Division Beyond the Wall

The physical presence of the Berlin Wall may have deterred citizens from crossing over to either side, but it it is the mental division that it created that revealed it’s true power over the two German peoples. Geographic division may have been the first and most prominent, but a difference in the way each side lived and breathed would eventually develop. The ideologies of both East and West would subtly encroach upon these people’s lives, eventually causing them to pay more attention to differences instead of similarities. To be a citizen of the East or West would come with a specific set of lenses through which to see the social, and more importantly political, aspects of society. There were privileged few, such as the Narrator of The Wall Jumper, who escaped this binary division, usually due to having access to both sides of the wall. The State and the self in The Wall Jumper have no “beginning” and “end” - rather, the two have fused together entirely, with the State now shaping social, economic, and political views of the individual. Those who escaped this categorization were forced to drift through society, left to seek meaning or purpose on their own in the face of the strange cultural separation that unfolded before them.

The Narrator himself is described as seeing the world with “Child’s eyes”, as he believes what he sees, taking events and people at face value. He is not necessarily true to the ideals of the West, where he was raised, but instead notices that something fishy is going on between the two sides, and aims to reveal this unknown element through his writings. As he does not truly believe in either side, others are able to project their own views upon him; Robert and Lena’s distrust and paranoia are often mirrored by the otherwise-calm Narrator when he is in their company. However, his viewpoint is certainly the most objective of any in the novel. The narrator recognizes the mechanistic rigidity of the East *and* the conniving nature of the Capitalist West, yet is unable to decide which of the two is more menacing. The narrator’s own identity has been fractured due to the presence of the wall, and he often ponders how similar or dissimilar he would be to “himself” had he been raised in the East. This is retroactively applied to *everything*, including whether, “I would have still practiced my violin while others were playing soccer” (Schneider, 125). Confused and lost, the Narrator does not belong to either *side* of the “German Problem”. Instead, he identifies to a group of people who can grasp the entirety of the problem itself, rather than get caught up in which side is better, more right, or more wrong.

While the Narrator often feels alone in his view of the world, his loneliness is briefly satiated by a woman named Lena. Lena entertains an interesting power dynamic with the Narrator, whom she first *needs* by her side every second,yet eventually comes to despise. Suspicious of any and every action that is not an outright show of affection, Lena constantly picks at the Narrator’s every move. This initial need to retain a close proximity to the Narrator stems from the distrust and suspicion that East Berlin entertains - Lena is used to there being more than meets the eye. When in the West, she bemoans the plastic and fake image that Capitalistic wealth provides, seeing everything as a facade or ploy, secretly aimed to undo her at the benefit of some elite member of society. It holds nothing over her beloved East, in which she seems to find some sort of comfort and reprieve that the Narrator is never able to offer. She finds comfort in simply *being* in the East after being in the West - such is the power of the State. Everything is black and white to Lena, there is no middle ground. In the words of the Narrator, “She was decisive, pure, and quick to judge” (Schneider 101). She sees everything as definite, and even advocates the masculine subject position of language, which only allows a word a single, definite meaning (compared to the feminine position, which allows for interpretation and/or multiplicity of meaning.) The ways of the State infiltrate her personal life; Lena’s need for things to be certain, coupled with her constant doubt, causes her relationships to crumble. Holding fast to the efficiency and order that dominates the East, Lena is unable to give up her paradigm of being somehow superior to the inhabitants of the West.

While Robert may have too grown up in the East, unlike Lena he sees the appeal behind the Western way of life. When at a fancy car showing, Robert shows the Narrator the “car of his dreams”. Though he makes the excuse that the *Narrator* does not like the car, the “combative gleam in his eye” reveals that he *actually* wants the ridiculously nice roadster that sits before them (Schneider, 81). Though Robert is still subject to the ways of the East, which will remain his primary form of indoctrination, he still *wants* to buy the flashiest, nicest car, in keeping with the Capitalist sense of superiority that this material wealth shows. He is also, like Lena, eternally suspicious of any and all events around him, believing them to be orchestrated by the almighty and unseen State. Robert carries this weariness with him to the West, now fearing that the wealthy Capitalist bastards are the one’s secretly running the show.This is especially true because the West, seeking to quickly rebuild a bulwark against the Communists, reinstated many “former” Nazi’s into their positions of power. Robert trusts no one in the upper echelons of Western society. The East State’s unseen hand in everything, however, allows Robert to distance himself from any kind of blame or responsibility that should accompany his own decisions, actions, and feelings. At the cost of being unaware or alienated from the events occurring around him, Robert experiences a mental freedom that the Narrator does not. When the two of them “strike out at each other with weary, weighted blows, angrily babbling our lessons” the Narrator realizes that it is not he and Robert with whom he is arguing, but that they are each “true to the states whose influence we no longer recognize” (Schneider, 93). The mentalities that each State has impressed upon the two men substitutes itself for any opinion they would have formed on their own.

Due to the extreme weight that each political state has impressed upon their citizens, the Narrator has been deprived of an identity that is truly his own, instead manifesting a splintered self that owes allegiance to neither East nor West. More often than not it is the absence of understanding or sense that the Narrator identifies with - he is most at home in confusion and loneliness. This ideological uncertainty allows those like Robert and Lena to impress their own views upon him, temporarily giving shape to his host of uncertainties and doubts (though in the typical Eastern fashion.) The fact remains that he is unable to identify with the beliefs of the West or East entirely, seeing the merits and shortcomings of both. The existence of such starkly contrasted ideologies within such close geographic proximity causes the citizens of either side to pit themselves against one another, blinding them to their similar heritages. The wall created in almost everyone a contrast, a competition. Each side felt that their own was far worse off, and that the other was a malicious and twisted realm. By trying to compare/contrast the East and West, the citizens miss the whole point, becoming obsessed with this “disease of comparison.”. In almost every social and cultural way, the State has seeped into the self, subtly controlling even personal beliefs and relationships. Political and geographic separation have little to do with the effectiveness of this - the mere fact that the East and West exist as “others” to one another created the divisive mentality that swallowed Germany, and is forever symbolized by the Wall.

The wall is seen as a challenge by some, or at least to their imaginations. Constantly people are trying to think of ways to supersede this menace, even if they themselves have no intention of crossing it. It’s mere presence inspired defiance in those who were not fooled by it’s purpose. Page 60 Pommerer

This permanent damage to the neural network of Germans has crippled a once-great state in their greatest hour of hope, and robbed them of the ability to realize that they have been blinded. Divison of West and East somewhat shocking, as they were supposed to heal the world after WWII. An external antagonism permeating the reflexes and actions of both sides. See each other as foreign, off, odd, alien... what would I have been like if?

“What you feel doesn’t matter, it’s a question of what we make others feel” 65

Robert’s view of seeing “more” and “comparing” infect the narrator, his own views have no weight, as his friends cast theirs upon him. Robert, like the narrator, is confused as he goes back and forth. Narrator catagorizes, *classifies* Robert as an Easterner, sees him as intrinsically diffferent.