Uwe Johnson and Divided Germany: A Study in Entfremdung, Entfernung, and Protest

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UWE JOHNSON AND DIVIDED GERMANY:
A STUDY IN
ENTFREMUNG, ENTFERNUNG, AND PROTEST

BY

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HONORS PROGRAM
SAINT JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
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April 2, 1969

Robert W. Acker
St. John's University
FORWARD

The life of Uwe Johnson reads like a history of divided Germany itself. Born on April 20, 1934 of North German and Swedish stock in Cammin in Pommern, Johnson spent his first eleven years (including those of the Second World War) in the territory currently "under Polish administration." In 1944 he entered a NS boarding school in Poland, but in 1946 was forced to flee to Mecklenburg, undoubtedly from the approaching Red Army. From 1946-1954 he attended Grundschule and Oberschule in Güstrow and began his studies of Germanistik in Rostok. From 1954 to 1956 he studied Germanistik at the University of Leipzig and took his diploma examination under Prof. Hans Mayer in Güstrow. He then began his writing career. His first book Ingrid Babendererde was refused publication for political reasons by Aufbau-Verlag, the leading publishing house of East Germany. 1959 marked a decisive year in Johnson's life. Perhaps due to the denial of publication, perhaps for personal reasons too deep to be divulged to outsiders, he crossed the border into West Berlin without the approval of the East German authorities and was accepted on the western side. In the same year he published Mutmassungen über Jakob, which was also written in the DDR. (To date, his first work has never been published.) In 1960 he received the Fontane-prize of the City of West Berlin for this first published work.

In 1961 Johnson spent four months in the United States as the guest of Wayne State University and Harvard University. He also published his third work, the massive Das dritte Buch über Achim.
In 1962 he received the Prix International de la Literatur and spent nine months in Rome and Italy as the guest of the Deutsche Akademie Villa Massimo. 1964 saw the publication of Karsch und andere Prosa, a collection of five short stories, and 1965 Zwei Ansichten. At this writing, Johnson is living in West Berlin.

Johnson has established himself well as one of the foremost authors in contemporary German literature. "Uwe Johnson rückt mit einem Schlag in die erste Reihe—wir glauben an die Spitze—der lebenden deutschen Autoren."1 He is perhaps comparable to James Joyce: very famous but, due to the complexity of style, not widely read.2

It is of course clear that Johnson treats the problem of divided Germany in his works. "Fünfzehn Jahre lang haben die Kritiker nun darüber gegründelt, warum ausgerechnet das Thema der Themen, das Kardinalproblem jedes deutschen Schriftstellers: die Teilung Deutschlands, bedurfte eines grossen Schriftstellers; ich glaube dass der Autor, der es jetzt als erster auf der Ebene der Kunst analysiert hat, ein solcher Schriftsteller ist: Uwe Johnson."3 And as was mentioned, Johnson is perhaps the only German writer that deals with this topic exclusively, in detail, and with profound depth. "Uwe Johnson ist nahezu der einzige, dem es in den Sinn gekommen ist, seine Aufmerksamkeit, seine Leidenschaft, die volle Kraft seiner


2Professor Otmar Drekonja in an interview with Robert Acker at St. John's University in the fall of 1967.

Begabung dem Nächstliegenden zuzuwerden, nämlich dem Faktum des zweigeteilten Vaterlandes. Gleich mit seinem ersten Roman *Mutmassungen über Jakob* ist er zum Dichter der beiden Deutschland geworden.⁴

And this is exactly how his publisher, Shurkamp-Verlag, advertises him—Dichter der beiden Deutschland.

Johnson's style, which contributes to his greatness, is hard to describe briefly. Each novel presents slightly different stylistic, or perhaps better, structural elements. One general characteristic that is easy to single out, however, is Johnson's fondness for lengthy description. Paragraph after paragraph is devoted to exhaustively beautiful details of every-day occurrences: taking a subway ride, drinking in a bar, or making marks on a schedule sheet. The description is precise and its objectivity illustrates the author's detachment. The camera-like attempt to get the picture is cool, impersonal, intellectual, and not emotionally involved.

The presentation in the different works is epic in nature. Johnson tells but does not analyze, watches but does not act. Levels of action jump from the real to the imaginary, from the monologue to description. Speaking of *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, Reinhard Baumgart singles out three different techniques: "Nacherzählung, Monolog und Gespräch."⁵

The Johnsonian hero is presented as alienated, frustrated, and aggressive to the world which engulfs him. One might describe


this general situation as similar to a universal Kafka, but yet more detailed, real, and complex.  

Since Johnson was born in North Germany many of the cold and strict elements of the northern peoples play a role in his works:

Er ist freilich sehr deutsch, provinziell im besten Sinn, ohne Uberschwang und Schwarmerei und Süße, durchaus protestantisch, karg, bis zum Humorlosen streng und ernst, ja feierlich, dem biblischen Tonfall nah, der durch manchen von Uwe Johnsons Säzen zu vernehmen ist.

Grammatically speaking, Johnson's style is highly unorthodox. Words are frequently out of "normal" word order. Paragraphing "seems haphazard and new trains of thought are introduced in the middle of lines and paragraphs. Ponderous detail cannot be given here of all aspects, but for a more exact discussion of Johnson's style see Kolb's "Rückfall in die Parataxe" listed in the bibliography.

This, then, is a short synopsis of Johnson's life, prominance, and style, and is intended to orient the reader towards the rest of the work.

The thesis will concern itself with the thoughts and ideas of Uwe Johnson towards his theme, that is, towards divided Germany and all that this Teilung involves. It was mentioned before that Johnson presents, but does not analyze. This does not mean that Johnson has no ideas, but rather that he presents facts and situations and the German Problem itself in the most objective way possible, leaving the analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and most importantly, a solution, to his readers. This thesis will attempt

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6 Professor Drekonja.

to perform that analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and solving.

It should be noted here that I am discussing only one aspect of the Johnson milieu. I could not possibly cover every aspect of Johnson's writings, but I will concern myself only with the thoughts and ideas involved in Johnson's theme, divided Germany. I shall not only individually analyze his three major works—Mutmassung über Jakob, Das dritte Buch über Achim, and Zwei Ansichten but also relate and correlate them to present a whole picture, a picture indeed of the development and blossoming of a new writer. How the situation of divided Germany is viewed by the people under both systems, particularly by those in the East. Since this system is not well-known to us, how the situation effects the lives and hopes and loves of citizens of both governments, and how it effects their relationship between each other, what the solutions are that Johnson offers, if any, and what does the future hold regarding the problem of Reunification: these are some of the questions to be considered in this thesis.

A study of this young German writer's thought on the agony of divided Germany has never been done before. But concerning a writer about whom the Germanist Marcel Reich-Raniki says: "Dies ändert jedoch nicht an der Tatsache, dass es heutzutage nur wenige deutsche Schriftsteller gibt, deren Bücher es verdienen, so aufmerksam gelesen zu werden wie die Prosa des Uwe Johnson." such a study greatly needs to be undertaken.

 Marcel Reich-Raniki, "Registrar Johnson" in Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, München, 1963, S. 246.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Der Sprung in das Abenteuer der
Wiedervereinigung muss gewagt sein.
--Paul Bourdin

A Short History of the German Reunification Problem

A glance at a modern map of Germany reveals complexities
typical of many lands divided by the hot and cold tensions of the
modern era. Boundary lines divide areas with such titles as Die
Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Die deutsche demokratische Republik,
Unter polnischer Verwaltung, or Unter sowjetischer Verwaltung. All
of these areas have one trait in common: they claim to be, or are
claimed by others to be German. The first adheres to democracy and
to the Western Block. The second practices communism and is an
essential economic member of the Eastern World. The last two have
been absorbed, partially or completely, by their neighbors. All of
them, however, were part of the Third Reich on Dec. 31, 1937, the
time immediately preceding the war precipitated by Nazi-Germany.

How, then, did this currently confusing situation of separation of
the German state occur? What have been the events and efforts aimed
at its resolution? To answer these and other related questions is
the scope of this chapter. No attempt will be made to be all-inclusive
or to pass judgment on the advisability of the actions involved.
What is desired is a short introduction to die deutsche Frage to be used as a background for an analysis of Uwe Johnson's views in this area. Superficiality may seem to be in evidence, but space limitations demand concinnity.

Any discussions of the German Problem must begin with a consideration of the Atlantic Charter of August 14, 1941, signed by Churchill and Roosevelt. The policies set forth here were to be the guidelines for all further international agreements undertaken by these two countries. A portion of the Charter is quoted here to demonstrate its later blatant refutation and the negligence accorded it by its signees:

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.1

As this discussion proceeds, the importance of this document for the maintenance of German integrity will become obvious.

In January of 1943 the Three Powers, in a flush of victory made by the Allied armies, agreed to demand unconditional surrender from the German High Command when Germany finally capitulated. Shortly afterwards, talks and discussions were held on the ambassadorial level between Britain, Russia, and the United States to determine policies for the occupation of conquered Germany. Although its

origin is today somewhat obscure, a tentative agreement was reached at this time to divide Germany into three zones of occupation. Poland, the first to suffer the effects of the "Blitzkrieg," was to be compensated with parts of Ostdeutschland, particularly East Prussia. Russia, with her Red Army advancing towards the West, was to be awarded the majority of Mitteldeutschland. Britain and the USA were to split the remainder of Germany, with American concentration in the south. This agreement was subject to ratification by the respective governments involved.

In their Quebec meeting of September, 1943 Roosevelt and Churchill tentatively agreed on the Morgenthau Plan, a scheme devised to turn Germany into a pastoral land. This was later realized to be too drastic and was modified, after great hassles in Washington during the winter of 1944-45, by the Joint Chiefs of Staff regulation 1067, which detailed the partial destruction of German heavy industry.

This was the background for the Yalta conference which met in February of 1945 and which was attended by the big three of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. Several significant policies were decided at this meeting. The Polish-Russian border was fixed at the Curzon Line, thus giving the Russians a victory in the long struggle over a narrow strip of land that had been going on for decades. In turn, the Poles were to be compensated by portions of German eastern territory. (Note the obvious violation of the Atlantic Charter.) The Big Three, despite Churchill's misgivings, also agreed to administer conquered Germany in different zones instead of administering it as

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one large occupation area. Stalin also agreed to allow a French zone to be carved out of the existing British and American zones.

May 8, 1945 marked the day of the unconditional surrender of the Third Reich. On June 5 the four governments issued a declaration on the military government of Germany. Each of the four zones was to be ruled directly by a military governor who had supreme power in his sector. Berlin was also divided into four sectors. The action of the four governors was to be coordinated by an Allied Control Council meeting in Berlin to decide issues which pertained to Germany as a whole. From June 7 to August 2 the Big Three of Stalin, Attlee, and Truman met at Potsdam to determine working agreements for the administration of Germany. Perhaps the most important decision of this meeting was that "during the period of occupation Germany shall be treated as a single economic unit," which is interpreted by many as an obvious statement of the wish to preserve the unity of the German State. The Polish-German Border was fixed at the Oder-Neisse Line. These and other decisions were not to be considered final, however, until they were ratified by a peace treaty with the German nation. Such a peace treaty has never been signed.

To make the story short, the Four Powers did not see fit to co-operate with each other to any great degree after Germany's surrender. France, not included at Potsdam, considered she had a right to annex the Ruhr area, and to enforce this demand she vetoed many decisions in the Allied Control Council. It soon became clear, too,

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3From the Potsdam Declaration quoted in Efforts of the German Government and its Allies in the Cause of German Unity, published by the German Federal Foreign Office, p. 10.
that Russia was exploiting its zone for the good of the Soviet Union. Chaos reigned, and efforts at restoring the German State and People as a whole lagged.

In the Western sectors self-government was gradually turned over to the German people through a series of elections in the Gemeinde, Kreise and finally Länder. In February of 1948 the British and American zones fused for economic purposes into the "Bi-zone," and France soon joined to form a "Tri-zone." Meanwhile the Russians were organizing their zone, politically and economically, along socialist lines. Particularly significant was the formation there of one political party, the Sozialistische Einheits Partei, a fusion of Communist and Socialist elements.

The summer of 1948 witnessed the beginning of the economic rebirth of West Germany—the so-called Wirtschaftswunder—due greatly to the advent in the year before (June, 1947) of the Marshall Plan. German economy and spirit in the Western zones recovered by leaps and bounds as all aspects of the economy began to prosper and to return to peace-time endeavors. The Russian Zone refused this aid.

During the economic and political developments in Germany itself during this time, diplomatic activity was also in evidence at international levels. In 1947 conferences in Moscow and London were held during which the Western powers attempted to persuade the Russian governments to an agreement for the fusion of the four zones and the signing of a peace treaty with all of Germany. It was obvious, however, that the Russians did not wish to give up their newly organized satellite state. This idea was crystalized by the disbanding of the Allied Control Council on March 20, 1948 due to
disagreements and bickerings and to the signing of the Bizonal Charter.

On June 13, 1948 the Western powers introduced a currency reform—the Währungsr Reform to their sectors which eradicated the post-war inflation. The Russians immediately responded with a similar reform in their zone and also blocked all land routes to the Cité of Berlin because they feared the adverse effects Western currency would have in their zone. This was the beginning of the famed Berlin Blockade and subsequent airlift, which lasted until May, 1949.

During this time, and after much discussion, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed and signed in April by the powers in Western Europe and the United States to defend themselves from the "threat of Communist aggression." The effect of this treaty was to harden the Russian position on reunification. The treaty was followed in May by elections in the Western zones for the writing of a new constitution for Germany. On May 23, 1949 this new Grundgesetz—Basic Law—was put into effect and the newly created Federal Republic of Germany was founded. It is interesting to note that this constitution was termed a Basic Law and not a Verfassung—a constitution. The thought behind this terminology was that a constitution could only be decided by all Germans, including those in the Soviet Zone. This law was to cease to be in effect on the day "on which a Constitution adopted by a free decision of the German People comes into force."³

³Ibid., p. 11.
The Soviet Union quickly pointed out that the Western powers' foundation of a new state was an obvious indication of their unwillingness to form a united Germany and they thus promptly formed their own puppet state, the German Democratic Republic—Die deutsche demokratische Republik (DDR). Its democratic character can be debated.

If we wish to be frank, the year 1949 marked the complete solidification of the German problem. Two separate states under two radically diametric political systems had been formed and the Powers which controlled these states (the United States and the Soviet Union) were not about to cede their territory to the rival cause. Both states, of course, expressed their willingness to unite with the other half, but under the condition that their separated Landslute would agree to their type of government. Both states also expressed, and continue to do so today, their wish for democracy and freedom for the "Two Germanies," but the meanings of these words in each "country" are quite different. And so the problem remains both semantic and political. The rest of the story of the German Problem is a series of heartbreaking and futile talks and conferences between the two world power groups.

The next six years after 1949 saw the continued economic and political growth and maturing in both parts of divided Germany. Notable among the array of events of this time was the decision of the Bundestag on April 3, 1952 to place German Reunification in the top priority category of West German Foreign Policy. The Soviet zone scored less successes during this period, however, and as a result workers in East Berlin and the rest of the Soviet Zone staged a revolution on June 17, 1953 against the Communist government. This
attempt was quickly squelched, however, by the rapid arrival of
Soviet tanks and infantry.

From January 25 to February 18, 1954 a Four Power Conference
was held in Berlin to discuss reunification, but adjourned without
success. In October of 1954 the Three Powers met in Paris to termi-
nate the military occupation of Germany and in London of the same
month they declared that "the achievement through peaceful means of
a fully free and unified Germany remains a fundamental goal of their
policy."5 To culminate these activities the ERP was declared an
independent and sovereign state on May 14, 1955.

From July 17 to 23, 1955 the Four Powers met in a Summit
Conference in Geneva. Both sides were concerned about European
security problems which had developed after the war, and Western
hopes were high, due to the magnanimity displayed by the Soviet dele-
gates. Agreement was finally hammered out on the now famous "Geneva
Directive" which emphasized "the close link between the reunification
of Germany and the problems of European security" and "the common
responsibility for the settlement of the German question and reunion-
fication of Germany by means of free elections."6 Khruschev imme-
diately backed down from this agreement, however, and a later Foreign
Ministers Conference in the same year reached a stalemate on the
issue.

In September of this same year diplomatic relations between
West Germany and the Soviet Union were restored. Konrad Adenauer,

5Ibid., p. 13.
6Ibid., p. 16.
the first Chancellor of the new Republic emphasized, however, that this resumption did not indicate recognition by West Germany of the Russian Zone and that moreover, since Russia recognized the BRD before the DDR, the BRD alone could represent all of Germany. There could not be two governments for one land. This was the birth of the West German policy of Exclusive Representation for all Germany.7

In 1956 the growth of nuclear arsenals on both sides of the Iron Curtain caused a general consensus on the need for disarmament talks. The Soviet Union, in numerous policy statements throughout the year, attempted, against strong Western opposition, to break the link between disarmament talks and the problem of German reunification. Propaganda attacks were hurled by both sides throughout the year until the wearisome London disarmament talks in 1957. There, the Soviet Union insisted on recognition of Germany's division as a precondition for disarmament, and the talks finally collapsed.

Concentrated efforts for another Summit Conference were conducted throughout 1958, and agreement was finally reached in early 1959 on a Foreign Ministers Conference to be held in Geneva in May.

7An additional argument for the right of exclusive representation runs as follows: The state of Germany has never ceased to exist since its foundation in 1867. Even though a war has intervened, the current Federal Republic retains its juridical identity with the German Reich. Now today "the Federal Government is the only government in Germany freely and democratically elected and legitimated by the German people. Since in 1949 only part of the population--those living in the three Western Zones of Occupation--were able to take part in the constitutional reorganization of the German state, the area in which the Basic Law applies presents the legal anomaly that the territory of the state and the area in which its constitution applies do not coincide. Nevertheless the Federal Government is the only de jure government of the continuing German state and thus the only German Government entitled to speak and act for Germany and on behalf of the German people in international affairs." (Germany and Berlin published by Inter Nationes in Bonn.)
of that year. Both sides in the conflict continued to reject proposals from each other for Four-Power meetings, each claiming that encroachment on their territory was the only aim of the rival proposal. In November of 1958 Khrushchev announced in Moscow that all Soviet powers in the DDR were being transferred to authority in the Soviet Zone, thus hoping to give emphasis and backing to the Soviet claim of "Two Germanies."

Needless to say, the Geneva Foreign Ministers' Conference was a failure, with the exception of an agreement to enter into later disarmament negotiations. Likewise a failure was the Paris Summit Conference of 1960 which was shattered by the U-2 incident of May 1.

The early 1960's were the years of the Berlin crisis, stimulated by Khrushchev's threat to take by force the Western Sectors of Berlin, always a continual sore in the DDR, and by the erection of the Berlin wall on August 13, 1961, which was aimed at keeping East Germans and East German marks from leaving the country. Immediate talks were instigated among the three Western powers and the American Kennedy conferred with the Russian Gromyko. But there was nothing the Western Powers could say or do to persuade the Eastern Zone to remove its wall. The results of a firm stand by the West did, however, convince Khrushchev to drop his threat of concluding a separate peace treaty with East Germany.

It must be noted here that on February 21, 1962, the West German government sent a note to the Soviet Union asking for immediate and direct discussions with Moscow concerning the German Question.

\[^{8}\text{Efforts of the German Government and its Allies in the Cause of German Unity, p. 30.}\]
It is an important aspect of West German policy and propaganda that this note was never answered.

About this time the Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland, a private citizen group organized to unify and strengthen West German public opinion on the German Question, proposed a series of statements on general policy and attitude. Since these policies were adopted by all the major German political parties (in 1965) as their official stand, it is well to quote them here:

1) German unity is to be brought about by political means only, and not by force.

2) The division of Germany and the refusal of the right of self-determination constitute dangers to peace and security that do not permit the indefinite postponement of a solution.

3) A gradual settlement may be called for, in order to overcome the deadlock in the German question.

4) The four Powers cannot be relieved of the obligation they assumed for the whole of Germany in 1945.

5) Germany is ready to agree to a system of security that will provide guarantees for all her neighbours in east and west, as well as for Germany herself.

6) Germany's eastern borders must be settled in a peace treaty. All negotiations to this end must take the German borders of 1937 as their point of departure.

7) Germany aims at a neighbourly relationship with all nations in the west and the east on a basis of freedom and self-determination. Human rights must be applicable to all and must be respected by all. There must, therefore, be no oppression of peoples and minorities, nor must there be a new expulsion.

8) A Germany reunited in freedom will be prepared to provide large-scale economic, technical and cultural assistance to other nations.

9) Immediate tasks are the strengthening of human contacts and the freedom of movement for men and ideas throughout all of Germany, as well as the development of Berlin as the capital city, and of the territories bordering the zonal line of demarcation as the centre of Germany.

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\(^2\)Quoted in Resistance Against Oppression, published by Germany Indivisible, Bonn, 1966, p. 19.
Thus far, this report has dealt only with the Eastern Zone of Germany and has neglected the territories to the East of the Oder-Neisse Line. Immediately after the unconditional surrender of Nazi-Germany, Soviet and Polish authorities took means to expel all inhabitants of German stock from their respective areas (those today labeled Unter polnischer or sowjetischer Verwaltung). Millions of Germans, called Vertriebene—expellees (in contrast to the Flüchtlinge—those who left voluntarily) streamed into the Soviet Zone or one of the Western Zones. The shock of their arrival was cushioned greatly by the tremendous lack of manpower in Germany as a result of the war. Their former homeland, centuries old in German tradition, was repopulated by people of Polish stock and administered by a peace treaty, but of course no such action has yet taken place. At most of the conferences and meetings named above in regard to relations with the Soviet Zone, token mention of these Eastern territories was given, and primarily arguments similar to those concerning the Eastern Zone were used. It is probably fairly safe, however, to say that the average German is quite willing to concede these territories in the event of a settlement to the German question.  

He realizes that reparations were due to the Polish state, and that moreover German administration of a Polish people would be completely untenable, as would a complete resettlement of the territories by their old German inhabitants.

In 1963 Ludwig Erhart was elected Chancellor of the Federal Republic. His policy towards reunification did not differ substan-

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10 Professor Lodiell G. Ebensteiner in an interview with Robert Acker at St. John's University, May, 1967.
tially from that of Adenaur’s, and he continually stressed the inter-
relationship between disarmament and reunification. For either
point to be effective, the other has to be in force. Meanwhile,
both sides in the struggle continued to strengthen their ties with
the World Powers that supported them. In May of 1964 the Foreign
Ministers of the Three Powers met at the Hague to discuss reunifi-
cation and in the same month the NATO Council passed resolutions
favoring peaceful steps towards unity. On June 26, the German Govern-
ment and the Three Powers issued a Declaration opposing the Soviet
two-state theory and again emphasizing their major points:

1) Four Power responsibility for Germany

2) Four Power status for Berlin

3) The right of sole representation of the German people by the
   West German government

4) Reunification through self-determination. 11

Also in June the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship with
the DDR, attempting to give sanction under international law to
their two-state theory.

Erhard’s "active day-to-day and direct policy of reunification"
accomplished little and because of this, and because of economic
trouble in his finance ministry, he was replaced in late 1966 by
the coalition government of Kiesinger and Brandt. In a policy speech
about reunification on June 23, 1967 a decisive change (or so it
seemed) was announced by Kiesinger:

And yet we would like to go along with a suggestion recently
made by a number of Soviet newspapermen, who advocated a
method that has often proved its worth. As long as major

11 Efforts of the German Government and its Allies in the Cause
   of German Unity, p. 53.
problems cannot be solved for the time being or in the foreseeable future, it is advisable to put them aside and to look for areas of agreement where one can work together. This method is an important instrumentality for relaxing tensions and has often rendered good service in international affairs. . . . We opened the present exchange with our declaration of April 12, 1967. In it, we made precisely the point that, for numerous reasons and due to the varied interest involved, the German problem is not soluble at this time. It therefore serves no useful purpose if we keep polishing up two irreconcilable positions and wheeling them into direct confrontation. Yet there are a number of questions that could be tackled in some temporary arrangement pending a final settlement. These questions require, in the first place, joint consideration and consultation. Measures could then be taken to ease the distress and anguish occasioned by the division of Germany, to remedy the suffering caused by it and to weight the possibility of carrying out certain practical steps that would benefit the German people as a whole.12

The phrase "easing of tension" became a password for the new government. What is meant by it, in the author's view, is that rather than insisting on old claims, name-calling, and key policies, attempts will be made to tone these statements down (although by no means disavow them) and instead seek positive areas where agreement between the two Germanies can easily be reached. Such "areas" have included: exchange of letters between West German political parties and the East German party, West Germany's proposal for both Germanies to aid in improving mankind's lot in response to the encyclical Populorum progressio, and establishment of trade missions to Czechoslovakia and Rumania. Work will be decidedly slow, but new and hopeful emphasis is becoming obvious.

12Speech reprinted in News From the German Embassy, Vol. XI, No. 8, August 1, 1967, p. 4.
A Short Glance at Life in East Germany

Since Uwe Johnson writes a great deal about life "on the other side of the Wall," i.e., East Germany, it will be necessary here to give a short synopsis of conditions existing in East Germany to aid the reader in understanding Johnson's references.

Approximately 21 million East Germans live in an area of 107,896 square kilometers, about the size of Tennessee. It is divided for purposes of administration into fifteen areas (Bezirke) which are centrally controlled. For defensive purposes there is a standing array of military forces numbering about 110,000 armed troops.

The SED, the Socialist Unity Party, with membership around one-and-a-half million, exercises almost complete political control. The organs of this party are the Politbureau and the Secretariat of the Central Committee. From these bodies come all bills and suggestion governing life in the DDR. When the government was formed in 1949 Wilhelm Pieck became President, Otto Grotewohl became Prime Minister and his deputy was Walter Ulbricht. Since Pieck's death in 1960, Ulbrich has taken over rule as "Chairman" of the "State Council." The "People's Chamber" (Volkskammer), is a Parliament of 400 seats, and is constituted according to predetermined patterns.

A subsequent vote of the electorate, based on a common list of candidates, with no provision for alternative candidates, has given it a show of respectability. Up to now, no member has voted against a bill of the government, demanded amendments, or even criticized the fact that he has only been given a superficial view of the state budget.13

The Volkskammer has the power to override resolutions passed in the Bezirke. Members of the Parliament, like the heads of Cabinet Ministries, do not usually get to see bills before they are presented to the Parliament, but are expected to give their acceptance and approval to these bills.

Other political parties, the Christian Democratic Union, the Liberal Democratic Party, and the National Democratic Party seem to have little influence and viewed from Western eyes they are merely facades. Communist auxiliaries include such organizations as the "Free German Youth" (FDJ) and the "Free German Federation of Labor Unions" both of whose activities are governed by the Party.

The Soviet Zone leads all but the Soviet Union in the Soviet block countries with regard to trade, economic endeavors and gross national product.\textsuperscript{14} Financial assistance is still required from the Soviet Union to aid the economy and the financial situations of the average worker is sufficient but could be improved. Five and seven year plans have been attempted with limited successes. Most workers belong to production cooperatives and most large industries such as banks and railways have been or are in the process of being nationalized. "In 1963 the share of the nationalized businesses in the gross industrial production was already 88.6 percent."\textsuperscript{15} Some industries survive better under private control, however, and in these cases the SED invests public funds in the industries or by securing a share

\textsuperscript{14} Professor Wolfgang Wessling in an interview with Robert Acker at Hofstra University in the summer of 1967.

in the private enterprises. Handicraft workers have been organized into handicraft production cooperatives. Trade during 1963 has been estimated at 20,500 million East DM,\textsuperscript{16} and is conducted mainly with the Soviet Union where the DDR supplies mostly products of the engineering, electrotechnical, fine mechanical and optical and chemical industries.

Farmers have been forcibly collectivized, which has resulted in some cases in lower production of certain basic food stuffs. "At the end of 1963 there were in the "Zone" 161,314 agricultural production cooperatives, with 986,500 members."\textsuperscript{17} Most prices for food are higher in the East than in the West, except for staples such as bread and potatoes, whose prices are kept down through subsidization.

As in the Soviet Union, education is not separated from politics and the young learn very early about Marxist doctrines. A ten-grade school with compulsory polytechnical training has been introduced, and all qualified students must continue their education at technical schools and universities. Many marks are devoted to scientific research and many institutes of higher learning compare favorably with those in the West. For all types of creative artists there is one school of thought to follow: "Socialistic Realism."

Over 80 percent of the population is Protestant. Attempts have been made, with some success, to replace the Evangelical Church with a State Church. Attempts to teach atheism also are prominent, and all church ceremonies, such as baptism, confirmation, weddings,


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 28.
and funerals, are given socialistic overtones.

The psychological influences of the above facts on the life in the Eastern Zone is not what might be expected. Most of the Easterns are enthusiastic and this enthusiasm is mirrored in the high degrees of optimism to be found in East German writers. Most of the people, particularly the young, are very much interested in politics, and if not, they are only apolitical at the very worst. Only the old, who remember former times, are bitter. Hans Werner Richter, who made a journey into the DDR in 1960, testifies to this interest and enthusiasm:

Sie wussten über alles besser Bescheid als ich, sie kannten jeden Politiker der Bundesrepublik, jede Rede, jeden ausser-
politiellen Entscheid, jedes massgebende Gesetz. Ihr Interesse war lebhaft und unbegrenzt. Sie setzten sich mit allem
auseinander, kritisch, lobend, verurteilend. Ihre Fragen
waren: "Warum lasst ihr die Nazis wieder hochkommen, warum
die Generäle, warum taktiert die SPD so schlecht, wo bleibt
die scharfe Opposition, warum verbaut ihr euch selbst jede
politische Möglichkeit?" Fragen über Fragen, die ich alle
recht und schlecht zu beantworten versuchte, schon in die
Verteidigung der bundesrepublikanischen Entwicklung gedrängt,
die ich selbst nicht voll bejahen konnte. Zweifellos sah
die Bundesrepublik von hier aus anders aus als etwa von Irland
oder von München. Sehnsuchte, Hoffnungen und Sorgen hatten
eine andere Intensität als bei uns, und doch hatte sie auch
für jene etwas Janus-köpfiges, die ihre ganze Hoffnung auf sie
setzten. Ich erfuhr es jeden Tag, in vielen Gesprächen mit
Arbeitern, Matrosen, Pischern. Ich sprach mit jungen Leuten,
Studenten, Oberschulern, Ingenieuren, Ärzten, ich sprach mit
Handwerkern und mit Lehrern. 19

The East Germans were not only interested in politics on both sides.

18 Professor Otmar Drekonja in an interview with Robert Acker
at St. John's University during February, 1968.

19 Hans Werner Richter, "Aufsatz in dem Sammelband," Ich Lebe
in der Bundesrepublik (1960) quoted in Claude Hill, Zweiund
of the wall, but also found certain plus and minus points regarding life in the Bundesrepublik. Here is what Richter says about the plus points:

Nicht mehr der Wohlstand, sondern die ungehinderte Reisenmöglichkeit wurde an erster Stelle genannt. "Wenn wir nur reisen könnten, wohin wir wollen, dann kehrten wir auch immer wieder hierher zurück"/ the idea of travel, choosing to come back to the DDR, and freedom of movement is very important for Ulve Johnson, as will become evident in the following chapters/ or "Man tut sich auch drüben oft schwer, das wissen wir, und hier kann man schliesslich auch leben." Tatsächlich ist der Lebensstandard in den letzten fünf Jahren erheblich gestiegen. Der unmittelbare Terror ist zurückgegangen und einer anderen nicht weniger gefürchteten Methode der Beeinflussung gewichen. So sind Rechtssicherheit und Meinungsfreiheit immer noch die wichtigsten Pluspunkte der Bundesrepublik.

and the minus points:


Demanding, communal, enthusiastic, and critical, then, perhaps best describe the life in East Germany.

This, then, is the current state of the German reunification problem and a synoptic picture of East Germany. The Reunification problem is admittedly static. What the West German today, apart from government policy makers, thinks about the question could be the subject of another entire thesis. Suffice it to say that emotions are mixed from apathy to fervent hope (the latter mainly among the refugees).

20Ibid., p. 480.
CHAPTER II

MUTMASSUNGEN ÜBER JAKOB

"Aber Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen."

p. 1

The plot of Mutmassungen über Jakob is of minor importance, for we know from the first line of the novel what the climax of the story line is: "Aber Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen."\(^1\)

The rest of the book is a series of speculations by the various characters about events leading up to the climax and indeed the reason for its occurrence. But it is necessary here to recapitulate the main actions of the Handlung to lend understanding to the discussion following. The story will be presented in normal time sequence, which is not the method which Uwe Johnson employs in the work itself.

The time of the story is October and November of 1956, the period of the Hungarian Revolution. Jakob Abs, the main figure, is a railroad dispatcher in the depot of a large East German city, probably Dresden. He is 28. Some years before near the end of the war, as just a child, he was forced to leave his home town in Pommern and flee to Mecklenburg, where he and his mother took up residence with a cabinet-maker, Cresspahl, now 63, and his daughter Gesine. Gesine, who decided to cross the border into the West, is currently

\(^1\)Uwe Johnson, Mutmassungen über Jakob (Frankfurt an Main: Fischer Bilderei, 1962), p. 1.
working as an interpreter for NATO. In the course of the book, Jakob, his mother, and Dr. Jonas Blach, an assistant at the English Language Institute at the University of East Berlin, are contacted by a certain Herr Rohls of the Staats sicherheitsdienst. Herr Rohls attempts to persuade these three people to contact Gesine in the West and to convince her to work as a spy for the East German State. Jakob's mother, after considering the prospect, flees in terror to the West.

Dr. Blach, who in the meantime has written a somewhat inflammatory political article and has engaged in verbal criticisms of a recent speech of Khrushchev, attempts to escape to the West, but his efforts are foiled and he is captured. While Jakob is considering his true political affiliations and ideas, Gesine, on a spy mission for the West, comes to visit Jakob, and then crosses back over the border. Jakob returns the visit, is unsuccessful at persuading Gesine to change her ideas and returns, disgusted at the Western way of life, to East Germany. The next day as he is cutting "quer über die Gleise" to his control tower in a thick fog, he is struck and killed by an oncoming train.

The story of Jakob's life is surprisingly similar to Johnson's life, at least in its early aspects (see the Forward). We note, however, that Johnson stayed in the West but Jakob returned to the East. This is interesting material to keep in mind and will make for good comparisons later in the thesis.

The style of this, "der grosse Roman des geteilten Deutschlands," is so unique, that it leads one to speculate that it was invented

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specifically to aid Johnson in the development of his theme of divided Germany. "Denn jene Mittel wirken hier so frisch, sie sind so eigenständig eingesetzt, als wären sie neu und eigens aus der Notwendigkeit der Erzählung heraus erfunden." One of the most striking techniques of this new style is the use of detail, as this example illustrates:

Als der Leerzug über die Brücke gekommen war, hielten sie ihn an vor der Einfahrt ins Bahnhofsfeld, die Rangierbrigaden stürzten sich auf ihn und rissen und pflückten die brauchbaren Teile heraus (immer noch standen die Soldaten über den Bahnsteig gebogen, rührten sich nicht die wartenden Züge auf der Richtung Nord-Süd, die freien Durchfahrten lagen leer und still), endlich knallten die Wagen an die Laderampe, die Fahrstrasse wurde geräumt, der Zweite Militärzug bekam die Ausfahrt, dem sind wir los, jetzt noch den dritten: Die Panzerkommandanten mit halben Leibe aus den Laken ragend drohten ihre Gefährte mit kreisenden Armen aus der Fahrtrichtung, schweißig und geschickt begannen die Ungetüme auf die Rampe zu klettern, die Rangierer krochen noch unter den Wagen umher und schlossen die Bremschläuche, Trupp für Trupp stürmte aus den Lastwagen über die engen Treppen auf die Wagons zu, Megafone knatterten, Motoren heulton, Holz splitterte zierlich unter den Raupenketten, die Rangierlokomotive zog fauchend ab.

Here we see every minute object and action clearly and precisely. That is to say, time and place are sharp and exact. We know when the train arrived, when it departed; we know where in the station it was and what actions were performed to it. But this passage also illustrates another element of Johnson's style--its impersonal character where individuals lose their distinctive characteristics. There is a nebulous group of brakemen, to which almost anyone can belong; there are soldiers, there are tank drivers--all collective individuals of a collective state. Mechanical devices take on new existences--

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4 Jakob, pp. 154-5.
megaphones crackle, motors rumble and wood splinters but no mention is made of the mechanical forces behind these objects. This is representative of the entire work, where all the characters remain hazy, uncertain, _undurchsichtbar._

The two above mentioned elements of style seem contradictory. On one hand we have detail which is clear and explicit, on the other hand much is left to question and doubt. Who is speaking here? What is he referring to? What is the meaning of this remark? These are questions that fill the reader's mind as he goes through the work and they are very difficult in many instances to answer. But Johnson has a specific purpose for these two contrasting modes of expression.

Die Diskrepanz zwischen der Unklarheit der Johnsonschen Helden und der Intensität, mit der die zwischen ihnen bestehenden mannigfaltigen Spannungen spürbar gemacht werden, hat keinen mysteriösen Grund. Sie ist eine logische Folge der generellen Absicht Johnsons. Er vergebens tritt die Infiltration der Politik in das Leben eines jeden Individuums im totalitären Staat von heute und zeigt das Resultat: Der Mensch tarnet sich nicht nur für die Machthaber, auch für seine Umgebung wird er _undurchschaubar_. Daher ist er für den Romanautor ebenfalls _nicht durchschaubar_ -- nur die Art der Beziehungen zu den Mitmenschen kann angedeutet werden und auch dies mit allerlei Vorbehalt.

This stylistic device hits upon one of the central themes of the book—that the political system of the East has struck at the very soul of the East German and has caused a considerable change in his very being. He must and does willingly live and behave differently as than he did in the past— he camouflages himself says Reich-Raniki. The political reality of two German states (and it is real, says Johnson, no matter what the West says) has forced a

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change so profound in the East that the author and indeed the West cannot recognize, understand, or indeed even communicate with the individuals in the East. So how can a book of true Genauigkeit be written about them? This is the reason for the title of the book--Mutmassungen--speculations by a writer removed from a people who are removed from themselves. The basic facts of common existence can be experienced, but not the inner life--the motivation, the true feeling--only Mutmassungen can be given about them.

A third element of Johnson's style evident in this work is his extreme scrupulosity and care in writing. In his short Skizze, "Berlin, Border of the Divided World," Johnson discusses the problem of how a writer, when describing the simple instance of a man getting off a subway, can have immeasurable problems regarding technique and language, for the writer will find himself using either the language of the East or the language of the West, which, in either case, will be unverständlich to the other.6

So long as a literary text of this kind is concerned with truth, its subject must be checked against two contradictory tendencies of truth-finding thus the need for Mutmassungen. We know some of the sources of error in the collecting and transmitting of news: eyewitnesses who didn't look too closely, who can't say what they didn't see. They make up something that seems to round off the incident. Or they quietly rearrange the situation according to their habitual points of reference, which may be private or of sectarian morality or party politics. Press, radio, television, and city gossip make additional changes in the material that has already been prepared for them. To some extent they depend on the interpretation which the first reporter gave to the incident with an adjective. They all damage reality (provided this word still applies), according to their special technical bias, by one or more

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6For a complete discussion of the relationship between a language and people, see the works of the Jewish philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, where he says: "Die Sprache ist die Seele des Volkes."
dimensions. These personally or technically induced errors grow in complexity and become a rigid pattern the moment they are combined with the even more prolific source of error which political bias provides. Each side of the border has its pattern. Obviously the criteria for one cannot be applied to the other. Just as obviously the reliability of one pattern cannot be established on the basis of retractions for instance forced upon the other pattern, or on proofs it manages to come up with by itself. Only to a certain extent can the surface phenomena Johnson's vivid descriptions be extended to include the interests of the government, the political faction, the economic group to which the information service (pattern) is tied by force, assignment, desire to life. The thoughts and attitudes of the characters.

Here is then another, although secondary, reason for the use of Mitmassungen: the errors of observation and differences of thought patterns between two individuals or between two states cause problems for the "all-knowing" author and present him with perhaps the impossible challenge of determining, or perhaps only choosing, the correct method or term of experience. The need for a writer's concern about truth and perhaps the relevancy of truth is Johnson's point here.

The situation of characters living a seemingly dreary existence and of an author unable, because of the very foundations of his and his characters' ideas, to give the actions and motivations a clearer perspective introduces a certain melancholy throughout the book.

Die Melancholie legt sich wie Mehltau über das ganze Buch. Nur mit Mühe sprechen die Figuren so sachlich, ja forschen, wie der Autor es zuweilen haben will. Auch durch diesen Jargon der Tapferkeit hört man, halb heruntergeschluckt, Schwermut und Pathos. Und diese Melancholie ist heilloser als das


8See Theodor W. Ödorno's Jargon der Eigentlichkeit published by Suhrkamp Verlag.
Entsetzen der Zeitgenossen über das politische Gebaren der jeweiligen Nachbarn, das, so ernst gemeint und so richtig auch immer, schließlich nur das Zeitliche betrifft und das Zeitliche segnet. Johnsons Melancholie geht im Geschichtlichen nicht auf als die Stimmung eines geteilten Landes, einer geteilten Welt, sie kommt von weiter her, betrifft im Zeitgenossen den Menschen."

This melancholy with its accompanying monotony and weariness, which I believe Johnson sees as a characteristic, although not necessarily a bad one, of life for many of the working class in the DDR, can be illustrated by these examples:

Aber er ging gleich weiter. Er wies den beiden Polizeiposten vor der Tür den breiten queren Farbbalken auf seinen Ausweis, sie sahen unauchsam hin und redeten weiter in ihrer unklaren südlich singenden Sprache. Er schlug das schwarze Eisengitter zu hinter sich und ging durch den dünnen Nebelrauen davon über die Gleise, (Er kehrte die Ausweiskarte um und zeigte der Schaffnerin); die Abstände zwischen den blindwütigen Abseitenheiten des Dienstes jießen mit ihren. Ähnlichkeiten ineinander, sie glichen sich. Die Stadt war keine veränderliche Landschaft, ihre Strassen waren austauschbar in seiner Erinnerung. Der Himmel war weiss.10

"Ich wünsch mir nichts" sagte er, und ein unterschwelliger Auflauf von Herzklopfen machte ihm bewusst dass er gesagt hatte was sein Leben war in diesem Herbst, die träge verzichtsame Unruhe bewogte sich in ihm als habe er sie immer gelebt und ohne einen Anfang irgend wo in der Zeit. Er hatte gelebt und ohne einen Anfang irgend wo in der Zeit. Er hatte etwas versucht mit seinem Dasein, das so "überstand: den die Zeit ("die Zeitr") war und waren so gefüllt dass einer wenig Gewalt hatte über sein eigenes Leben und aufkommen musste für was er nicht angefangen hatte. Nun treibt einer hin und her zwischen seiner Arbeit und einem möblierten Zimmer nach Regeln und Gewohnheiten manchmal wundert er sich dass dies im menschlichen Vermögen ist. Aber das war es wohl.11

Here again is evidence of the veil or covering (or camouflage, as was mentioned before) that the characters, or better the inhabitants

9 Baumgart, p. 968.

10 Jakob, p. 28.

11 Jakob, p. 37.
of East Germany, have wrapped around themselves to remain anonymous in the totalitarian state. They see without seeing, they have little to say about their own life, they follow rules and routine. And it is precisely this atmosphere which brings melancholy. For the reader, it is also a consequence of Johnson's scientific, rational approach of Mutmassungen, Johnson's objective striving to keep his works as untinted as possible, that he, too, experiences this feeling and sense of uneasiness.

Reich-Raniki, echoed by Enzensberger, sees a striking contrast between the basic structural outline of Johnson's first published work and the literature of Socialist Realism of Communist countries. The characteristics he gives of this type of literature he claims can also be found in Mutmassungen über Jakob: Discussion of a current political situation, a hero from the working class who has advanced through the ranks (Jakob), an official representative of the State (Herr Rohlfs), a somewhat confused intellectual (Dr. Blach), a treatment of the problem of escape from a socialistic country, a hero who visits the West and returns disappointed, and a description of the job of the working man and his inner relationships to his job. All the characteristics seem to fit. Indeed, this book would be more communistic than anti-communist (if Johnson would allow us such terms--remember, Communism is not necessarily a bad system for Johnson), as Jaesrich alludes. But the difference here lies in the purpose of the author: "Johnson rebelliert gegen die verein-

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fachende und vorsätzliche Darstellung des Lebens der Durchschnittsmenschen in der DDR, gegen die offizielle Auslegung der Phänomene, gegen die ideologisch determinierte und begrenzte Perspektive."¹⁴ Through a stereotyped form Johnson wants to oppose a stereotyped view of the East German. He used the required form of DDR literature but did not come up with the standard message. He wished to show the East German Government that such a conception was wrong, that such a determined and narrow perspective of life was false. In so doing he shows as an example to West Germany and to the Western world that our conception of the East German as a worker with miserable living conditions who hates his government and desperately yearns for reunification, a man waiting to rebel but kept in tow by the brute force of the totalitarian state, a person desiring all that is Western is likewise false. "We must obtain a clearer picture of the average East German; that is what I attempted to do in my book" we can picture him as saying.

Johnson would also insist that we not use ideological and philosophical interpretations in literature. "So scheint die Johnsonsche Betrachtungsweise einem tiefen Misstrauen gegen jedliche Denkschemata, gegen philosophische Deutungen und ideologische Interpretationen entsprungen zu sein."¹⁵ Johnson was obviously rebelling against Eastern thought schemes, but we must not forget the lesson it holds for us when we put Western capitalistic and democratic interpretations on Eastern ways of life and thought. Johnson will

¹⁴Reich-Raniki, p. 235.
¹⁵Reich-Raniki, p. 235.
not judge the political worth of one political system against another. Moreover, he claims that one cannot judge another system or way of life, due to the separation of reality between the two systems.

"Ein gerechter Registrator will er sein."16 Also, as Enzensberger so aptly puts it, Johnson makes a "Herausforderung an die Intelligenz des Lesers" and "Johnsons Erzählweise erlöst den Leser aus seiner geniesserischen Passivität."17 The reader is presented with a political problem without a solution and without the ideological basis to make a solution, and he must observe, evaluate, and make his own judgments, all based upon and within the limits of the impartial Mutmassungen of the text.

In the above discussion of style it was observed that Johnson described the everyday mechanical life of the working man with utmost precision and care, but when it came to the thought, actions, attitudes, feelings and relationships of the characters the reader was subjected to doubts, obscurity, and confusion. This demonstrated, it was noted, Johnson's opinion that the neutral occurrences of life can be described with certainty, but that the inner life of people under a communist government has been changed, not making them unhuman, but simply different from other societies and forcing a misty cloud to surround them. We in the West cannot understand them and perhaps by their very nature they cannot understand themselves (remember, Johnson wrote this book while still a member of the German Democratic Republic). When an author describes these

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16 Reich-Raniki, p. 235.

17 Enzensberger, p. 236.
people, he must keep this fact in mind. It was also noted that the idea of speculations gave evidence to a scrupulosity of Johnson's which forced him to be careful as possible in not tinting the work politically or morally or in passing judgment in any way. Philosophical meanings and implications leave Johnson cold, no matter what system he considers. Ideological interpretations are for him equally worthless. As for the reasons of certain actions, he does not know, nor does he care. All of these elements, however, embody the traits of Johnson's style as it applies to his theme of divided Germany.

It has been mentioned several times that Johnson deals with the divided people of a divided land. What, then, are some of these speculations and thoughts of the characters themselves about the political problem of this divided state? They of course cannot be made entirely certain or entirely clear, but we can attempt to give a good indication from frequent textual references. How does the average man in East Germany consider his government, his way of living? What are his attitudes towards West Germany? Let us analyze some of these ideas, and perhaps reach a few conclusions.

Life under Soviet rule began harshly for Jakob (Perhaps for Johnson too?).

Denn wohl kam er vierzehnjährig hinein in das Ende und in die Hinterlassenschaft des Deutschen Krieges, er hatte aber keinen Teil an ihm. Das ging so weit dass er nicht begriff und kaum zuständig war für die Soldaten der geschlagenen Armee, die verschwitzt und müde ohne Zucht und Anstand hinter dem Treck ankamen in Jerichow und bettelten um Wasser und Brot und stahlen wie die Raben und stief weiterzogen die Küste entlang westwärts als könnten sie sich so entfernen von den was sie hinterlassen hatten. Er fand ihre Waffen und Uniformen im Bruch, sie gingen ihn nicht an, er nahm sie mit wie Strandgut. Dann mit den kleinen schnellen Pferden in wunderlichem Halsgeschirr in den niedrigen klappernden Wagen kamen still oder
In this, Jacob's recollection of the past, a certain vagueness of recollection is evident (recall the quotation where Johnson talks of eyewitnesses and of their poor recollection) and it is certainly different than the Soviet recollection of the facts. Jakob was typical of many of the youth of his time, too, who had little to do with the war and who did not understand the phenomenon of returning soldiers and their weapons. His life, then (like perhaps Johnson's), was harsh but this did not seem to make him bitter or resentful towards the Russians or towards the state.

When Jakob grew up he joined the State Party and the average member in good standing had of course many definite views about socialism and the economy. Among other things he believed that "die Sache des Sozialismus wird siegen und übrigbleiben, und einfach so in den Tag hinein und raus aus der Republik in hin zum Mittelländischen Meer," and that capitalism was doomed to failure:

- Hoch und festlich könne Jakob sich bedanken für Zeit und dauer seines Daseins, denn er habe nicht mehr gekannt die Unvernunft des Lebens,
- Die in die Welt gekommen ist mit dem kapitalisierten privaten Eigentum an Maschinen und Rohstoffen und Geld, damit der Kapitalist die Arbeitskraft des Mannes mieten kann und den erzeugten Wert der Arbeit so anlegen dass es immer weitergeht und dass er kriegt was er so braucht
- Er verwendet den Wert der Arbeit für seine widermenschlichen

18 Jakob, p. 44.
wie auch für seine eitlen Zwecke
- Ja, und der Wert ist nicht selten doppelt so hoch wie der
Mietlohn und dreifach angewiesen bist du auf den Betrug auch
noch, sagen wir mal Ausbeutung. Schmeiss einer dich raus,
mußt du zu einem andern, und wenn du bloss so dastehst und
schreist, hetzen sie die Polizei auf dich, die kriegen nun
wieder dafür ihr Geld, die wollen ja auch leben. Da rechne
mal gegen an.

- Ja, und die Kapitalisten zogen sich Verbrecher heran um
die Ausbeutung zu kraftigen, und die Verbrecher schlugen zu
mit Ansehen der Person, die Person musste sagen es sei gut so,
und dauernd sollte dies wign. Und da konnten sie den Hals
nicht voll genug kriegen in eigenen Land, da überzogen sie die
Welt mit Krieg, da hatte er zu Tode kommen können Jakob, da
gingen sie unter mit Gestank. Und es taten die Sieger mit dem
Land es Übel wie ihnen gefiel.
- So ungetehr und unerbittlich werden sie ihm das gesagt haben,
und warum ist der Aufbau des Sozialismus gerecht? weil der
Kapitalismus ungerecht war. Das ist doch endlich mal eine
Gerechtigkeit, die sich von selbst nicht versteh. Ja, das
sind noch zwei Bier. Zusammenrechnen kommen wir später.

Ich stellte mich auf den Boden der Tatsachen. Ich sagte ihm dass
die Sowjetunion da, wo sie uns von Faschismus befreit hat, das
große private Eigentum an Maschinen und Rohstoffen und Lohn-
geld abgeschafft hat von den grossen Bodennieten ganz zu
schweigen, das weiss er ja wohl selber, und nach all diesem
Schmutz ist unablässig ein neuer Staat entstanden, der die
Arbeit gerecht verwaltet, den Überschuss zwischen Lohn und Wert
der Arbeit dem gemeinsen Wohl mützlich zukommen lässt, in dieser
Zeit können noch ganz andere als Jakob glücklich werden.

Die Umstände des von Jakob beaufsichtigten Streckenabschnitts
sind im allgemeinen also die aller anderen, nämlich das dritte
und mitunter das zweite Gleis sind von der Roten Armee, abgeris-
sen worden und fehlen. Das haben die Franzosen auch gemacht:
dachte ich, aber so hatte Jakob das nun wieder gar nicht gemeint,
ich hielt still wie der Vogel im Netz. Zum anderen hat die
Deutsche Demokratische Republik im Verfolg ihres ersten Fünf-
jahrplans 1950-1955 eine eigene Schwerindustrie aufbauen müssen
zu Lasten des Scheintransports, "wir haben Strecken, da liegen
die Schienen seit 1929, neue kriegen wir nicht genug, und jetzt
haben wir den zweiten Fünfjahrplan".

Die siegreichen Kapitalisten taten Übel wo sie gesiegt hatten
und ermitligen das private Eigentum zu weiterer Ausbeutung und
bestärkten den Rückstand in der Entwicklung des Lebens auf
Erden, von neuem nun waren die Verbrecher nicht fern. Denn die
Kapitalisten blicken schoel auf den ihnen benachbarten Unter-
schied in der Vertielung des Mehrwerts, sie rüsten sich Krieg
und wollen den Arbeiter befreien von seiner endlich eingerichte-
ten Freiheit; mit allen Kräften und Mitteln denken sie die
Kraft des vernünftigen Lebens zu schwächen, sie scheuen nicht
zurück vor ruchlosen Anschlägen, sie sprechen den Rückstand
deiner Gedanken an und dingen dich zum Handlanger der Reaktion: sage ich, hörst du, verwöhntlich sind diese und des Unterganges gewiss, sollte nicht ein jeder ihnen ihr sträfliches Tun und Treiben verhindern wegen der nationalen Zukunft von Sozialismus?20

These quotations are taken from various contexts, mainly from Herr Rohlf's attempts to resolve Jakob's doubts, but they do illustrate the actual thinking of the Communist. The Western capitalist uses the workers' labors for his own profit, for his vanities, for anti-humane purposes, and the people are exploited when they buy the finished products. This type of life the capitalists, as criminals, spread throughout the world. But the Soviet Union abolished this unjust system and established a new one for the advantage of the workers. Naturally the system has some failures at first but even though unscrupulous capitalists have attempted to fight them, the Socialists will triumph in the end—a simple life of thought but actually quite convincing. We in the West so easily wish to disregard these thoughts as pure propaganda and we never stop to ponder the truths that these statements might contain. We say: These are all lies, there is false logic here, no one "over there" believes them. But Johnson wants to show us that they are perhaps all not lies, that the people do believe them, that there is perhaps a different logic here, a different thought pattern. The true believer makes sacrifices, endures hardships for the "cause." Jakob does not mind the overwork, the scarce pay, the few holidays. He accepts this as a way of life, not with resignation but with a feeling of semi-devotion and purpose.

20Jakob, pp. 30-34.
These passages also show Johnson as the non-omnipotent writer who refuses to take a firm stand on the values of these two systems. It resembles a great deal Bertold Brecht's "Epic Distance" which denies the reader the privilege of identification.

The East does not worry or feel angry about the violations of freedom (in the Western sense) that supposedly occur there. Such actions are considered matter of fact. For example, tampering with the mail: "regelmässig und so in einer Macht im Oktober wurden manche Bezirke je nach Weisung des Leiters für die Abteilung Zustellung (der Weisung hatte) abermals durchsucht, nun kamen vier ausge- sonderte Briefe in einem amtlich bestempelten und verklammerten Steifumschlag abhanden und versäumten ihre Ankunft am nächsten Morgen." Or censoring of newspapers: "Der XX. Kongress hatte stattgefunden, aber die Rede war nicht abgedruckt, sie kam auch nicht später, und allmählich wurde klar dass sie für uns nicht gelten sollte." Or the behavior required of authors and scientists: (Dr. Elach speaking, perhaps Johnson directly?, ironically?)

All had been saying things in their writings and scientific lectures, year after year they had been given and allowing themselves to be compromised, thereby becoming known in the press and with national prizes and through the Actual Camera, so that those attending these evenings could meet as intellectual beings of our state's and discuss as better to meet in the interest of a socalled human socialism.

Now these occurrences are common knowledge to us but the manner of Johnson's presentation of them makes us awaken quickly and sharply.

21 Jakob, p. 21.
22 Jakob, p. 82.
23 Jakob, p. 77.
to the fact of the real acceptance that most East Germans have in these actions. Now this acceptance may be part of the mark worn by the East Germans that was mentioned so frequently in the first part of this chapter. They behave as if they are not against these actions but perhaps they are only demonstrating a passive resistance. This tendency to impersonalization incidentally is evident in Johnson's use of ich and man. Ich, a generally reliable information given for other authors, becomes unobjective and unreliable for Johnson, as in the case of individuals talking about the above-mentioned violation, but the impersonal man, usually not meant to be reliable, becomes extremely credible in Johnson because it pictures the impersonal trend towards anonymity. But whether this acceptance is red or not we still might ask ourselves: How can they believe in such things? How can they live under such a system? We do not or can we know how or why, because that knowing is part of the concept of Mutmassungen. All we know is that they outwardly do; we never know what they are inwardly thinking. The West must come to realize this fact.

On the other hand, what do the Germans in the East think of those in the West? Why, the same thing those in the West think about them:

Braucht bloss das Radio einzuschalten. Jede westliche Station wirft uns üble Nachrichten über die Grenze und dummes Zweckwissen, und jeder kann verreisen wohin er will, raus rein nach Belieben, das soll gut gehen auf die Dauer? Wir haben erst vor zehn Jahren angefangen. Ich möchte wetten drüben stehen sie Gewehr bei Fuss und warten auf den ersten Stein der hier ins Fenster fliegt und mir an die Nase wie ich hier sitzt beschaulich mit meinem vergnügten Abend.

Here is the same disgust for opposing propaganda, the same distrust

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24 Jakob, p. 84.
of the other side that is found in the West. Another example of the division of Germany, which is perhaps the first striking evidence we have that the two Germanies are foreign to each other, is the matter of language, which was alluded to previously:

"Wir sind ja der Sache des Fortschritts unbeeindruckbar ergeben," Cresspahl hatte an der SACHE DES FORTSCHRITTS wohl nicht mehr zu verteidigen gefunden (denn was war das?), aber ÜBER dem UNBELEHRBAR ERGEBEN war er bedenklich geworden. Denn UNBELEHRBAR war das Wort, das die sozialistische Staatsmacht für ihre Feinde gebrauchte und heiss soviel wie streitsüchtig besser-wissensicher tückisch unnutz, aber ERGEBEN verwandte sie für den anderen Teil der Bevölkerung und der internationalen Arbeiterklasse, der von dem einmal eingeschlagenen Weg zum Sozialismus UNBELEHRBAR überzeugt war und unermüdlich arbeitwillig die Anweisungen der Parteileitung ausführte, und was heiss UNBELEHRBAR ERGEBEN (dachte Cresspahl:) wenn es in Jonas' Munde war? Sichtlich waren seine Gedanken sättlich auf die Einrichtung des einen deutschen Drittelstaates gerichtet und befassten sich unablässig mit dem was die einen und die anderen und die dritten und die neunen mit jeweils unterschiedlicher Sinnessart und Bedeutung SOzialismus nannten, und da Jonas schlechthin nur die Regierung seines Landes in Auge haben konnte, sah er manchmal den Wald vor Blumen nicht, so klug war er, konnte das sein? dachte Cresspahl, aber so etwas hatte ihm inzwischen wohl noch nicht auffallen können. Würde Jonas nun wohl eigenmächtiges Augenmerk behalten, wenn er (im Spass. Im Spass) den einen Namen annahm und den anderen behielt und er immer dazwischen gab sich aus für namenlos? Er sagte so: es lag im Interesse der Regierung dass sie eine ideologische Schwarmgeisterei im rechten Anfang unterband, das begründete er so eingehend und verständlich dass man sich nur wundern konnte über seine frühere Feindseligkeit, und er sagte es liege im Interesse der UNBELEHRBAR ERGEBEN dass endlich nicht mehr nach den Vorschriften und Regeln des Lehrbuchs gedacht werde, und da dies unbestreitbar auf der Hand liegen sollte wie es schien, blieb nur noch zu fragen wer denn etwa recht haben sollte (von der Richtigkeit zu schweigen, die war unkenntlich geworden).25

What makes the above quotation so beautiful and intriguing is that it invades the thoughts of an old man who has lived under both systems and has trouble adjusting to the new system. Incorrigible is a term used only for capitalists, dedicated applies to the working

class, but what does the combination of these words mean? What do
the Socialists mean with their new words, phrases, and slogans?
Cresspahl has trouble understanding and perhaps he never will.26
But for the young it is a different story—they grew up with the
language from birth and know no other meanings.

It is no wonder, then, that the two Germanies cannot communicate.
Even the toll of language they use has developed different contexts
and meanings. Perhaps it is this language difference that makes
Gesine (now in West Berlin, but formerly from East Germany) cry out
once in anguish: "WAS WÜNSCHEN SIE I AM A STRANGER HERE MYSELF."27

Perhaps the most moving part of the book and the "most"
definitive proof we have of separation of views and life between
East and West Germany is close to the end at the occasion of Jakob's
visit to his old love, Gesine, in West Berlin. For all those about
to make such a journey a certain despair develops. The apprehensions
of Dr. Blach before his attempted escape typify the thought of all
those (including Jakob) who are about to depart to the West:

"Ich werde nie erlernen zu leben wie sie. Ich würde sagen:
und was kommt dann? und was sagt das soziale Urteil zu meinem
Verhalten? was hat mich veranlasst zu dieser Änderung meines
Lebens aus der sicheren Gewohnheit heraus? ich würde mir
kein Wort glauben, während sie blindlings sicher den Mantel
anzieht und weggeht ohne sich zu misstrauen für die Lange eines
Atemzuges und so in Recht ist wie ein junges Pferd, dem sie das
Zaumzeug zum ersten Mal aufgelegt haben, es versucht die Risten
mit seinen vorderen Beinen abzustreifen vom Kopf; manche können
es, wer hätte nicht die schlanken behenden Fohlen gesehen auf
der Koppel in der Sonne aus dem Fenster des vorderragenden
Schnellzuges.28

26 Note also Cresspahl's difficulty in distinguishing between
truth and right.

27 Jakob, p. 130.

And what is the reason for this inability to cope with a new situation? Namely because it is not a new situation but a new world, where fears and uncertainties are the stock of life. Only one thing is really certain—you cannot live and be happy in the West if you come from the East: "aber wenn einer nicht auskommen kann ohne Besuch, die Eltern, und nun noch der, aus dem Osten, dann kann man hier nicht gut leben. Entweder das eine oder das andere, beides geht nicht."

Note here the indication of love, affections, and personal involvement. The East is not a barren wasteland. You can live there and be happy.

And what is Jakob's view of the West? It is appropriately illustrated by the following passage, which again illustrates Johnson's fondness for the detail of small things:

ein Helles ein Bier für den Bruder aus dem Osten, hier, Zigarre ich bin kein Bruder aus dem Osten auch, bleibst du hier, nicht wahr. nein, ich fahr zurück warum, Mensch, kann man denn da überhaupt leben? oder musst du, Familie gefällt mir hier nicht was! sag doch mal, das denn Das ist nicht schwer. Etwa die music box vollautomatisch, ging einer hin mit seinen Groschen und suchte sich eine Plattennummer aus undwarf die Münze ein, in dem rot und grün und engelsblau und rastete ein vor der gewählten Platte. Knickte vor. Ergriff sie. Hob sie hoch über seinen Kopf und führte sie zum Teller, der zu drehen begann, ging zurück, während der Tonarm sich auf die äußerste Rille legte und hinauszuschleudern begann in den engen warmluftigen widerhallenden Raum den Badenweiler Marsch warum magst du das nun nicht ist der Lieblingsmarsch des Führers. eben aber er ist doch tot und ihr macht ihn euch wieder lebendig ach was, ist schöne Musik

29 Jakob, p. 181.
Notice that, for instance, in the case of the music box, time and sentence order are interrupted by Johnson’s highly impressionistic style. Jakob first notices the music box and then as an afterthought that it is *vollautomatisch*. Then Jakob notices a nebulous *einer* going to the machine, and then the fact that he has a cane in his hand, then back to the machine itself—the robot arm, the turntable, the needle, the groove, the song. Finally comes the declaration that the song reminds him of Hitler. Here we have no romantic story-telling, but disintegrated sentences to illustrate a (to Jakob) disintegrated Western world. Considering the context of the entire quotation we see that Jakob is moreover disgusted by the things Westerners tend to forget—corruption of all forms, lies, insincerity, and especially materialism. These things do not (or should not) exist in socialism. Why should he then stay here, where such vice runs rampant? Jakob is so adversely moved by his experience that to Gesine’s "Ebleib hier" he responds simply "Komm mit."  

She stays, he returns to the East, and on the first day back to work he is killed by a train while cutting across the tracks, as was his custom.

Why did Jakob die? Because of the "speculative" nature of the book, the answer can probably never be determined for certain. But a few quite meaningful interpretations can be made. Gotthart

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30 Jakob, p. 185.

31 Jakob, p. 194.
Wunberg makes one attempt. He shows by numerous references to Johnson how Jakob, because he had done it so many times in the past, was extremely well versed in the art of crossing the tracks. Only after he had returned from the West did his Unfall occur. Wunberg interprets the Gleise as being a symbol for the border between East and West. When Jakob visited the West, which he considered better, he was sorely disappointed, for things were in the same state of decay there as in his homeland. He therefore returned home and the border (tracks) had become meaningless to him, because there was no difference between the two Germanies. Jakob crosses over this border which he cannot see because of the fog (i.e., it does not exist) and he is killed to symbolize the dissolution of former out-moded ideas.

As Wunberg says:

Nach dem er im Westen gewesen ist, wird er überfahren. Er hat die Niederschlagung des Ungarauaufstands im Osten erlebt; seine Reaktion: in den Westen gehen. Kaum ist er dort, bombardieren die Engländer Ägypten. Daraufhin geht er zurück in den Osten: es ist hier so wie dort. Nicht einmal die Grenze ist so fester, wenn auch negativer, Maßstab. Wo auf der einen Seite so viel falsch gemacht wird, wie auf der anderen, hat eine Grenze sich von der Sache her erübrigt, ist sie hinfällig geworden. Der einzige tatsächlich feste Anhaltspunkt war die Grenze gewesen. Sie bedeutete für Jakob—eingestanden oder nicht: hier im Osten ist es unter Umständen nicht so gut, wie manche meinen; dort im Westen ist es besser, jedenfalls bleibt mir immer noch die Möglichkeit, über diese Grenze in den Westen zu gehen. Sie war so etwas wie ein objektiver Markierungspunkt in der Werteskala gewesen. So hatte er sie—quer über die Schienen gehend, also parallel zur Grenze—immer für sich nachvollzogen und realisiert. Jetzt wo sie ihre Bedeutung verloren hat, verwundert er, indem er tut was er immer getan hat: indem er quer über Gleise geht; d.h. einen Maßstab anwendet, der nicht mehr existiert. Zum Verhältnis wird ihm die Grenze erst in den Augenblick, als sie ihren Charakter als Grenze zwischen Wert und Uwert verliert.\(^{32}\)

I disagree somewhat with this interpretation and tend to go

further in its significance than Wunberg. I would agree that the tracks represent the border between the East and the West and that Jakob's crossing of it symbolizes his crossing of the border. But I do not agree with Wunberg's reasons for Jakob's departure and return. Granted, Jakob did have some misgiving about the Communist government, but we must remember that he was asked to act as a go-between, he was solicited by the State to act on its behalf. He was perfectly content to stay home and enjoy the life of the typical day-laborer. The "System" was acceptable to him. When he reached West Berlin he was confused, alienated, and estranged from the things he experienced there. The "System" there was different. Granted, in superficial ways, such as the inability of the Western state and ideology to grapple completely with the total life milieu of its citizens, the situation was the same as he had experienced at home. But he did not feel at home. He had to return because he could not understand the system, because there was a certain Entfremdung between himself and the foreign system. The fog over the tracks is a symbol of this Entfremdung and Jakob was killed because he could not see this fog to recognize the other system--represented by an interzone train from the West--hence the West itself and all it stood for.

Difference and not similarity is my point here.

Jakob will nichts anderes als in Ruhe leben, seine Pflicht erfüllen und seine moralische Integrität bewahren. Er will weder der Spionageabwehr dienen, die seine Hilfe sucht, noch fliehen. Unheimlich wird ihm der Staat, in dem er lebt--Fremd bleibt ihm der andere deutsche Staat. Er versucht, quer über die Gleise zu gehen. Eine Lokomotive führt ihm entgegen, er weicht ihr aus, wird jedoch von einer anderen Lokomotive erfasst. Die Richtungen, aus denen diese beiden Lokomotive kommen, sind zwar nicht angegeben, aber wir können sie vermuten: Ost und West.33

33 Reich-Raniki, p. 240.
From the above discussion of the content and the Mutmassungen of the novel, it is obvious that Johnson does not wish to make the problem of divided German easy for the reader. He wishes to tax the reader’s patience, to make the reader work for understanding, to remove the reader from his passivity which probably carries over into the social-political sphere. As Wunberg says: "Nicht nur, was sie sagen ist vage und blasse Vermutung; auch was der Leser sich über sie zurechtlegt, muss unbestimmt bleiben." And this leads us to one of Johnson’s many positive qualities. He does not teach or preach about the advantages of one side over the other in the cold war struggle, but simply demonstrates the man and the State of East Germany and their relationships to the West cannot be understood or presented in a clear and simplified form. Johnson, when writing about the East, could only speculate about his characters (since he was once a part of it he could understand it so much better). In turn, his characters could only speculate about the circumstances of Jakob’s death. Finally, we in the West (Johnson probably foresaw that many of his readers would be in the Western world) can only speculate about the thoughts and ideas of those in the East. In no case can one party pierce the mask of the other. To understand this idea is to grasp the key that unlocks the meaning of the title and indeed the very meaning of the work.


34 Wunberg, p. 441.
Rückblick des Touristen, Jenes "Versteh nicht allzu früh!", das er dem Leser mit jedem Satz zuflüsst, richtet der Autor freilich auch als Mahnung an sich selbst. Die ungeheure Entfernung, die er zwischen sich und seine Figuren legt, der Mangel an Einverständnis, die Kälte, die zwischen Helden und Autor herrschen, zeugen von seiner Konsequenz. Der Schriftsteller und sein Geschöpf blinzeln sich nicht länger zu; sie sind einander entfremdet in einer entfremdeten Welt. 33

The reason for this Entfremdung, to repeat once again, is the existence of two cultures in two Germanies. The conversaions and observations of the East Germans, together with their opinions of the West "represent the border of the divided world: the border between the two systems that regulate living in the world today. The other territorial borders between the hostile armies have become petrified into military demarcation lines that block all exchange. On either side life has its separate blood stream." 36

What is the result of these speculations and their consequent Entfremdung? For one thing, they do not present us a book devoted to German reunification. "Es ist kein Roman des Brückenschlages oder der Annäherung, es sei denn in dem Sinne, dass eine jeglicher Schwarz-Weiss-Malerei abschüttende Darstellung mitteldeutscher Zustände und vor allem mitteldeutscher Menschen uns dies näherbringt." 37 It brings us closer to the problem, it gives us more aspects of the problem, it eliminates clichés from the problem. But it remains a problem nevertheless. Johnson offers no solutions. He simply presents the facts. We, with these added insights, are to attempt to find a solution, if

35 Enzensberger, p. 236.
37 Jaesrich, pp. 74-5.
even Johnson may say no solution can exist. (The next chapter will examine this later statement in more detail.) "Ein gerechter Registrator will er sein."38

The question of freedom, upon which really the whole problem of reunification is based, is another matter Johnson wishes to clarify. It must be realized, says Johnson, that "freedom" means different things in different places, and we should not all be so naive as to think all peoples adhere to, if not outwardly at least inwardly, to the Western concept.

So alienation between the people of the two Germanies is the central core, theme, moral (call it what you will) of Uwe Johnson's Mutmassungen über Jakob. "Johnson hat die künstlerische Chance wahrgenommen, die in unserem Unglück liegt, und mit seinem Buch, was er zeigt, auch schon, und sie es nur mutmassend, "überwunder:
die deutsche Entfremdung."40 In the next book to be discussed, Johnson presents his main character as trying to overcome this Entfremdung and as attempting to comprehend its causes. "Das dritte Buch über Achim beginnt also da wo die Mutmassungen über Jakob aufhörten."41

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38 Reich-Raniki, p. 235.
39 Enzensberger, p. 237.
40 Enzensberger, p. 239.
41 Reich-Raniki, p. 241.
CHAPTER III

DAS Dritte Buch über Achim

"Die Personen sind erfunden. Die Ereignisse
bezichten sich nicht auf "Wirkliche" sondern auf
die Grenze: den Unterschied: die Entfernung
und den Versuch sie zu beschreiben."

p. 301

Das dritte Buch über Achim presents an intriguing change of
events from Johnson's first published work. In this novel we see a
West German who travels to East Germany and then returns. It is a
West German who we see this time struggling with the problem of
divided Germany, although the experiences and events we read occur
again primarily in the East.

Karsch, a journalist from Hamburg, is invited for a visit in
East Germany by his old girl friend, Karin, an East German actress.
Karsch accepts and his experiences thus begin. He meets a Radrennfahrer,
Achim, who is Karin's current flame. In the course of his
visit Karsch is persuaded by an East German publishing house, and
indeed by the Party itself, to write a book about Achim as a propa-
ganda piece for the general public who all admire greatly Achim's
tremendous athletic prowess. (There have already been two books
written about Achim, hence the title of Johnson's work.) And thus
commences the Beschreibung einer Beschreibung as it has often been
called. For Johnson does not give us the finished third book about
Achim but instead a description of how Karsch gained material for
his book and of how Karsch attempted to write it.

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Karsch is very thorough in his research. "Er will wissen, wie Achim lebt und wie seine Landsleute leben, er will begreifen, schmecken und beschreiben, wie alles aus sich heraus sich erklärt." He studies, travels, makes notes. All this Johnson makes known to his readers by the use of a nebulous personage whom he addresses simply as du. This du asks questions about the book, characters, and what Karsch has written. These questions appear as a type of chapter title and the answers given by Karsch are the bodies of the chapters.

What Karsch discovers is sometimes complimentary and sometimes rather unpleasant to the characters involved and to the East German Government: Achim’s father was a Social Democrat and was against Hitler—his father perhaps even organized the sabotage of the plane factory where he worked; his mother and his three-year-old sister disappeared during an air-raid; Achim was a member of the Hitler-Jugend and later the FDJ; he once had a young Jewish girl as a close friend; his bicycle was stolen from him during the invasion of the Red Army, but a new one was later given to him in its place; Achim originally studied for the profession of mason but became involved in bicycle racing only by chance; one time Achim entered West Berlin and purchased there gears for his bicycle although this was strictly forbidden by the East; he once, on a racing tour in Austria, left the winners platform because the National Anthem of West Germany was played; and he was photographed participating in the revolt in East Germany on June 17, 1953.

The publishing house does not wish many of these facts to appear in the book and suggests instead other things that might be added. But because he cannot write the book the way he personally wishes and, more importantly, because he simply cannot comprehend the people of the DDR—their thought, their way of life—Karsch returns disgusted, full of regret, and surrounded by misty incomprehension, to West Germany. His book is never finished or published.

Johnson's language and style is once again admirably suited to his theme and content. Here, however, we see a more mature Johnson, a Johnson whose ideas and expression have become more crystallized, more precise.

Johnson will die Sprache zwingen, Mutmassungen in Gewissheit zu verwandeln. Was beschreibbar ist, muss auch erklärbär sein. Solcher Mühe folgt das Wort; auch dort, wo es versagt bleibt und unkenntlich. Das am schwersten zu Deutende, die andere Atmosphäre, das Unwägbare, das den ganzen Unterschied ausmacht, das ergibt sich dieser Sprache, es erscheint in ihr, weit über jede 'Erklärung' hinaus.²

No longer do we have the extremely speculative nature of the first book. There is more certainty here, more things capable of being explained. Examples of this and other characteristics will be given in quotations later in the chapter.

Johnson has, in the years that separate these books, removed himself from his work, has set a certain distance between himself and his characters. As will be mentioned later, this device enables him well to illustrate the distance that separate the two Germanies. "So ist Johnson's Sprache: freundlich und hart, auf Distanz bedacht und auf Kennzeichnung des Veränderlichen."³ This distance enables

²Wiegstein, p. 634.
³Wiegstein, p. 634.
Johnson to concentrate on ideas, background and causes, and not the people in themselves. "Offenbar liegt dem Verfasser des Dritten Buchs über Achim weniger an den Charakteren als an der Darstellung der Verhältnisse; nicht um Aktionen geht es ihm, sondern um den Hintergrund. Wichter als die Gedanken, die geäußert werden, sind für Johnson die Umstände, die sie verursacht haben." This is the reason why Karsch makes his examinations and investigations into the life of Achim. Contemporary attitudes and behavior can be understood only in the context of their historical developments. Given their relationships, the clarity of the present predicament emerges from its previous disentanglement.


The work, then is a series of reports, of chronicles, which some complain are too loosely strung together, making the story difficult to follow. But again it must be stressed that it is not the story but the individual situations in which the characters find themselves that are important.

Die Fabel auf Achim ist im Grunde nur eine Hilfskonstruktion. Der Geschichte von westlichen Journalisten und östlichen Radrennfahrern geht das Gleichnishaft ab. Mogen manche Abschnitte

4 Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Registrar Johnson" in Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, München, 1963, S. 244.

5 Reich-Ranicki, p. 242.
The details are necessary to import the full effect of the distance which separates the two Germanies. In this sense, then, it is closely connected to the accurate and detailed descriptions found in Mutmassungen über Jakob, whose details, it will be recalled, were necessary to contrast the certain from the vague. In this book though the details have a far more reaching range than simply a vehicle to portray the world of the worker.

What remains nebulous here are the unimportant connections and distractions such as a detailed plot, which pulls us away from the central theme. We do not, therefore, have to concern ourselves with "speculations" as we did in the last chapter.

Details, clarity, distance, a widened range of precision, interest in motivation and background, all these stylistic elements, as has been said, are concentrated on the theme of the book. What, then, is this all pervasive theme? The answer is simple. It lies on the third page and the last page of the novel: "Ich meine die Grenze, die Entfernung, den Unterschied."8 Succinctly put, the

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6 Reich-Ranicki, p. 244.

7 Wiegenstein, p. 634.

border between the two Germanies has caused such differences in all aspects of life between the Eastern and Western parts of Germany, that there exists today a great distance, a great separation between them. In order to amplify, clarify, and explain this thematic core, it is necessary to discuss in detail the Unterschiede the Grenze has caused. Perhaps it will become certain how the differences appear, but the question "why" will be more difficult to answer.

One of the most fundamental and basic problems, yet so obvious as to escape notice, is the problem of language. The two Germanies cannot communicate with each other. This is obvious. (See the germ of this theme in the previous chapter.) But why not? Do they not both speak the same German language? No, says Johnson.
The language is different and this distinction causes an Entfernung, a completely different view of life and behavior:

Die Sprache, die er verstand und mit der er verständlich über den Tag gekommen war, redete ihm noch oft in die Träuschung von Zusammengeschobenheit hinein, wieder hielt er beide Staaten für vergleichbar, wollte in Gedanken sie reißen zusammenlegen, da doch ein vergessenes Landeschild oder die Sprache oder das vertraute Aussehen öffentlicher Gebäude in einem Land an das andere erinnerten; dann aber gingen die Ähnlichkeiten nicht auf in einander: die golden und schwarz aufgemalte Zigarettensorte hatte man dort vor fünfzehn Jahren zum letzten Mal kaufen können, die öffentlichen Gebäude regierte ein anderes Gesetz, dessen Sprache nur ordnete das Bild der Straße und nicht das Gespräch der Leute, die da gingen oder hier aus den Häusern niederblickten in der kühlten ruhigen Luft des Abends auf Kissen gestützt und redend: die Sprache der staatlichen Zeitungen vorstand Karsch nicht.

Notice the perception and clarity so beautifully evident in this small passage. Here we have no speculations of Grasspahl about language (see the long quotation in the last chapter) but a fairly definitive and objective outline of Karsch's thoughts. The language

9Ibid., p. 23-4.
to which Karsch has been accustomed for so many years in his native area has suddenly adopted a foreign flavor. Karsch was certain that through this language he could make suitable comparisons between the two Germanies. But this alas was not the case. The socialist-communist oriented State, in which he was only a visitor, had changed for him such simple things as a sign on a store of the common street scene. Karsch naively believed at this time (early in the book) that the language of the ordinary people had not changed, just the language of the newspapers. He was later to discover that he was in error.

This very idea is rooted and strengthened by what Johnson has to say in his *Skizze, "Berlin, Border of the Divided World."

Speaking of simply the definitions of words Johnson says:

each power system has established its own terminology which it was able to impose to some extent as a convention within its territory. For instance, each of the two Berlins calls itself free and the other not free, itself democratic and the other undemocratic, itself peace-loving and the other rocket-rattling, etc. Some of these diffuse formulas have actually seeped into everyday speech and are often used without irony. So the traveler *Karsch* arrives with a baggage of definitions for objects, credos; political circumstances that don't exist where he has alighted, where these definitions are not familiar. 10

This idea is so basic it often escapes us. If we look up the word "freedom," for example, in a *Duden* on one side of the border we will find a meaning entirely different from that of the other side. The West will speak of unhindered choice, certain rights, democracy. The East will speak of all actions to be devoted to the cause, of all people having the right to work for socialism. Each definition

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contradicts the logic of the other. How, then, can the two Germanies even hope to dialogue with each other? Both sides, for example, claim in their official statements profound concern and desire for Wiedervereinigung under democracy, but of course they have two different concepts in mind. "Ihr habt die Wahl" and "Das kann jeder wissen, dass Du für Friede bist" say the posters of the East. The people on either side of the border understand what their own concepts are, but they cannot comprehend how the other side can possibly hold such absurd beliefs. The irony of this whole situation is expressed so well by Achim in the following quotation:

Sie werden sich demokratisch nennen uns eine Diktatur: sagt ihnen wir haben mehr Demokratie als Sie denken können. Sie werden ihren Staat ausgeben für allein rechtmässig und unserm für nicht rechtmässig; sagt ihnen dass wir das Recht der Arbeiterklasse haben und sie nur die Nachfolge des zerschlagenen Deutschland; sie werden sagen dass sie rüsten weil wir rüsten; sagt ihnen dass wir rüsten weil sie rüsten; sie werden sagen dass sie uns mit Sabotage Spionage überziehen; sagt ihnen dass sie uns mit Sabotage Spionage überziehen; sie werden sagen dass der Tod nur steht für ihren Staat; sagt ihnen es nützt nur zu sterben für unseren freien demokratischen rechtmässigen Staat, in dem zum Beispiel der Sport, das sehen sie doch, das zeigt ihnen einmal.11

We have here first of all good evidence of what Wiegenstein, in an earlier quotation, called a freundlich und hart language. Achim is slightly angered and uses a very hard language to indignt the West for its seemingly unjust attacks on Eastern integrity and to accuse the West of being hypocritical in its propaganda. But Achim nevertheless, tries to remain on a friendly basis with Karsch and in the end he can no longer remain angry and his thoughts turn again to his delight for sports. Secondly, in a clear and vivid manner, we we again only too plainly two states struggling without success to

11Achim, pp. 281-2.
bridge the gap that distances them.

It is in this context that the definition of truth becomes quite relative. It is a "fact" that Achim, as a young man, crossed into West Berlin to purchase a gear for his bicycle. But it is not "true," i.e., it is not good for the State, to admit this fact, in the book Karsch is writing: "Wie Achim dann doch zu einer Schattung kam (denn im nächsten Jahr unverehrs hatte er eine) kann mit Sicherheit nicht mehr festgelegt werden. Es ist nämlich lange her."\(^{12}\)

In fact, the portrait of Achim, the "true" story about him, has already been predetermined by the Communist party, and indeed by Achim himself:


Here is a complete change of view from Western concepts in a simple biographical sketch of Achim's life after the war. He was at first unconcerned about his fellow workers but gradually, due to the influence of the Party, he realized (especially by Westerners) it cannot help but serve as a perfect model for inspiration to others. Karsch thus does not understand this Unterschied, this alienation

\(^{12}\) Achim, p. 227.

\(^{13}\) Achim, pp. 212-3.
(nor perhaps can he ever) because his self-expression is controlled by an all-pervasive and more realistic set of norms: "das müssen Sie beschreiben als hätten Sie es verstanden."\textsuperscript{14}

This brings us back to a final comment on the reason why Achim was commissioned to write the book. Not for any Western idea of literature for its own sake or for entertainment, or for vicarious experience, we shall see, but, as was mentioned so many times before, to serve the State (which is in a way a vicarious experience, but one that has a more inherent motivational direction):

\begin{quote}
(nun ja! sagte er: die Bücher erfüllen ihren Zweck!\textsuperscript{15}) sei nicht die ganze Person gegeben. Die ganze Person aber sei der Eindruck der sozialen Armee und der Aufbau einer neuen Wirtschaft und die neue Zufriedenheit des Lebens und der fahnenbewegenden Zuschauer am Rande der Rennstrecken alles im allem!
\end{quote}

Here is further evidence of Johnson distancing himself from his characters to remove individuality from his characters (recall the work in the first chapter) and more importantly to examine the Eastern milieu as a total phenomenon and to investigate the background or history of the rise of the East German State.

The mistakes Achim may or may not have made in his past life are thus unimportant. "Nicht seine Fehler sind wichtig sondern was ihn mit unserer Zeit verbindet."\textsuperscript{16} For this book has a much higher purpose—to serve, to make converts to the "true system": "Denken Sie an all die Menschen, die das Buch lesen werden und glauben und

\textsuperscript{14} Achim, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{15} Achim, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{16} Achim, p. 132.
ihr eigenes Leben verändern.\textsuperscript{17} It was also this very inability to understand the language and other facets of Eastern life that brought Achim into conflict with the publishing house, and indeed forced his very retreat from East Germany.

What then were some of the other facts that showed this Unterschied, that produced this Entfernung? For one thing the Communist ideology (notice Johnson places no criticism on this system) has so penetrated the life of the people that "hier offenbar ass und trank man nicht das selbe, es wurde mit anderen Mitteln gewaschen, es gab andere Mengen und Arten von Autos, und nur mitunter.\textsuperscript{18} The ideology has not manifested itself as ideology, that is, on a philosophical and theoretical level but in the simple common things, the Dinga with which one lives. Achim, a visitor from the West partially realized this and "versucht zu unterscheiden wie das wirtschaftliche Gesetz im Aussehen der Strassen erschien.\textsuperscript{19} He was not successful. The Entfernung was too great.

The reporting of the news honestly and objectively (supposedly greatly prized by the West) is another of the Unterschiede. This reporting is not the same in the DDR as in the West (although ironically this ideal is not too often upheld in the West itself):

\begin{itemize}
  \item Die städtisch regierende Zeitung berichtete nur von der kriegerischen Rüstung des westdeutschen Staates, sprach von ungerechten Gerichtsurteilen gegen Volksredner und von der zunehmenden Vorrohung der Sitten: Karsch sah nach ob zu Hause gelegt wurde: es wurde gelegt, aber die westdeutschen Zeitungen sprachen überhörbar von der kriegerischen Aufrüstung des ostdeutschen
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{17} Achim, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{18} Achim, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{19} Achim, p. 43.
Staates, von ungerechten Gerichtsurteilen gegen Volksredner und wachsender Verrohung der hiesigen Sitten.20

Once again both sides are accusing each other of the same things and both sides seem to lack objectivity. Johnson explains this idea further in "Berlin, Border of the Divided World":

Up to now, he the traveler was at the mercy of the news service of the country he has just left which not only made one-sided reports, but also blocked news from the other country in order to be able to impose its own unhampere interpretation. Only occasionally and always accidentally have comparisons been possible. The general distrust of newspaper reports, broadcasts, and government sources is purely defensive; its results are vague. The traveler could not always avoid blind acceptance of definitions and judgments of the conditions on the other side of the border, he has brought them along; from the train he already notices the predicted items, misunderstands them at first on the basis of these definitions against which he has been defenseless. He'll have a hard time adjusting his definitions to the respective objects. He'll have a hard time learning the definitions of the foreign country, comparing them to those he brought along, finally arriving at his own definitions on the basis of his personal experiences.21

Johnson speaks here of adjustments that have to be made; a new Weltanschauung must be created by the individual to meet the needs of these new adjustments. It was obvious that Karsch was not able to do this. The gap was too great.

It is perhaps hard to realize how thoroughly the Eastern Zone has influenced its citizens, and how the people who are so treated come to expect it and to thrive, within their limits, under it. (This is not to imply that the West does not do the same thing, but Westerners are hard put to recognize this point in themselves and even more in other nations.) As an example of this and further, of the Unterschied mentioned above, the good citizen is expected to devote himself and

20 Achim, p. 190.

his life, although it may involve hardships, to the Communist cause.

Wir können bei manchen harten Ratschlüssen der Staatsmacht nicht mehr reden über zurückbleibende Familien und übriges Leben in ungeheizten Zimmern, durch die der Wind geht wie brüderlich: wir sollen nicht vergessen dass diese Staatsmacht mit uns den Sozialismus macht, dieser Grundsatz erst schafft unserm Blick die Ordnung in den vielen auch widersprüchlichen Vorfällen des gewöhnlichen Lebens.  

Also the training for and practicing of athletic events must involve a certain "indoctrination": "Natürlich ist Sport nur im Frieden möglich, und wir haben bei uns keine Kapitalisten mehr sitzen, die mit ihrem Geld nicht wissen wohin, dann machen sie Krieg, und dagegen müssen wir uns natürlich verteidigen, natürlich."  

The State has interest in all literature: "Ich spreche mit Ihnen sondern das Interesse des Staates und einer neuen und nützlichen Literatur." 

A certain isolationist pride develops: "Unsere Renemaschinen haben wir in Sachsen gebaut ohne fremde Hilfe!" The question of Ehrung is completely different:

- Wart ihr nun verabredet? fragte sein Biograph.
- Was? sagte Achim.
- Das ihr die Ehrung geschenken habt! ergänzte der andere.
- Die Frage verstehe ich gar nicht! sagte Achim.

None of the Unterschiede above seemed to disturb Karsch at first:

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22 Achim, pp. 231-2.
23 Achim, p. 233.
24 Achim, p. 118.
25 Achim, p. 274.
26 Achim, p. 277.
As in the earlier quotation which mentioned the signs on the shops, Karsch knows the Unterschiede theoretically and is prepared to experience them on this level. But this plateau he never reaches. Instead, the Dinge that he encounters manifest for him the greatest differences. This does not imply that Karsch understood what he was doing when he recorded the differences, but it implies that he was using a technique similar to Mutmaessungen über Jakob. Perhaps Johnson sees here a Western duplicate of himself. Karsch was attracted and driven on to further work and study in these things by an inner urge he did not understand himself. Perhaps it was an intense desire to understand at all means, perhaps it was simply disbelief and incredulity at being incapable of comprehending the distance that separated the East Germans and himself that forced Karsch on.

But the more he attempted to solve the puzzle, the greater became the Entfernung. He soon felt so foreign, so removed, so disgusted with his complete inability to bridge the gap that he strongly desired

27 Achim, p. 100.

28 Achim, p. 102.
to return home where he could accept and understand and be understood:

\[\text{Karsch} \] zog die ersten sechzehn Jahre von Achims Leben in ein Nachgehalt von größerem Erzählstücken hinüber, aber die längeren verdammten Nachmittage entschieden ihn auch zur Rückfahrt mit dem Rest seiner eingetauschten Devisen an die Grenze, wo sein Geld wieder galt und alles ihm half und er sein Vorhaben vergessen wurde. 29

Near the very beginning of the book shortly after his arrival in the East, it is said of Karsch: "Er war sicher dass er nichts verstehen werde mit Vergleichen (du hast mich nach den Unterschieden gefragt): dies war etwas für sich allein und zu erfassen nur von sich aus: er kannte es nicht." 30 and near the end of the book we see that his fears were well grounded, because he and Achim represented two totally conflicting and irreconcilable doctrines:

Ich erklärte mir das so: sagte der angenommen Karsch: Wollte Achim die Mißerfolge der Wirtschaft nicht achten, da es um die Wissenschaft ging und die versprochene Zukunft unter der verschönerten Sonne? Es müssen politische Gründe sein! Also gaben die Sieger dem Sachwalter Staat zu bauen nach den Lehren zweier Soziologen aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert und dem Vorbild der Sowjetunion. Da baute er in ganzen Lande für seinen Verein die Häuser mit Telefonen und stellte sich Soldaten auf die Hüte; gemeinsam schickten sie die Kraft der Geschädigten auf Arbeit, produzierten mit ihnen, verkauften ihnen ärztlichen Abschlag, legten an und zurück für die Rüstung gegen die Armee des westdeutschen Kanzlers und für die Regierung ihrer Regierung, damit es nicht werde wie früher und nie wieder Krieg.

Also was denn! sagte Achim. Und möchte er arglos den Sachwalter regieren, der den Gewinn der Arbeit insgeheim verteile und die Arbeitenden wissen liess für die Lehrgelder seines ungeschickten Vereins? der ihnen vorenthielte was er plante mit ihnen? der sie prügelte in seine Vorschriften anstatt sie zu führen? der sie betrog um Wahlrecht und Mitsprache an der Verwaltung des Staates schlimmer als eine bürgerliche Polizei? der sie setzte für die Verbreitung von Wahrheit, die ihnen nutzen konnte wider ihn? der sie presste in seine Armee und sie festband an die andere Seite

29\text{Achim}, p. 103.

30\text{Achim}, p. 21.
der Sieger? der sie absperrte vom westlichen Deutschland und
die nicht entlassen wollte in die Wiedervereinigung? der ihr
tägliches Leben schändete mit seinen gezinkten Theorien, so
dass die Wirklichkeit so barmherzige Kinder bekam wie schlampige
Produktion, Flüchtlingslager, gehorsame Angst vor dem eigen-
nützigen Verein? der Straffe setzte auf Zweifel an seiner
Urmenschlichkeit, denn er wollte des Irrtums nicht fähig sein? 31

The Entfernung could not be described more succinctly. Here are the
prejudices, the accusations, the misunderstandings, the truisms,
the essentials from both sides. Spoken perhaps from anger they re-
veal the deep and inner feelings that the Umstände have produced and
which guide the actions of the respective people involved. And
herein lies a major key to the work: the way of thought and life in
East Germany is different from the West. It is a different culture
with different values. It is similar to the situation of perplexity
which arises when Western and Eastern religions attempt to communicate
to each other. They find it extremely difficult to comprehend each
other's concepts, relationships, and values. To put it very simply:
"Ich meine doch dabei nicht was Sie meinen: sagte Achim!" 32 And why
did he not mean the same thing? Because "Fremde sprachen über Fremdes
in fremder Sprache." 33

So what does this discussion of Unterschiede have to say for
unity of mind, for an alliance of understanding on a personal or in-
deed even political level?

... kommt einer dahin, begreift nichts, alles in diesem Land
will für sich angesehen werden und zeigt sich nicht im Ver-
gleich, er spricht die Sprache und kann sich nicht verständlich
machen, sie haben da anderes Geld und andere Regierung: damit
soll er sich eines Tages vereinigen: was tut der Besucher?

31 Achim, pp. 286-7.
32 Achim, p. 284.
33 Achim, p. 208.
der fragt, der redet in einem mehr als hier steht. Übrig ist dies, weil er deswegen blieb, und an den offenen Stellen hätte er damals schon begreifen können, was er nicht wahrnahm: dass er die Vereinigung versuchen sollte.34

One can question, one can talk, one can seek unity. But one can never find it. One must return to the system one understands. A very pessimistic, but as Johnson would have us believe, realistic and objective picture.

What Johnson has done in this book is to further develop the theme of *Mutmassungen über Jakob*. Here, however, we see not only Entfremdung in great measure, but also, due to a more mature and more exact presentation, a certain Entfernung between the two German states. In *Mutmassungen über Jakob* we received the hazy, nebulous idea that the two German states were foreign to each other, and that the way of life on one side did not appeal to someone from the other side. In fact, the visit would probably have traumatic effects. (Jakob is run over by the train.) But here, in *Das dritte Buch über Achim* we receive no nebulous alienation, but a distinct and concrete separation of great length, presented in clear and unmistakable detail. We observe that the Western visitor is no better at comprehending strangeness than his Eastern "brother." Karsch can no better describe the East than the speculators could in *Mutmassungen über Jakob*. But here we see the circumstances that caused this Entfernung. The only answer to be given to the question why? is a feeble one: the socialist-communist mode of life under Soviet interpretation, although born in the West, has separated itself from its western manifestation. The two German states have so separated themselves from one another that they are not fit abodes for someone

34 Achim, pp. 119-20.
from the opposite system.

The Grenze, a symbol for different social-political-economic systems, has caused difference in all facets of life:

The two power systems that govern life along the border have changed the behavior of their citizens when they changed their living conditions. Each has taught its members different reactions. Attitudes toward official requirements, relations such as the job contract, a friendship, riding side by side in a train have different interpretations and seem therefore like different behavior. Each has its point of reference. The newcomer arrives equipped with habits and considerations for which he suddenly lacks the reasons that prompted them on the other side. He notices that the people next to him pay no attention to things which frighten him. He watches them have arguments he'd consider either too trifling or too risky in public. Where they let go, he has scruples. Real foreign countries are rarely so foreign... Individual character actually plays a disproportionately smaller part in a person's behavior than the motivations that prompt it. The motivations cannot be compared. The interplay of associations has different implications: the policeman, the advertisement, the brownish dust on the platform are, for instance, a more dangerous combination for the newcomer than for the other passengers. Their motivations are not present.35

"Karsch lernt die Unterschiede... und mit den erlernten Unterschieden vergrössert sich die Entfremdung."36

If Johnson can be said to take any position on either side of the border in this book, it is against Western bigotry. He is tired and weary of the over-simplified West German view—a view too smug and self-sufficient. He is "gegen oberflächliche und klischeehafte Vorstellungen von Leben jenseits der Elbe, gegen die 'handelsüblichen Namen' der Phänomene."37 It could also be said, as Reich-Raniki does, that Johnson is against East German methods of propaganda, that he is "gegen eine Theorie, die das Dasein unentwegt vereinfacht, gegen

36Wiegstein, p. 633.
37Reich-Raniki, p. 241.
Eine Welt, in welcher der Mensch als restlos deutbare, berechenbare und näher stets auswechselbare Größe behandelt wird;[38] but to me this view appears to be too much based on Western prejudices.

What does Johnson, finally, say about hope and efforts for German reunification? (Remember, Johnson is not speaking here as a politician, but as an impartial observer, a recorder, and a man.) If the "two Germanies" are so far apart from each other, if their systems are so different, if every mode of expression from basic language to intellectual endeavors is so permeated by the ideologies of the separate systems, reunification remains impossible. In fact, I believe Johnson would go so far as to say undesirable. Two alien peoples who cannot, nor probably ever will, be able to understand, to communicate with each other, should not be joined. The result would be chaotic and utterly absurd. Efforts to obtain communication with the other side are equally hopeless, for the basic link of communication, language, does not exist. What, then, should be done? Nothing, but let each system go its separate way? Try to change the system, the ideology itself? Johnson does not say. He presents us with the problem, or better the picture... we must be the judge, the impartial observer.

So far, in the two works discussed, Johnson has not taken a position against any particular institution (except ignorance and bigotry). In the next work to be discussed, Zwei Ansichten, we will observe a profound change in this attitude.

[38]Reich-Ranicki, p. 245.
CHAPTER IV

ZWEI ANSICHTEN

"... die Veränderung der Grenze...:
wo Strassen aufgerissen wurden, vermauert,
verdächtet, verstellte, mit Hunden bewacht.
Die Grenze war in die Erde gesenkt."

From the very cover of the book, which presents an optical
illusion that can be viewed in two ways, we know at once that Uwe
Johnson's novel, Zwei Ansichten, provides us with a dual perspective
of an integral whole. We know, too, that we will be presented some-
thing about two different views and we can guess, without even
opening the book, that these two views are of divided Germany.

In this book Johnson's characters have no names, only initials.
Young Mr. B. is a photographer from Schleswig-Holstein who some
months previous had a love-affair with D., a nurse from East Berlin.
One time, when B. is in West Berlin to visit D., his expensive
sportscar is stolen. B. returns home dejected, failing to keep his
appointment with D. He is forced to work in a drugstore to supple-
ment his income to enable him to purchase a new car. Shortly after
his attempted visit the Berlin Wall is built. B. makes many trips
back to Berlin to see D., but because of personal internal conflicts
and political reasons he is unable to do so.

D. on the other hand, does not take B.'s actions too seriously,
for, at least until the Wall is built, she is quite content with
her life in East Berlin. Besides, the reader learns that she too
failed to keep her appointment with B., which was the cause of much of B.'s grief and was the initial impetus for B.'s frequent, erratic, and inconsequential visits to Berlin. D. is rather independent: she rents a private apartment and does not stay in the nurses' quarters; she frequently makes trips to West Berlin, even stopping to purchase medical supplies; she has a boyfriend in the West, etc. After the Wall is constructed, however, her feelings and attitudes change. Through an exchange of letters with B., who, after many trips to West Berlin has taken up temporary residence there to photograph the Wall and the refugees, D. writes that she wishes to leave East Berlin. B. locates an underground refugee smuggling group headquartering at the bar which he frequents for long hours practically every night and arranges for D.'s escape. After a very involved (and thrilling) process D. is finally smuggled safely into the West. B., in his over-anxiety to see her is struck by a truck and is seriously injured while dashing across the street to the building where she is staying. D., "out of duty," visits B. in the hospital the next day but then goes out looking for a new room and a new hospital in the West. Here the story ends.

The book is arranged in classical tradition. It consists of ten chapters five of which are devoted to B., five to D. They are in alternating sequence. Each is a monologue of the thought and action of the character to whom it is devoted. The two main characters never meet in the book, however, until the final chapter in the hospital scene. "Johnson verharrt bei zwei Monologen, die sich manchmal annahern, doch nie treffen, nie einander zuwenden. Er sagt: das ist die Lage, und die Lage hat uns dazu gebracht."¹ This

¹Peter Hörtling, "Der Rückzug auf B. und D." in Der Monat, Oktober, 1965.
is a stylistic representation of divided Germany: two Germans who are foreign to and alienated from each other, two Germans which can never meet. The significance of the one exception in the hospital will be discussed later.

Zwei Ansichten shows a remarkable difference in its readability. Gone are Mutmassungen and unclarity along with the Beschreibung einer Beschreibung. Here is a text that is easy to comprehend and straightforward in its presentation.

In dieser Gedankenerzählung erreicht Johnson eine Genauigkeit und Vorsicht, die beispielsweise in der zeitgenössischen deutschen Prosa. Er schickt nun nicht mehr Mutmassungen gegeneinander, sondern Beschreibung durch ihre Beschreibung, sondern behauptet, wie der alte psychologische Roman, Einsicht in seine Figuren. Das Unsichere wird nicht mehr als unsicher betrachtet, es ist ausgelassen, fällt in Parallelen zwischen sich lassen.

This time Johnson claims, although not to a great degree, to have insight into the thoughts and motivations of his characters. He is more traditional in his insights and more precise in his delineations.

As Günter Blöcker puts it: "Johnson schreibt diesmal Klartext." There are I believe two reasons for this change in style. The first is to make perfectly clear the Entfernung and Empfindung themes of the past two books. If we had doubts before as to themes of the previous books, this doubt is here removed. As will be clear in later quotations in this chapter, the characters are openly alienated and distant from each other. "Tatsächlich geht es in dieser Erzählung um Zeugnis und Gegenzeugnis, um die Konfrontierung und

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Vorschränkung zweier Ansichten vom deutschen Leben."4 These old themes have a new certainty, a new Genauigkeit. "Diesmal jedoch verzichtet der Autor auf schwierige formale Verschlüsselungen, er vertraut auf die unverstellte Wirkung von Bild und Gegenbild."5 "Sie sind Freunde für einander,"6 but in this case we see this Fremdheit in a new light:

Johnsons Sprache aktiviert die Gegenstände und den Leser. Der vielzitierte "Blickfall in die Parataxe" bedeutet nicht, dass hier einer Manier, einem kunstgewerblichen Primitivismus gehuldigt wird, sondern dass der Autor die verfilzte Sprache entknottet, dass er sie, indem er ihre Teile wie Steinchen nebeneinandersetzt, leitfähig macht, sie mit einer neuen Fühligkeit ausstattet, Gedanken und Gefühle ohne Knick bis zum gewünschten Punkt zu führen. Ihr eigentliches Geheimnis aber ist jene winzige Blickwendung, jene Millimeterdrehung, mit der sie Vertrautes in Unvertrautes verwandelt und uns so nötigt, es neu und wie zum erstenmal zu sehen.7

Johnson has not changed or corrupted his style but rather structured his novel to bring the reader swiftly through the maze of divided Germany to a climax of significant import.

The second reason for this change in style, and I believe the most important, for it carries a new and revolutionary aspect of Johnson’s thinking, is a protest against the Grenze, the Grenze in the form of a Mauer. To be sure, the idea of the boundary as separating two different peoples, as found in the previous works discussed, is still there:


4Bloöker.
5Bloöker.
6Bauagart, p. 123.
7Bloöker.
But Johnson will go further. He will, in no certain terms, speak out in protest against an object he believes is having serious effects on the Germans. That object is the Wall. In order to establish this theme of protest it will be necessary to discuss the text in detail.

Both B. and D. were devoted to their separate political systems and had been indoctrinated by them. About B.: "Nach seiner Kenntnis der Zeitungen und nach dem politischen Unterricht in seiner Zeit bei der Bunderwehr hielt er für möglich, dass seine Sendungen der D. eine polizeiliche Überwachung eingetragen hatten glaubte sie in Gefahr." B. had been conditioned by the propaganda he had received from the army and the newspapers, (See Johnson's lengthy description of newspaper indoctrination in the last chapter.) In a state of anxiety B. naturally believed that his attempts to reach D. by phone and by letter would result in a dangerous situation for her. This was not the case. About D.: "Lange Zeit war der Staat für sie eine Einrichtung der Erwachsenen gewesen, der Beamten wie der Lehrer, gegen die sie sich verteidigen musste mit Grüssenwerden, den gewünschten Zeugnissen, der vorgeschriebenen Arbeit." D. felt a need to defend herself against the State but nevertheless considered it to be her teacher under whose influence she grew and developed. She accepted

8Härtling.


10Zwei, p. 46.
naively and on face value the statement and teachings of the state like the small boy in Borchert's *Nächts schlafen die Ratten doch* who believes the words of his former teacher and of the old man.

But what happened to these ideas learned from the states, this feeling of security, when the characters considered the border and the Wall? Since throughout the book D. emerges as the central character and B. disintegrates into indecisiveness and moral degradation "dessen Gedanken so flüchtig sind wie seine Bewegungen," I would like to concentrate more heavily on D. For the remainder of this discussion. D. was slow to react, for it was only after the Wall was built that she felt thus:

*Sie hatte unter diesem Staat gelebt wie in einem eigenen Land, zu Hause, im Vertrauen auf offene Zukunft und das Recht, das andere Land zu wählen. Eingesperrt in dieser, fühlte sie sich hintergangen, getäuscht, belogen; das Gefühl war ähnlich dem über eine Krankung, die man nicht erwidern kann, es drückte auf die Kehle, erschwerte das Atmen kaum merklich, wollte sich ausdrücken.*

This is an extremely crucial quotation. D. had lived a secure life because she felt the future certain, i.e., she felt secure in the fact that she could always choose the "other" Germany if she wished. This does not say that she would want to, but that she "could" if the situation required it. Once the wall was built, however, she suddenly felt choked. She was penned up, surrounded, enclosed, encased. Her will had been taken away from her. She could no longer choose to live in East Berlin.

Such thoughts should not, however, lead the reader astray to thinking that this was always her attitude, for there is no doubt that

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11 Baumgart, p. 123.

12 *Zwei*, p. 47.
that even before the Wall was built, D. felt foreign in the West, and we get an inclination of this feeling from the problem of language which was discussed in the last two chapters:

Den Verhältnissen zuliebe hatte sie aufgegeben, ihre Handlungen aus der eigenen Sprache in die ihres Staates zu übersetzen; sie hatte gelernt, sich für eine andere auszugeben bei Leuten, die der Macht und Gewalt des Staates verwandt waren, bekannt oder ähnlich, kenntlich an Wortschatz, Fragestellung, Abzeichen, Uniform und einem Zusammenhang von Blick und Gehabe, den erst sah, wer dem sich anpasste. Sie lag auf die Frage nach Besuchen in Westberlin, weil sie das Verbot begriff für die, die es verhängten, für sich selbst nicht.¹³

The fact that D. had to translate between East and West Germany gives us an excellent indication of the difference between the two languages, and we must also remember that in translation a great deal of meaning and understanding is usually lost. There is also an indication here of the mask mentioned in the last chapter. For any officiary of the state she disguised herself, she pretended to be another. Lastly, she was stubborn and independent and refused to recognize or obey the laws about visiting West Berlin. This quotation in sum, then, illustrates the continuity of Johnson’s thought from his previous works, but it also provides a clue for a possible enlargement of his views.

But despite this alienation D. considered Berlin to be one city, her city:

Die Städte Berlin waren für sie immer Nachbarschaft gewesen, die Gegend neben, genutztes Eigentum und es war ihr nicht recht gewesen, wenn B. in Westberlin doch immer für sie bezahle mit seinem Geld, als wäre das nicht ihre Stadt, und Ostberlin vermisst, als würde das seine nicht. (Daraus hatte es einen Streit gegeben.)¹⁴

¹³Zwei, p. 39-40.

¹⁴Zwei, p. 40.
Note that Johnson here uses the term "die Stadtte Berlin." This is a certain indication of his recognition of the political reality of two Germanies, symbolized in the analogy of the two Berlins. But D. considered it essential to her well-being to be able to travel there if she pleased, and she became angry at B. for paying with a different type of money (a trivial thing, really) "als wäre das nicht ihre Stadt." It was natural, then, that after the wall was built she would feel locked in and enclosed.

Before the wall was built, many refugees streamed across the border and D. always felt as if she could go with; if she wanted:

Das Schlimmste kommt euch noch. Jetzt täglich über eintausend Leute warfen den ostdeutschen Auswärts weg, in der Woche ein Dorf, im Monat eine kleine Stadt, und aller Angst vor der Freude verengte der D. den Hals, als ginge sie heute schon mit.

But now that the wall had been built something vital and essential had been taken away:

Die Laborassistentin, die unverhofft in der Tür stand, konnte angehört haben was klang wie ein Lob für freiwilliges Hierbleiben, die D. hatte aber nicht die Wahl gehabt, und sie fürchtete zudem den Klatsch unter den Assistentinnen, weil sie den Ton im Labor nicht kannte.

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15 This brings up the problem of refugees in Johnson’s works. They are rarely mentioned, with the exception of this obvious reference. To me, Johnson establishes his theme well, that the two Germanies are alienated and at a distance from one another. But if these people are so foreign to each other, why do so many refugees try to escape? The answer is not simple and Johnson, to my knowledge, gives no solution. But we can speculate, as he is so fond of doing, that these refugees are mainly the older generation who miss and understand the Western system and who take their children with them and perhaps some youthful hotheads who wish to revolt and rebel. After all, Johnson would probably point to the millions of East Germans who remained in their state.

16 Zwe, p. 41.

17 Zwe, p. 52.
Freiwilliges Hierbleiben—here is the key to the work. D. admired the person who had enough courage and common sense to remain in the East, but only if he was given the choice. Take away the choice and staying in the East voluntarily becomes meaningless. Granted, says Johnson, refugees (at least those thoroughly acclimated to the Communist) will probably not live happily in the West—they could not, because of their distance from ideas held in the West, perhaps even become moderately adjusted to the West. But this does not mean, cries out Johnson through the lips of D., that the right of free choice between the systems should be taken away. The right of at least a visit should not be deprived. Indeed, the right of choice should not be deprived. (Note that this is more a protest against the wall itself than against the East German Government, but this latter aspect is also present to a slight degree.)

It is indeed this specific aspect of the changed border that affected D. so deeply. The Grenze was no longer simply a routine crossing point but had been sunk in the earth and was stifling and strangling all life out of the people on both sides of it:

Fasslicher noch als eine Rundfunkstimme aus der Weststadt trug ein Blickwechsel zwischen Türr und Angel der Schwesternzimmer in ihren Bewusstsein die Veränderungen der Grenze nach; wo Strassen aufgerissen wurden, vermauert, verdrahtet, verstellte, mit Hunden bewacht. Die Grenze war in die Erde gesenkt; die Stationen der Untergrundbahnstrecken, die mit der Weststadt Verbindung hatten, wurden verschlossen. Die Stadtbahn wurde nur auf zwei Strängen in den Westen gelassen, diese Bahnstufen waren Ausland für gewöhnliche Leute. Vor den Ries zwischen den Städtchen flatterte ein gefährliches Netz aus Posten, Kontrollstegen, Sperrstunden. Über den Düchern in dick verwinkelten Himmel fielen die westlichen Flugzeuge in ihre Landekurven, stiegen auf in den nördlichen Luftraum nach Westdeutschland; jetzt waren sie unerreicht.18

18 Zwei, p. 58.
A vivid and moving picture that needs no comment. She could no longer see B. although he could come to see her and refused to do so, her youngest brother fled to Munich, her eldest had disappeared, there was not as much medicine available for her hospital, and her friends were being smuggled to the East. It is no wonder, then, that she can stand it no more and that she writes to B. that she is ready to come:

"Ich habe nicht gleich geglaubt was du mir geschrieben hast, nimm mir nicht Übel" las er. "Dann hilf mir rüber, ich will jetzt kommen. Es muss aber was sein wo, nicht geschossen wird. Nimm mir nicht Übel, die Angst" las er.\(^{19}\)

Another result of the "Veränderung der Grenze" is fear. This is an uncertain fear, never clearly defined by Johnson. It is perhaps a fear of uncertainty of the future, a fear of being encaged, a fear of further developments from the East German Government. It is a fear created by change for the worse.

The crux of the problem is of course: Why did D. leave? She realized that she was foreign and separated from the West, that she would find it difficult to adjust, and that her general situation in life would probably not improve:

Manchmal in der Dämmerung, im abnehmenden Licht, das jetzt jeden Tag früher von Haus schatten, Nebelketten verstellte wurde, wäre sie bedenkenlos mitgegangen, hätte eine sie über die Grenze bringen wollen, einfach aus Überdruss, ohne viel Hoffnung, sich zu verbessern.\(^{20}\)

Perhaps as she says, she left out of disgust. Perhaps it was in reaction to her apartment being searched (because she received a letter from her younger brother in Munich) and in turn being forced

\(^{19}\)Zwei, p. 163.

\(^{20}\)Zwei, p. 127.
to move back to the nurses’ quarters which she hated. Or perhaps it was an act of protest, an act that said: "No one can keep me here, no one can keep me from my own city. Berlin is one. I will not remain encircled and entrenched here." Perhaps it was stubbornness and rebellion, like a small child who acts contrary to his parents wishes just to be defiant. But we do know that she was changed and that she had to leave, that she indeed left, and that she stayed in West Berlin.

Perhaps one of the above reasons is the one which influenced Uwe Johnson to come to West Berlin and take up residence there. It was said earlier that he perhaps left because his first novel was denied publication. But maybe he, too, acted in protest, in protest against the right to choose. We will probably never know, but it is interesting conjecture.

B. cannot be neglected in this discussion of the effects the Wall had on the Germans and their subsequent reactions. Even before the Wall was built, B. was naturally distressed at the border itself:

Er fühlte sich selbst gekränkt durch die Einsperrung der D. in ihrem Berlin, er hatte eine private Wut auf die Sperrzonen, Minenfelder, Postenketten, Hindernisgräben, Sichtblende, Stacheldraht, Vermauerung, Schießbefehle und Strafanordnung für den Versuch des Übergangs.21

His anger was private because he found himself in the predicament of modern man, unable to change the system. At first he adopted a rather defensive attitude, an attitude characterized by nonchalance and emptiness as is indicated by the following quotation (note the similar reaction of his fellow citizens):

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21Ziel, pp. 25-6.
Sein Geschwätz über die Mauer, als Weltlügigkeit vorgetragen, trug ihm aber nicht viel Beachtung ein von den Bürgern, die sich nicht schuld glaubten an der Abschliessung eines Staates, den die öffentliche Berichterstattung ihnen ohnehin, als einen nicht belebenswerten, aufgegebenen Ort geschildert hatte.

As time went on and the Wall prevented D. from coming to him, his feelings became more vehement. "Er liess den seine wüsten Verachtungen gegen die Kommunisten ausspucken und verlegte sich auf schwerwiegige Blickwechsel mit der Frau.—Man musste was tun, wenn man bloss was machen konnte!" But he felt so completely hopeless.

Finally, after his patronage at the Berlin bar had become well-established, he became bitter and enraged with almost anyone he came into contact. The Veränderung der Grenze effected him in a deep and mysterious way:

... er fühlte sich benachteiligt, verraten, betrogen von einer unbestimmt en Mehrzahl Leute, die als 'die' oder 'sie' in seinen Gedanken vorkamen, einmal die westdeutschen Politiker, die ihm Hilfe gegen die Einsperrung der D. versprochen hatten, dann wieder die ostdeutschen Politiker, die der D. Arbeitskraft für sich behalten wollte, oft auch die D., die ihm glauben liess, auf der westlichen Seite sei für sie kein Beizstand ausser ihm, die ihn in seiner Verpflichtung im Stich gelassen hatte und nicht durchs Wasser, über die Malle, durch den Draht gekommen war wie mittlerweile Tausende.

B.'s enemies had disintegrated into impersonal images against whom he vented his inward frustrations. He was angry at the West for being slow to act, at the East for locking D. in, and at D. herself for having gotten him in this condition in the first place. Indeed, he was most angry at himself. And this is but one instance in a

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22Zwei, p. 66.
23Zwei, p. 93.
24Zwei, p. 156.
long series of events in which Johnson describes B.'s gradual decay. Whether it is love of D. (one gets the impression it is not) or a
general frustration at his inability to cope with reality that causes
his situation is not important. What is important is that his life
had been changed, and it was changed after the erection of the Wall.

So far, the discussion has taken the general form of Johnson's
presentation, i.e., B. and D. are in separate chapters and do not
meet in the book until the final scene of the hospital visit. The
last pages of the book which lead up to this event are full of sus-
pense and symbolism and I would therefore like to discuss them briefly
here. Before her planned escape, D. mores around for days:

... aber die D. ließ sich nicht mitnehmen nach draussen,
nicht ins Kino und nicht ins Dorfcafé und nicht zum Tanzen,
sie wollte nicht mehr tun als an Kameradschaft üblich, sie
möchte nicht noch einmal sich befreunden mit jemand. Sie ging
kaum je aus dem Kombinat.25

She did not wish to do anything that would bring back fond memories
later. Then she feels cut off from everyone and everything: "Die
Zukunft, die einmal die offene Welt, fremde Länder, die ganze Welt,
auch den jungen Herrn B. enthalten hatte, kam ihr abgeschnitten vor."26

The world, especially the Western world into which she would escape,
loomed foreign in her speculation. She felt like B., hopelessly lost
in the maze of society. Suddenly D. experiences a fear, a terrible
Angst, about the danger of crossing the border, and what is to follow.
She has dreams about such things as water and underground tunnels,
all symbolic of the border and her pending escape. Then, finally,


26 *Zwei*, p. 183.
the climax--she escapes. And on the final pages, as was mentioned previously, we have a last confirmation of Johnson's theme. As B. is lying in his hospital bed recovering from his accident, Johnson says this:

Der Form halber, und weil die Wirtin ihr zugeredet hatte, besuchte sie den jungen Herrn B. im Krankenhaus. Es war ein Kranker wie alle. Es war verboten, ihn zu erregen, und so versprach sie dem Patienten, der so komisch dalag in den Kiss- sen, seinen Heiratsantrag zu überlegen. Sie dachte nicht daran, Berlin aufzugeben. Sie hielt sich nicht lange auf. Sie wollte die weithinige, aus Pavillons zusammengesetzte Anlage des Krankenhauses noch besichtigen, bevor die Besuchszeit abließ, und in der Karteltasche hatte sie die Zeiten des Wochenendes, die so dick sind von Anzeigen, Stellenangeboten und Vermietungen, da wollte sie sich in Zimmer suchen.27

This passage is extremely significant. Note that D. only came to visit B. out of duty and only promised to think about marrying him because she did not wish to upset the patient. She did not, and this is important, cross the border cut of love for B., as he had so vainly and frivolously imagined. Now that she had made her revolt, her anguished outcry, her protest, and had proven her right to a freiwilliges Hierbleiben (in either part of Berlin) that no Verän- derung der Grenze could change, she was satisfied and content. She calmly went to look for a new room and a new hospital in which to work in her city, the one city of Berlin. Conditioned by the Eastern system to put on a mask in the face of political reality, she was changed by the wall into a state of political indifference. She did not worry about her happiness in the West--only about her. Security which rested in a job and a place to stay.

The foregoing discussion of Zwei Ansichten as a novel of protest is aptly characterized and summarized by Krüger:

27 Zwei, pp. 242-3.
Hier ist von der alten Position deskriptiver Neutralität und
ästhetisch-poetischer Unbetroffenheit nur noch eins übrig
geblieben—der Titel. Dieses Buch kommt aus der Tiefe einer
Verwundung, die nicht vorheilt ist, es kommt aus den verletzten
Rechtsbewusstsein eines Bürgers, der die DDR ertragen, erdulden,
nicht antasten wollte, solange sie ihm nicht das Bewusstsein
des Vermauerheitsens vermittelte. "Zwei Ansichten" ist vier Jahre
nach diesem schockierenden Ereignis der deutscher Nachkriegs-
geschichte der zähneknirschende Protest eines tiefverwundeten
Schweigers... Die Zeit der Mutmassungen "auf der Mauer" ist
vorbei... Er schrieb einen politischen Roman, ohne auch nur
den Jargon der Politik zu streifen. Nicht ein einziges Mal
braucht dieser Autor, um die Welt der Eingeschlossenen zu
artikulieren, das allerorts strapazierte Wort der Freiheit.
Sein Pfadfinder ist nicht für den Westen. Es ist gegen die
Mauer.28

This is a novel about a political situation without political
language. Johnson is no politician. He is a humanist concerned
about the interaction of people and the political states in which
they live. He attempted neutrality for two book, but now he must
speak his mind. And he speaks out against the Wall. It is essential
to note, however, that this is an inner protest and not a protest to
action. It is not a protest against the East German Government, who
Johnson would likely see as building the Wall for economic safeguards,
or a cry for rebellion and revolution. It is rather the protest of
the ancient Greek hero entrapped by his fate but who nevertheless
seeks to escape his destiny. It is the protest of a Sisyphus who
will stubbornly keep pushing his rock up the hill along which he can
get nowhere by his actions. It is a protest of conscience and of
soul.

Following this same line of thought, and amplifying somewhat
the above ideas, this book can also be viewed as an accurate portrayal
of the German identity crisis. The cultural heritage of Germany has

28 Horst Krüger, "Das verlese Rechtsbewusstsein" in Die Zeit,
1. 10. 1965, S. 12.
now acquired two views, as the optical illusion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter indicates, (recall also the almost paradoxical term die Stätte Berlin which Johnson employs) and Johnson paints the situation of the two Germanies dialoguing to resolve this crisis. "Ein stummer Dialog wird durch die Mauer geführt." This dialogue is able to take place because Johnson represents his characters as types, as representatives, as typical products of the two German systems. It is no coincidence, I believe, that B. corresponds to the first letter of the Bundesrepublik and that D. corresponds to the first letter of the Deutsche demokratische Republik. "Leise, zwischen den Zeilen, wird gelegentlich darauf gepocht, diese beiden Personen seine typisch, seinen Produkte zweier Gesellschaftsverfassungen."  

Die Krankenschwester D. hingegen stellt jenen dumpfen, getrieben, aber auch zu Bockigkeit neigenden Tochtertyp Potsdamer Kleibürgerstüms dar, aus dem sich in Deutschland offenbar ebenso mühelos das weibliche Personal des BDM wie der FDJ rekrutieren lässt.  

Similarly, B. is a typical product of the Wirtschaftswunder of Germany (which has turned a great many West Germans into blasé materialists, well-satisfied with their economic prosperity). B.'s new Sportwagen was a crutch, a status symbol to B. After it is stolen, he can no longer hold his head high:  

B. ist der halbe Deutsche in buchstümlicher und in übertragener Bedeutung des Wortes. Sein guter Wille ist so wenig zu beweisen wie die Unklarheit seines Denkens und die Unwirklichkeit seiner Entschlüsse. Schuldgefühl treibt ihn nach Berlin, an

29 Blöcker.  
30 Baumgart, p. 123.  
31 Krüger, p. 12.
die Mauer, in D.'s Nähe, aber dort lässt er es bei alkoholdurchfeuchteter Sentimentalität bewenden. Ein junger Mann zwischen Politik und Wohlstandsideologie—die wahre Wirklichkeit ist für ihn, wie für Millionen, am Ende doch der rote Sportwagen. 32

He is unclear about political realities but he acts with good intentions. He finds it difficult to distinguish between the real world and the world of fantasy. Bauangart summarizes these two types very well:

"Festgehalten im Krankenhausdienst, beaufsichtigt von ihrem Staat, dem "wunderlichen Lehrer," materiell wie moralisch eingeengt, macht sie gründlichere Erfahrungen als der mobile Herr B., den Flugmaschinen, Züge, Autos von Holstein nach Hamburg, nach West-Berlin, nach Stuttgart befördern. 33"

Both, then, are products of their separate systems and serve well to represent the two Germanies.

It has been noted several times before that the characters are given no names but instead are titled with abstract initials. This abstraction causes uncertainty and the uncertainty lends itself to the uncertain struggle after the war for German self-identity. "Diese Unsicherheit zwischen zwei Menschen korrespondiert mit der Unsicherheit zwischen zwei politischen Situationen." 34

So here we have B. and D., each representatives of a system. Both are trying to get together, to be united, to be reunited. B. (the Bundesrepublik, now) makes many attempts but fails miserably. His attempts are half-hearted and indecisive. For example, he once goes to East Berlin on an errand of mercy for a young man from his home town who also has a girlfriend in the East. He has a perfectly

32Blöcker.
33Bauangart, p. 129.
34Härtling.
He refuses to see her because of some petty argument he remembered from the past. The excuse is completely trivial. So, too, has West Germany made many weak attempts at reunification and talks about reunification, says Johnson, but she has too failed. Even when chances were good, she did not pursue their opening. D. on the other hand is rather stand-offish, like the East German government, and prefers to live her own life and not be bothered by Western suggestions for action.

E., considered in the light of this dualistic view, might seem to be a little overbearingly stereotyped to fit the East German's model of the West German. As Krüger says:


35Zwehl, p. 71.
36Krüger, p. 12.
But these characteristics are the mode of life in West Germany today as a result of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Johnson is here criticizing the West for its general way of living--a West, by the way, that is always criticizing the East. It is perhaps this way of life, says Johnson, that is preventing any serious progress in reunification efforts.

What if, then, by some miracle, the two Germanies were unified, as D. escaped to the West and was reunited with B.? Well, what happened to B. and D.? First, we know from the last scene in the book that D. did not come to B. out of love or affection. So too, the two Germanies, if they ever were united, will not do so out of concern for each other but, as D. sought release from tension, for personal gain and profit. Secondly, except for a few exchanges of families, both types of Germans will probably live within their own border, still partially foreign to each other and unable, because of years of indoctrination under separate systems, to completely understand their "separated brethren." They will live their own lives in an awareness that a freedom of choice remains to them concerning the part of Germany in which they wish to live. But they will probably never solve their identity crisis. The need will always remain for an author like Johnson to distinguish two views of the concept German. Like Schiller and his work *Über naive und sentimentalische Kunst*, the sensitive thinker of Germany must be sentimental, that is, remote, not taking sides and distinguishing between the real world and the world of perception. He must not be naive and see the German mind and culture as one, but rather (and for a long time to come, regardless of whether reunification is
accomplished) as two sided, as two faced, as dualistic.

In sum, we see in this third major work of Johnson a considerable development in his social-political thought. From a speculative concept of alienation between the two Germanies, to a specific study of an unbridgeable, we finally arrive at Johnson taking a position against a political entity but against an object: die Mauer. We see the conscience of Johnson crying out for free choice as perhaps it did when he, himself, crossed the border illegally. Reunification should not be desired because of differences between the two peoples involved and the identity crisis which it intensifies, but free choice should not be denied to the individual. As he pleaded in his newspaper article, "Boycott der Berliner Stadtbahn," for the reopening of inter-city communication between East and West Berlin, so here he is pleading (although he realizes his plea is probably tragically impossible) for freedom of exchange of all kinds within a city politically divided (die Stadtte Berlin) so that humanly speaking it may become one unit. The same might very well hold true for Germany as a whole.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Entfremdung, Entfernung, and Protest

Uwe Johnson, in the three works discussed in this thesis, has devoted himself to the theme of divided Germany. He presents an objective view of both sides of the question but does not take sides. His works are not political but deal with the circumstances involved in the integration of people and politics. His attitude is not that of a Western reunificationist but of a recorder of and protestor against the basic inhumanities in thought and action on both sides of the German border. His purpose is to give his readers a new awareness, a new attitude, a new outlook on the old and static problem of German unity. To do this, he skillfully blends style and presentation with theme and content and presents his reader with an integrated whole of literary excellence. This thesis has shown, then, how such stylistic elements as description, impersonal removal, and development of clarity have linked hands in Johnson's works with forceful thematic creativity to present a humanistic and reasonable view of the true appearance of the German question. Without getting involved in political details this paper has demonstrated how Johnson, as an impartial observer of political systems, has painted the result when human representatives of one system are involved with human representatives of the other. In short,
this thesis has detailed and analyzed the serious thoughts of a troubled and disturbed young writer.

_Mitmassungen über Jakob_ carries the theme of Entfremdung, i.e., an attitude of alienation and estrangement between the peoples of the two Germanies. Johnson's style is speculative. It is difficult to follow the plot and to determine who is speaking. This is a device necessitated by the impenetrable mask worn by the East Germans to hide their inner feelings and thoughts. It illustrates the changed life of the East German and his consequent estrangement and confusion when visiting the West. It represents the limited views about the East held by West Germans who refuse to recognize the condition of Entfremdung that exists. Enough clear thoughts and perspectives are given, however, and the reader is able to obtain an excellent view of some of the differences between the two Germanies, and what the actual opinions and beliefs of the East Germans are both about their own state and about the people of West Germany. Among other things, the East German cannot understand the Western way of life and does not wish to remain long under its influence. These concrete ideas lead to the statement that Johnson would have sincere doubts about the possibility and feasibility of German reunification which is complicated by Entfremdung. Johnson leaves us in doubt, however, about the situation of divided Germany, and it is not until his next book that we obtain a clear, concrete, forceful, and positive picture of his views.

Added to the Entfremdung of the first work we see in _Das dritte Buch über Achim_ an added impetus to Johnson's germ ideas. In this work we see the German people not only alienated by the
border but also separated from each other by an Entfernung, a distance that is perhaps unmeasurable and untraversable. By removing himself from complete involvement with the characters of the work Johnson describes the inability of comprehension of a West German towards the East German state and people. Here there are no more Mutmassungen but specific ideas and actions. The reader discovers the Unterschiede caused by the Grenze and from them follows the Entfernung between the characters, between the two Germanies, and between the reader (if he is Western) and the East Germans. The obvious result of this distance is, in Johnson's definitive opinion, that German unity is no longer possible or desirable. The two Germanies should be left alone to develop as entities that are separate and distinct from each other. The West German should realize this fact and stop complaining about the enslaving conditions of East Germany and the desire of the people there to be free and democratic, for, because of the problems caused by a "different" German language, the Easteners believe themselves to already possess these attributes.

In the final book discussed, Zwei Ansichten, Johnson abandons somewhat the strictly neutral position he held in the previous two novels discussed. Here Johnson wages a protest against the Wall in Berlin which he sees as an obstacle in the path of free choice of the inhabitants of Berlin to visit or live in whichever part of the city they wish. Berlin has become a symbol for divided Germany as a whole and the theme emerges as the right of the individual to choose in which of the two Germanies he wishes to reside. This is not to be confused with a pleading for reunification, for the person from one side who goes to live in the other will probably still
remain detached and at a distance, as in the two previous novels indicate, but nevertheless the choice should still be preserved. The protest is an inner one, similar to those of the heroes of ancient tragedies. Moreover, Johnson accurately portrays the German self-identity conflict by selecting typical representatives from each system, and he illustrates the consequences when these two identities attempt to merge. Johnson's choosing to live in West Berlin is analogous to this entire situation and we might conjecture that he, too, crossed the Wall out of protest and to resolve his identity crisis. At any rate, we note in this last novel a profound addition to the already impressive collection of Johnson's views and pictures.

The question whether Johnson is primarily interested in politics or people might seem to be a vital issue to be resolved in the context of the thesis, but it cannot be adequately answered because it presupposes a separation that to Johnson cannot exist. People are involved in determining the sway of political affairs but it is the politics which govern the life of the people. The two concepts are so inter-related that to pull them apart would damage and distort the entire scene. In the discussion of the various books in the preceding chapters people were always connected with politics. Johnson rarely discussed the relation of one person to another person on the human level—the political influence and milieu always loom in the background. And the reason for this is clear. The people who were somewhat personally involved with each other and who sought a real relationship were always from separate sides of the border—Jakob and Casine, Karsch and Achim, B. and D.
The relationships between those people on the same side of the border were always uncertain. They were vague in the East because of the mask that the people wore, and they were almost superficial in the West because of the materialism of the Wirtschaftswunder. But regardless of which side we consider, the political background of each character influenced both his behavior with his countryman and with his estranged brother. This is exactly one of the problems that arises from two German states and we arrive at yet another aspect of Johnson's central theme of divided Germany.

The purpose of the thesis has not only been to analyze Johnson's books individually but also to obtain an integrated view of the whole and to demonstrate Johnson's development as a writer. In this regard it has been shown that Johnson begins with a great deal of scruples and with some hesitancy to proclaim his rather inflammatory idea about the dissimilarities between the two Germanies. He chose to use Mutmassungen. After establishing himself as a serious and sensitive writer he became more confident and proclaimed without hesitancy the absurdity of thinking that hopes for reunification exist or that even mutual understanding between the two countries is possible. Finally he gains the courage and the insight to criticize a particular problem of Die deutsche Frage, die Mauer, in the like of the German's search for himself. Unlike the German problem, Johnson has not remained static but has grown in competence and thought. He has become a master of a cool, unemotional, controlled staccato style of the technological age, a style which is clear, sharp, and almost impersonal. He has become a keen observer of the inner and outer actions of his characters. He has struggled in his
private life with two varying governments and from his experiences he has produced three masterpieces. Through these novels he has communicated to Germany and to the entire world a more accurate picture of divided Germany, namely a picture of Entfremdung, Entfernung, and Protest.
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