

DIVIDED WE WRITE: UWE TELLKAMP'S *DER TURM* (2008) AND NORA NADJARIAN'S *LEDRA STREET* (2006)

HOLGER BRIEL

ABSTRACT

The essay analyses two recent texts on division and unification, Uwe Tellkamp's Der Turm (2008) and Nora Nadjarian's Ledra Street (2006) with regard to their poetics of separation. It begins with Der Turm and through a close reading of several text passages demonstrates how its poetics participate in discourses of division and possible unification. It then proceeds to Ledra Street and compares the two texts in respect of their poetics. It becomes clear that although the texts hail from different genres and political systems, they have much in common, in particular their belief in the power of poetry to challenge, if not change, the political status quo. Wherever my writing is divided, I feel cold.

Faize Özdemirciler, *Two people to a coat* (2008)

1

Recurrent divisions and unifications form a large part of human history. Indeed, one might even read all of history as the history of ever-changing constellations of such separations and unions. Such divisions can have very different manifestations; they can be geographical, ethnic, gendered, religious, psychological or linguistic. Almost always, they are the cause for much harm done to humans.

In recent times, one can point to North and South Korea, to the states of Ex-Yugoslavia, to Burundi and Rwanda, to Slovakia and the Czech Republic, to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, to many of the states of the former Soviet empire, to the Near East and to a host of other communities/nation states which have been involved in forced separations. In the following, I will discuss two further geographical areas which have recently been involved in unification and/or continued division and a number of their literary representations. These areas are Germany and Cyprus.

As 2009 commemorates the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and 2010 the 50th anniversary of Cypriot nationhood, this might perhaps be a good time to review how these events have left traces in their cultural manifestations. Just as walls are often used to distinguish between assumed discrete parts, literatures are always markers, of some kind of distinction or other.¹ However they *also* act as doors or gates through the above mentioned walls. Here I am thinking of national literatures, a term which has come under scrutiny. It serves well to remember that for instance German *national literature* is an invention of the early, and *Germanistik*, as a discipline to investigate this alleged phenomenon, of the later 19th century. In order to investigate the place of literature in relation to divisions, in the following I will analyze and compare two texts, Uwe Tellkamp's massive 973-page *Der Turm* (2008) and Nora Nadjarian's collection of short stories, *Ledra Street* (2006)². It might seem difficult to compare two texts of such different genres and lengths, but they do converge in two distinct and meaningful ways: in the existence of poetry within them, and this poetry's connection to the idea of division, of lost identity, of missing halves. As such, they do not just participate in the topos of separation literature, but they actively work towards a *poetics of overcoming separation*. It is these poetics that this article seeks to elucidate.

2

Uwe Tellkamp participates in this history. He has been on the literary radar since 2004 when he won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize with his text *Der Schlaf in den Uhren* which spoke of a tram ride through Dresden. A year later, his *Eisvogel*³ appeared to less positive critiques. In fact, many viewed him as a neoconservative writer, and critics

¹ Cf. Holger Briel, 'The Trouble with Walls. Do they enhance Security?', *International Security Forum*, June 2009, http://inter-security-forum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66:the-trouble-with-walls-do-they-enhance-security&catid=37:general&Itemid=147 (accessed 18 October 2011)

from the left even compared this text to Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*.² Mostly from the right, and leaving leftist politics aside, another criticism at the time was leveled at his opulent, baroque writing style, especially his much featured accumulation of adjectives.³ Tellkamp has no problem with this characterization and happily states in his acceptance speech for the Uwe Johnson Prize that his baroque writing style is a sign of freedom in fast-paced times⁴. This adjectival accrual would reach a new peak in the autumn of 2008 with the publishing of *Der Turm*, a novel of almost 1000 pages, subtitled *Geschichte aus einem versunkenen Land*. It won the 2008 Uwe Johnson prize, the 2008 Deutscher Buchpreis and 2009 Literaturpreis of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. With his publishing date, he managed, but only just, to precede the many texts published for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as could be gleaned from the offers available at the 2009 Leipzig Book Fair.⁵ A second part to the novel is in planning, and as of October 2011, the book is in production for a 2012 made-for-TV motion picture release, directed by Christian Schwochow and starring some of Germany's top star such as Jan Josef Liefers, Claudia Michelsen, Götz Schubert and others and with a budget of 6.7 Million Euro. The *Turm* has been a huge success, inclusive of guided tours à la *Auf den Spuren Uwe Tellkamps* of the Dresden city area of Weisser Hirsch, the model for his Turmviertel. Amongst other local attractions, it created a run on the Feinbäckerei Walther, only thinly veiled in the text. 'It is you, oh you full-blooded Dresden rolls I want to serenade' [Dich, o vollblütige Dresdner Semmel, will ich besingen].⁶

Der Turm describes the lives of a somewhat privileged *Bildungsbürgertum*, the cultured bourgeoisie, living in Dresden during the final years of the GDR. The main protagonists are Christian Hoffmann, at the beginning of the novel a pupil, and later on a soldier in the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA); his father, Richard Hoffmann, a hand surgeon, and Christian's uncle, Meno Rohde, an editor/censor for a publishing house. Christian in particular has much in common with the author. Both were imprisoned for reading forbidden books, both their fathers are doctors, Tellkamp grew up in the Weisser Hirsch and perhaps needless to say, both are book mad. Tellkamp jokingly claimed that the text is 34.57% autobiographical.⁷ The novel has been read as a roman à clef, with Hans Modrow, Manfred von Ardenne, Siegfried Unseld, Stefan Hermlin, Peter Hacks, and Franz Fühmann all lending some characteristics to figures in the text.

Much of it deals with Christian's miserable life in the NVA. It is here, in a lightless dungeon in an army prison, where he has the feeling that he has finally arrived at the center of the GDR:

"He was in the GDR, which had fortified borders and a wall. He was in the National People's Army, which had barracks walls and control posts. He was an inmate of the military prison of Schwedt, and was cowering in the U-boot, behind walls without windows. Now he was fully there, he must have arrived.

[Er war in der DDR, die hatte befestigte Grenzen und eine Mauer. Er war bei der Nationalen Volksarmee, die hatte Kasernenmauern und Kontrolldurchlässe. Er war Insasse der Militärstrafvollzugsanstalt Schwedt und hockte im U-Boot, hinter Mauern ohne Fenster. Jetzt also war er ganz da, er mußte angekommen sein. (T 827)]⁸ "

These military service passages remind one of other recent German texts on the same subject, such as Sven Regener's *Neue Vahr-Süd*, his follow-up to *Herr Lehmann*, and also Sten Nadolny and Jens Sparschuh's *Putz- und Flickstunde*, where the authors compare their surreal experiences in the Bundeswehr and NVA respectively.⁹ But Tellkamp goes further and unflinchingly describes the brutality of this life without much of the humour inherent in the other texts.

The *Turm* has been compared to many grand novels, to Thomas Mann's texts of course (Harald Jähner calls it 'Thomas Mann plus electrification, the *Rheinischer Merkur* a 'Saxon Magic Mountain), but also to books by Heimito von Doderer, Marcel Proust, Alfred Döblin, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, which has its own *Turmgesellschaft*.¹⁰ In reading the novel, Helmut Böttiger feels transported back to the 19th century, at least for the first 200 pages.¹¹ Tellkamp himself states that he loves especially Tolstoy and Uwe Johnson.¹² Tellkamp even claimed that Chekhov appeared to him in a dream and instructed him on how to write the first and last sentence of the book.¹³ He is certainly nothing if not a well-versed salesperson for his own good. And it is utterances such as the above which have not helped much with his critics.

Reminiscences and comparisons are a common thing with such a long and ambitious text. Case in point is Martin Walser's 1957 *Ehen in Philippsburg* [*Marriages in Philippsburg*], the description of a re-emerging West-German bourgeoisie. Its style reverberates with Tellkamps, with both seductively (re)creating certain warmth, a *heimelige*

atmosphere hard to shake off. The reception of Walser's text had been equally ecstatic as Tellkamp's. However, and different from Walser, in *Der Turm* the bourgeoisie is depicted more positively, as a protective buffer against an otherwise all permeating *real existierenden Sozialismus*. And despite their frequent stylistic and topical closeness, a critique of this bourgeoisie is possible for Walser, but not for Tellkamp, a fact for which he has been rightly criticized.¹⁴

Tellkamp masterfully connects various strands of his novel, be it from chapter to chapter or from one trope to another. Thus, a connection is drawn between the novel's title and the turret of the tank Christian has to commandeer. Here the seeming innocence of the inhabitants of the Turmviertel is de-masked as potentially lethal. Just as Christian's tank, a device built to harm others, but to safeguard its inhabitants, kills one of his comrades, the inertia and/or unwillingness of the Turm inhabitants to stand up for their convictions might make them guilty of the deaths of others, for instance at the German – German border.

But it is not the novel as a whole that will be discussed here in detail; others have done this very extensively already. Rather, this paper will examine only a certain linguistic aspect, namely its lyricisms and their relation to the notion of division. Tellkamp stated about his earlier *Der Schlaf in den Uhren* that he always wanted to write poetry, it only came out as prose³ Apart from his novels, he does write poetry, although he has not published much of it. He has been working on an epic poem, entitled *Nautilus*,⁴ which is supposed to be published in three volumes, loosely associated with Homer's voyages transplanted into German history. As everything with Tellkamp, it is a mega-project:

"In his poem 'Nautilus', given wings by delirious visions, Tellkamp sallies forth on an endless journey through the 'sunken cities and the sunken time' of German history. At the center of this project, so far only published in bits and pieces in journals, there is an Argonaut spaceship which steers its passengers clear of the cliffs and eddies of German history. By now, the Nautilus has grown to about 300 pages. The mythical freight on this endless journey are the Kyffhäuser Saga, romantic cornucopia or *Wunderhorn* sounds, and historical Ur-scenes from the time between the Alexander Battle and Stalingrad. In Tellkamp's work the nautical isn't just poetic imagination: it is lived family history, transformed by the author into a mythical world poem. Originally, the Tellkamps hail from Hamburg and were sailors, pilots on the river Elbe, gold prospectors and merchants."⁵

Poetry is also an intrinsic part of *Turm*, in which lyrical passages abound. And while some critics view the whole text merely as 'Essay mit lyrischen und epischen Einsprengseln', an essay with lyrical and epic bits thrown in.⁶ But these parts have a much deeper meaning than that. This is not only manifest in their manifold textual occurrences, but they touch the very structure of the text. *Turm* is a postmodern poetic pastiche, and consists of diary entries, flights of fancy, varying narrative perspectives and poetry. Especially the last part, entitled 'Mahlstrom', maelstrom, attempts to do narrative justice to its title; it is constantly on the verge of losing itself and all its actors in a Pynchonesque free-for-all. It is as if this mirage of the GDR is being wiped off the surface of the earth, is being dissolved, just like Foucault's face of a misunderstood human(ism) is washed off the sand by a chaotic sea in his *Les Mots et les Choses*.

One of Tellkamp's structural poetic techniques lies in the repetition of phrases, taken from music and poetry, such as the oft repeated 'but then all at once, ... the clocks struck.' [aber dann auf einmal... schlugen die Uhren.] (T 973) in the last chapter.⁷ Or the equally paradigmatic *Spieluhr*-song which appears and over again: 'Dresden, in the little museum towns, there lives the sweet illness Yesterday' [Dresden... in den Museumsnestern/ wohnt die süße Krankheit Gestern' (e.g. T 345/6)].

³ Elmar Krekeler, "Die Jungen müssen wieder fighten." Von der Befehlsverweigerung zum Bachmann-Preis: Ein Gespräch mit Uwe Tellkamp', *Die Welt*, 13 August 2004, http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article333832/Die_Jungen_muessen_wieder_fighten.html (accessed 18 October 2011)

⁴ Uwe Tellkamp, *Nautilus*, Excerpts published in: *Lose Blätter*, Heft 27 (2004), 765-69; Heft 34 (2005), 1010-1013 and in Axel Helbig et al. (eds), *Orpheus versammelt die Geister*, Dresden, Literarische Arena 2005, 50-55.

⁵ (<http://www.poetenfest-erlangen.de/archiv/2004/personenseiten/tellkamp.htm>)

⁶ Klaus Fuchs, 'Bücher. Uwe Tellkamp. "Der Turm"', *Perlentaucher*, 28 December 2008. <http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/30147.html> (accessed 18 October 2011)

⁷ Tellkamps belief in the ticking of the clocks as a sign of progress can be understood from the stasis he experienced in the GDR. However, not all belief in progress ushered in by clocks is justified. This is well illustrated by the haunting first sentence of George Orwell's 1984: 'It was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were striking thirteen.'

The novel's rhythm is also a poetic one, it breaks off, speeds up, slows down, is constantly in motion. Technically, this is achieved for one by the accumulation of said adjectives, which slows down the narrative pace. For another, with the sudden change of register in midstream. Case in point is the scene in which Christian's comrade Burre dies in the tank during a military operation, an incredibly fast-paced scene which, however, is constantly broken up by letters Christian had received from his relatives and friends.

This scene requires a renewed look at the *Turm's* reception history. Despite the almost unanimous praise, one of the main criticisms which has already been alluded to and can be found in many of its reviews is that of the overflowing, 'ausufernde' language used. Thus, Sabine Frank speaks of the novel as 'overflowing into the lyrical via its associations' ['assoziativ ins Lyrische ausufernd'].⁸ One wonders what is wrong with that, as if a lyrical tone in itself were something bad. It is not as if Tellkamp did not know what he was doing. In *Turm*, it is method, elevated to the point of stylistic and narrative principle and shapes the whole presentation of the storyline.

In this manner, the novel comments on the place of poetry in society. A glimpse of what Tellkamp is trying to express is evident in *Turm's* chapter 63, entitled 'Kastilia', a title again taken from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and a chapter which approaches the heart of Tellkamp's poetics.

Perhaps following a Platonic notion gained from his *Republic* and applied to the specific situation of the GDR, Tellkamp writes his prose poems and at the same time cautions against poetry. In the chapter's central passage, Christian's uncle Meno, the editor and a big fan of the poet Osip Mandelstam, judges his own work, his publishing house and his country. Already his father had warned him of the country of poems and said:

"Beware of the countries in which poems are highly regarded[...] in this country cruelty and fear rule, there rules the lie. Beware of the country in which poets fill arenas... Beware of the country in which poems are ersatz.)

[Hütet euch vor den Ländern, in denen Gedichte hoch im Kurs stehen... in diesem Land herrschen Grausamkeit und Angst, herrscht die Lüge. Hütet euch vor dem Land, in dem die Dichter Stadien füllen [...] Hütet euch vor dem Land, in dem die Verse Ersatz sind.]⁹ (T 894)"

This seems to suggest the concern that in such poetic countries the actual, real lives of people are not valued and have to queue behind the dreams. Meno reflects on this and then describes his work and that of his colleagues as follows:

"We dipped plumb lines into past voices, plucked meridians and waited for an answer. We gave the people its spiritual bread, we were a window to the world ... The wall wound itself around the scholars' island, this socialist Kastilia, secured threefold: towards its interior, towards its exterior and against laughter; the barbed-wire roses drove up the building, only the birds did not get stuck...

[Wir] tauchten Lote in die vergangenen Stimmen, zupften an Meridianen und warteten auf Antwort. Wir gaben dem Volk das geistige Brot, wir waren ein Fenster zur Welt... Die Mauer schlang sich um die Gelehrteninsel, dies sozialistische Kastilien, dreifach gesichert: nach innen, nach außen und gegen das Lächeln; die Stacheldraht-Rosen trieben am Bau hoch, nur die Vögel bliebe nicht hängen [...]. (T 851¹⁰) "

After this apparent condemnation of poetry, curiously, Meno ends this passage with: 'What was it the great project? The reproduction of reality, in order to form it according to our dreams. '[Was war es, das Große Projekt? Der Nachbau der Wirklichkeit, um sie nach unseren Träumen formen zu können.'](T 854) Again, this is a specific reference to the failed dreams of the GDR. But most would agree that dreams are not a bad thing, dreams give hope and feed poetry; and literature in turn feeds dreams. And Tellkamp participates in this exercise, even if it includes the writing of poetry against (the writing of) poetry, in search for artistic expressions that also benefit people. A further argument in favour of the necessity of poetry is the fact that the lyrical

⁸ Sabine Frank, 'Ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten', *Falter*, 15 October 2008.

<http://www.falter.at/web/shop/detail.php?id=27873&SESSID=d4c9e1e1ccdbe0edbe50c912e1372fa7> (accessed 18 October 2011)

⁹ This becomes evident when he has Christian say about his now dead comrade Burre that 'alle seine Gedichte [ihm] nicht geholfen hatten.' (697)

¹⁰ The last bit is perhaps a reference to Wolfgang Vogel, who had successfully organized the 'sale' of many imprisoned GDR citizens to the other Germany. In the book he is called Sperber, is corrupt, has himself paid with sex and is generally portrayed as an utterly dislikable character. Vogel died in 2008.

passages become fewer and fewer as the novel progresses. It seems that the demise of the system is also related to the demise of the ability or willingness to write poetry.

Despite Tellkamp's overall rejection of the GDR, there are many passages in the text which attempt to portray day-to-day life in the GDR also in a somewhat positive light, passages of home idylls, holidays taken, jobs done well. Even when it comes to ideological matters, Tellkamp is often quite even-handed in his judgement. A long chapter deals with a meeting of the GDR writer's association, in which several members are excommunicated. But some of the older, stricter writers eloquently express their ideas and it seems Tellkamp is not completely against their vision of a humanist socialism. To read his text as a gigantic and nasty diatribe against humanist socialist ideals, as Tilman Krause does in the *Welt* (2008), would imply missing much of the subtlety of the text. Krause writes that Tellkamp has written

"[...] the ultimate novel about the GDR ... from the viewpoint of those who did not doubt for a second that they opposed it. All of this by itself is already a redeeming feat, especially after all the wishy-washy of Christa Wolf, Volker Braun Christoph Hein and all the others. It is so clearly anti-communist, so full of cutting contempt for the proletariat and the petit bourgeoisie [...]"¹¹

Such a reading, apart from being factually wrong and mean-spirited, also means missing out on the reason why much literature is written, as it is mostly an idealist endeavour. Gisela Trahms' interpretation of the text comes much closer to the truth. She states that Tellkamp asks the question, whether the GDR was 'mythentäuglich?', good enough to become mythological, and she implies that the answer is yes.¹² Writing this myth, together with its divisions, requires literature, and it seems, a lyrical, poetic, and not (only) a descriptive kind. Beyond the outright political and baroque, the poetic takes over and makes this the impressive achievement it is. Passages such as the following make clear why:

"The wind died down, freshened up again, lifted up blossom dust and winter ash in fine coattails – undecided like a child playing with sand and being bored. The first raindrops pushed blobs of slate grey into the brightness of the street. By the time Christian walked back to the Thousand-Eye-house, the sky resembled a swimming pool of ink, framed by rowing tree crowns.

[Der Wind legte sich, frischte auf, hob Blütendunst und Winterasche in feinen Schärpen – unschlüssig wie ein Kind, das mit Sand spielt und sich langweilt. Die ersten Regentropfen brachten Kleckse Schiefergrau in die Helligkeit der Straße. Christian ging zum Tausendaugenhaus zurück, als der Himmel einem Schwimmbad aus Tinte glich, eingefaßt von rudernden Baumkronen.] (T 622) "

Besides such longer passages, shorter expressions and phrases underline these interventions further:

„Die Flocken hingen hundertäugig an den Scheiben. (T 148) (The hundred-eyed snowflakes clung to the window panes.)

Die siebente Haut des Herzens, Schwarzkirsch-Augen. (T 170) (The seventh skin of the heart, black cherry eyes.)

Er[...] sah die Elbe wie ein Rückgrat aus Teer unter sich. (T 241) (Below, he saw the river Elbe like a spine of tar.)"

Beyond the bombastic and beyond the overtly political, the text sketches a realist-romantic picture of a time passed, is a *Bildungsroman*, a coming-of-age and ending-an-age story under specific historic conditions, retaining an at times uncritical, yet nevertheless compelling poetic humanism. This literary undertaking is of course not only under way in Germany, but in other divided parts and languages as well, for instance in Cyprus.

3

The island of Cyprus has seen its share of divisions and foreign rule. Today, these divisions manifest themselves mostly as those of religion, nationality and ethnicity. And these problems are far from solved. To compound the problem, just as many unification texts in Germany show, even if some kind of unification is possible, many divisions remain, e.g. psychological ones, a status described in German as the 'Mauer im Kopf', the wall in

¹¹ Tilman Krause, 'Die Kraft zu widerstehen', *Die Welt*, 15 October 2008. http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article2577545/Die-Kraft-zu-widerstehen.html (accessed 18 October 2011)

¹² Gisela Trahms, 'Uwe Tellkamp. Der Turm (Ein Lektürebericht).' 1 December 2008. <http://www.titel-magazin.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=7585&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0> (accessed 18 October 2011)

people's heads. In Cyprus we are dealing with very real existing divisions and although circumstances have eased somewhat since the opening of border crossings after 2000 and the continuation of talks between the north and the south, the main geographical division is continuing and the island remains separated by the Green Line, administered by the UN and in some parts by the British Army, with only a handful border crossings available. Nicosia, Cyprus's capital remains the last divided capital in the world, a Checkpoint Charlie café at the border driving home the point with a specific comparison to the situation in West Berlin from 1961 to 1989. On top of that, Cyprus is also in the thrall of post-colonialism, a situation problematised even further with the continued presence of its erstwhile colonial master at her two largest and sovereign military installations outside of the UK. In the north, there is the presence of ca. 40,000 Turkish troops which are very much a felt presence on a daily basis too.

Just as in Germany, literature is trying to do its part to highlight and perhaps overcome these divisions. Starting with the 'national' poet of Cyprus, Vasilis Michaelidis (1849-1917), whose 1882 poem 'The 9th of July 1821' refers to the killing of the Greek Cypriot elite by their Ottoman rulers, many other poets framed the country's issue in literary terms. Amongst them was Nicos Nicolaidis (1884-1956) who like many of his compatriots lived abroad for a significant number of years, in his case in Cairo. In 1923 he launched the island's first literary journal, *Avge*, and was involved in the Cyprus independence movement. On the Turkish Cypriot side, there is the example of Taner Baybars (b. 1938) as one of the most influential poets, yet he also has been living abroad for many years.¹³

In more recent times, one can point to the poets included in the island's foremost contemporary literary journal, *Cadences*, with Stavros Karayanni as its editor and which features poems and stories from both sides of the Green Line as well as from foreigners living on the island.¹⁴ It is multilingual, with text printed in and only sometimes translated from Greek and Turkish into English, and has given literature and its politics a fresh face. Writers associated with this journal and dealing with the Cyprus problem are, amongst others, Adriana Ierodiakonou, Aydin Mehmet Ali, Faize Özdemirciler, Jenan Selchuk and Lisa Majaj. Amongst them is also the writer who will be discussed below, Nora Nadjarian, who is one of its advisory editors.

Nadjarian, an Armenian-Cypriot, published her *Ledra Street*, a collection of 35 short stories, in 2006. This was her first excursion into prose; all her previous publications had been collections of poems. Just as Uwe Tellkamp wants to write poetry, but comes out with poetic prose, the same might be said for her as well. She stated that she felt only recently that there are certain things which she could only express in prose (Personal conversation with the author, February 2009). Yet, even this prose is heavily poeticised. Her texts about the Cyprus question in particular come clad in lyrical clothes. Her longing for another half is not only a political longing, but it is a general one, at times tinged with erotics, at times with pain. Even here, though, divisions remain and poetry comes to the fore. An example is the story 'The day before yesterday' in the *Ledra Street* collection, where punctuation ceases and a poetic stream-of-consciousness style takes over. It seems that, just as with Tellkamp, at some point in the narration the author becomes unable to control her subjects any longer.

The title story, 'Ledra Street', is emblematic for Nadjarian's undertaking. It speaks of divisions, with such bifurcations informing its structure. An unnamed lyrical I walks down Ledra Street, the central street of Nicosia, cut in half by the Green Line border between the Turkish and the Greek part, and says:

"Today I walked on Ledra Street and counted the steps from where the kafenion stood, all the way to the checkpoint. It was 52 steps. Fifty-two steps to freedom, fifty-two steps to captivity. I can only imagine the other side. My father's shop hidden in a souk. Labyrinths of spices, hands dripping gold, a tree of idleness, Bellapaix, la belle paix. When the hodja's voice clings to the clammy summer evenings, I try to imagine his face and weigh the importance of his syllables. What is he asking God, and how carefully is God listening? (L 10)¹⁵"

Just like the people in the *Turmviertel* can only imagine the other side, so does the protagonist here. The division is literally written into the street and all that remains are memories of another side long vanished. 'When you walk the streets of Nicosia, my father used to say, you walk on the wounds of history.' (L 26).

¹³ For an exhaustive overview of Modern Turkish Cypriot Literature, cf. the 8 volumes published by Mehmet Yaşın, (ed.), *Modern Kibrisli Türk Edebiyatı Dizisi/The Series of Modern Turkish Cypriot Literature, Girne, 2009, vol. 1-8.*

¹⁴ Stavros St Karayannis (ed.), *Cadences*, vol. 4, Fall 2008.

¹⁵ Nora Nadjarian, *Ledra Street*, Nicosia, 2006. Further citations from *Ledra Street* will be in parenthesis in the text, preceded by the letter L.

Another story, 'Guided Tour', is about the impossibility of showing Nicosia to tourists and marks this division even more strongly. One tourist on this guided tour states: 'What a strange thing, what a rare pain to be trapped in your own country.' (L 18) To which the narrator responds: 'History only changes drastically and beautifully from page to page in history books.' (ibid.), implying that living history oftentimes has much less charm than reading about it. A bit further into the story, the prose once again breaks up, with poetry only kept at bay by way of notation on the page:

"At sunset the city is gold. The light is still strong and, for tourists, exotic. The dark outlines of the houses, high-rise buildings, churches, palm trees and mosques, all merge as in a shadow theatre. A stage set under the sun, the city is one. But.

What a strange way to live, says one tourist to the other. Half a city.

The sweetness of the coming evening is heart rending. It pulls at the light, the gold darkens. And in the sky a silence. Half light, half dark.

Half city. (L 19)"

In Nadjarian's story the gold darkens, the same way the ideals upon which the GDR were built also darken for the Turmviertel inhabitants. In his goodbye letter before committing suicide, Professor Müller, Richard Hoffmann's former boss, writes: 'Das ist nicht der Sozialismus, von dem wir träumten.' (T 796) The divisions and hardships much more gladly accepted at an earlier stage of the GDR become ever more depressing, a shadow, and make less and less sense in a system which has begun running on autopilot, becoming independent of its actors.

Divisions do not only show themselves in a geographical manner in Nadjarian's texts. She also includes stories of a different division in her collection, the divisions and difficulties experienced by the large number of foreign workers in Cyprus. One story is entitled 'Papers'. It poetically describes the plight of economic migrants in Cyprus and their attempt to beat bureaucracy with visual poetry: An illegal immigrant stopped by the police says: 'I don't have papers [...] but look at my eyes. All of my history. Look at my eyes.' (L 66). Of course, this does not work in Cyprus, just like it would not have worked in the GDR, nor indeed in most places in this world. Here the power of poetry ends, but it gives a glimpse of the what-could-be. Borders are always semi-permeable, passable only for some: In Cyprus, if you are from the north, but do not have Turkish-Cypriot papers, if you are a settler from Turkey, you are not allowed to cross. In the GDR, only a select few were allowed to pass or leave; others were shot. The erstwhile revolutionary phrase *no paseran* here takes on a very sinister meaning, especially when effected by regimes calling themselves socialist and/or communist.

Another story along the same lines which also connects to the *Turm* is the 'Okay, Daisy, Finish'. It is one of the strongest stories in the collection and once again describes the plight of foreign domestics. A painter paints mostly Russian women with whom he subsequently has affairs. These are overlooked by his wife. But when he enters a painting of their Sri Lankan maid, Daisy, in an exhibition, his wife, believing he had followed his normal pattern of behaviour and had slept with her, explodes into a racist attack, calling Daisy a 'filthy, fucking Sri Lankan' (L 158) and says: '[...] that dirty bitch and her filthy black skin leave tomorrow [...]' (L 159). While the GDR and Cyprus both professed that skin colour was of no import, reality was such that even the mere mention of this difference could bring out the real feelings of the protagonists.¹⁶ After unification, the East German states experienced a tremendous and frightening increase in xenophobic and racist attacks, just like West Germany had done before and had to realize that its 'real existing socialism' had done little in preventing such outbreaks.

Nadjarian rightly believes that archeology as a scientific means to capture the past, is not enough. Even prose texts might fail at that. In order to capture this surplus value of reality, poetry and mythology must be invoked. This is the case in her 'Aphrodite'-story, who according to legend came out of the sea near a Cypriot beach. Nadjarian evokes the soothing, hopefully compelling and also political power of mythology and of the mythic, poetic voice. Aphrodite speaks and describes the pain of the inhabitants of Cyprus and offers solace, a solace encompassing both memory and forgetting. Nadjarian lets her say: 'Let the blue balm soothe you, my friend. It is Mediterranean blue. When you see it, remember and forget. Both. Dig and bury. The love and the pain. Both' (L

¹⁶ The topic of betrayal also plays an important part in *Turm*. In it, Richard Hoffmann has an affair with one of the hospital secretaries, resulting in the birth of a daughter. He apparently also has an affair with his son's girlfriend. The Stasi uses these affairs to blackmail him. As a kind of nemesis, his wife Anne has to sleep with solicitor Sperber in order for him to help her son who is in trouble with the law.

38)¹⁷. In many ways, the spirit of the river Elbe and the city of Dresden (also called *Elbflorenz*) fulfil a similar role for Tellkamp.

Der Turm and *Ledra Street* are thus also city texts. In *Turm*, Dresden is perhaps even more the main character than any of its human protagonists. This is also true of Nicosia for Nadjarian. The city mirrors and creates the lives of its inhabitants, and always referring to an outside, to its own demarcations. Thus, the *Turm* describes a veritable city state, and offers a glimpse at the Hessian *Glasperlenspieler* in their secular monastery. With Nadjarian, we feel this split already in the title, where Ledra Street is the symbol for division. When Nadjarian wrote the story in 2001, the border on Ledra Street had not been opened yet, the city remained permanently cut in half. Tellkamp's *Turmviertel* is cut off from the rest of the city, with bridges and a cable car marking crossings. And in Nadjarian's 'Next Year', we also hear of the city, yet once again tinged with nostalgia for a home by the sea, where Nadjarian grew up:

"But you grew up, shhhhhhhhhh... You grew up, shhhhh. In the big city. And even now, sometimes, in your car the sea seeps in slowly into the silence in your head and the emptiness of your heart shhhhh... Throat perched, thirst in the big city, heat and traffic lights, the sea moves in, first in a trickle, then waves, then currents. The traffic lights turn red and you look at yourself in the mirrors of the tall building distorted like so many years pressed into a can, melted and beaten like metal, like next year, next year, next year which never came. (L 118-9)"

This 'next year', a recurring motif in Nadjarian, separates the *Turm* from her endeavour somewhat. While the actual historic period of the GDR has finished, the Cyprus problem continues. But what has not finished in both instances is the working through of the resulting memories, and how this can be achieved. In the story 'The Cyprus Problem', this continuation of divisions, lies at the heart of the text which once again becomes a poem despite itself. The discourse of two politicians turns into a repetitive and empty mantra of 'there is no solution there is no solution there is no solution' (L 24), just the way many of the GDR and FRG inhabitants felt about the German issue at the time.¹⁸

Tellkamp's warning that poetry isn't everything is probably correct. But without poetry, divisions would not be named as such and continue subconsciously. They require literature, I would argue, they require the poem in an Adornean sense. And thus, Tellkamp writes poetry and, at the same time, poetry against poetry. The situation in the GDR, in divided Germany, was such that more was needed than mere prose. Therefore Tellkamp's last chapters have to become this tour-de-force through styles and viewpoints, with the plot finally dissolving in unison with the GDR.

Both texts also function as *Teilungsromane*, as texts on and of divisions in time and place. One reason why Tellkamp's novel was so successful was his ability to create a certain kind of 'Heimat' for the inhabitants of Dresden, not dissimilar to Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* series written foremost for the Eiffel area of West Germany and by collocation expandable to the rest of the country. Tellkamp explicitly states that for him writing is also an attempt to recoup such 'Heimat'.¹⁹ But in both cases this 'Heimat', this home, has vanished, for better and worse. Both authors display a somewhat sombre mood in their texts. They understand that theirs is a topic which has hurt and killed many people. Thus, humour is not absent, but often muted, in Nadjarian perhaps slightly more so than in Tellkamp.

While *Turm* and also *Ledra Street* are to a certain extent nostalgic books (in *Turm*, for instance, GDR product placements abound), they are much more. It isn't mere nostalgia that is at work here, it is a poetic working

¹⁷ Cf. Costas Hadjigeorgiou, 'Nora Nadjarian. *Ledra Street*', In *Focus. Quarterly Magazine on Literature, Culture and the Arts in Cyprus*, 3, 3&4 (December 2006), 130-135, here

132. Another usage of the Aphrodite theme is evoked by Yiannis Papadakis
Yiannis Papadakis, 'Aphrodite's Delight', *Postcolonial Studies* 9, 3, (2006), 237-250, when he explores the renaming of the sweet generally known as 'Turkish Delight' into 'Aphrodite's delight' in the Greek speaking part of Cyprus.

¹⁸ Another reference to strengthen this argument, if such was needed, can be found in Nadjarian's story 'Three Wishes': 'I wish some poor bugger will one day solve the Cyprus problem.' Said as part of a Three-Wishes game in light conversation, yet also a potent reminder that it nevertheless continues to be on everybody's mind.

¹⁹ Stefan Voit, 'Meine Heimat ist ein Schiff aus Papier', 1 April 2006. <http://www.oberpfalznetz.de/onetz/861721-131,1,0.html> (accessed 18 October 2011)

- Elmar Krekeler, "Die Jungen müssen wieder fighten." Von der Befehlsverweigerung zum Bachmann-Preis: Ein Gespräch mit Uwe Tellkamp', *Die Welt*, 13 August 2004, http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article333832/Die_Jungen_muessen_wieder_fighten.html (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Gisela Trahms, 'Uwe Tellkamp. Der Turm (Ein Lektürebericht).' 1 December 2008. <http://www.titelmagazin.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=7585&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Helmut Böttiger, 'Weißer Hirsch, Schwarzer Schimmel', *Die Zeit*, 22 (September 2008), <http://www.zeit.de/2008/39/L-Tellkamp> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Holger Briel, 'Humor im Angesicht der Absurdität', in: Gerhard Fischer (ed.), *1990-2000. 10 Jahre Gesamtdeutsche Literatur*, Tübingen, Stauffenburg, 2001, 65-89.
- Holger Briel, 'The Trouble with Walls. Do they enhance Security?', *International Security Forum*, June 2009, http://inter-security-forum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66:the-trouble-with-walls-do-they-enhance-security&catid=37:general&Itemid=147 (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Harald Jähner, 'Noch einmal Platz nehmen in der DDR. Uwe Tellkamps Roman 'Der Turm' über die letzten Jahre eines versunkenen Landes', *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 September 2008. <http://www.berlinonline.de/berlinerzeitung/spezial/kritiken/buecher/109996/index.php?ycl=rss> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992. [French original, *L'autre cap*, 1991]
- Julia Encke, 'Neo-kons in der Literatur. Macht euch mal wieder locker, Jungs', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 April 2005 <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/106/406882/text/> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Klaus Fuchs, 'Bücher. Uwe Tellkamp. "Der Turm"', *Perlentaucher*, 28 December 2008. <http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/30147.html> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Mehmet Yaşın, (ed.), *Modern Kibrisli Türk Edebiyatı Dizisi/The Series of Modern Turkish Cypriot Literature, Girne, Freebirds, 2009, vol. 1-8.*
- Michael Braun, 'Sächsischer Zauberberg', *Rheinischer Merkur* (16 October 2008). http://www.merkur.de/2008_42_Saechsischer_Zaub.30715.0.html?&no_cache=1 (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Nora Nadjarian, *Ledra Street*, Nicosia, Armida, 2006. (A German translation of the title story can be found in: Georges Solomontos, (ed.) *Zypern Literarisch. 12 Portraits*, Berlin, Botschaft der Republik Zypern, 2008, 68-69.)
- Sabine Frank, 'Ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten', *Falter*, 15 October 2008. <http://www.falter.at/web/shop/detail.php?id=27873&SESSID=d4c9e1e1ccdbe0edbe50c912e1372fa7> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Stavros St Karayanni, (ed.), *Cadences*, vol. 4, Fall 2008.
- Stefan Voit, 'Meine Heimat ist ein Schiff aus Papier', 1 April 2006. <http://www.oberpfalznetz.de/onetz/861721-131,1,0.html> (accessed 18 October 2011)
- Sten Nadolny, Jens Sparschuh, *Putz- und Flickstunde*, München, Piper, 2009.
- Susanne Beyer, 'O vollblütige Semmel', *Spiegel*, 52, 2008, 143.
- Susanne Beyer, 'Fast vergessenes Glück', *Spiegel*, 11, 2009, 152-154.
- Sven Regener, *Neue Vahr-Süd*, Berlin, Eichborn, 2004.

Tilman Krause, 'Die Kraft zu widerstehen', *Die Welt*, 15 October 2008. http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article2577545/Die-Kraft-zu-widerstehen.html (accessed 18 October 2011)

Udo Knapp, 'Rezension zum Buch "Der Turm"', *Ostseeanzeiger Der Rügauer*, 5 November 2008. <http://www.rueganer-anzeiger.de/archiv/artikel/rezension-zum-buch-der-turm/> (accessed 18 October 2011)

Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Eisvogel*, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 2006.

Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2008.

Uwe Tellkamp, 'Kunst muss zu weit gehen', *Die Welt*, 27 September 2008, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article2499445/Uwe-Tellkamp-Kunst-muss-zu-weit-gehen.html>, (accessed 18 October 2011)

Uwe Tellkamp, *Nautilus*, Excerpts published in: *Lose Blätter*, Heft 27 (2004), 765-69; Heft 34 (2005), 1010-1013 and in Axel Helbig et al. (eds), *Orpheus versammelt die Geister*, Dresden, Literarische Arena 2005, 50-55.

Volker Weidermann, 'Als der Turm noch ein Türmchen war', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 7 June 2009, 28.

Yiannis Papadakis, 'Aphrodite's Delight', *Postcolonial Studies* 9, 3, (2006), 237-250.

¹ Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Eisvogel*, Reinbek, Rowohlt, 2006.

² Claus Christian Mahlzahn, 'Ostliteraten. Republikflucht der Romanciers', *Spiegel Online* 3.2005, referenced at: www.single-generation.de/kohorten/golf/uwe_tellkamp.htm (accessed 18 October 2011)

³ Cf. Volker Weidermann, 'Als der Turm noch ein Türmchen war', in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 7 June 2009, who sees Tellkamp's literary merit reduced to 'lifting pebbles'.

⁴ Uwe Tellkamp, 'Kunst muss zu weit gehen', *Die Welt*, 27 September 2008.

⁵ For recent literature of unification, cf. Susanne Beyer, 'Fast vergessenes Glück', *Spiegel*, 11, 2009, 152-154. Also, the 2011 Frankfurt Book Fair continues to churn out literary history of 'ordinary lives in the German Democratic Republic, such as the much praised *Der Hals der*

Giraffe. Bildungsroman by Judith Schalansky (Berlin : Suhrkamp, 2011) or Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts. Roman einer Familie*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2011). Cf. *Spiegel* 41 (10 October 2011) : 140 – 44.

⁶ Susanne Beyer, 'O vollblütige Semmel', *Spiegel*, 52, 2008, 143. To attest to the authenticity (and attractiveness) of the locale, Suhrkamp has on its promotion page for the *Turm* a video of Tellkamp guiding the viewers through the Weisser Hirsch area of Dresden. (<http://www.suhrkamp.de/turm/>)

⁷ Die Berliner Literaturkritik, 'Deutscher Buchpreis für Uwe Tellkamps DDR-Epos "Der Turm"', 13 October 2008. <http://www.berlinerliteraturkritik.de/detailseite/artikel/deutscher-buchpreis-fuer-uwe-tellkamps-ddr-epos-der-turm.html> (accessed 18 October 2011)

⁸ Uwe Tellkamp, *Der Turm*, Frankfurt, 2008, Further citations from *Turm* will be in parenthesis, in the text, with the page number preceded by the letter T)

⁹ Sten Nadolny, Jens Sparschuh, *Putz- und Flickstunde*, München, 2009; Sven Regener, *Neue Vahr-Süd*, Berlin, 2004.

¹⁰ Harald Jähner, 'Noch einmal Platz nehmen in der DDR. Uwe Tellkamps Roman "Der Turm" über die letzten Jahre eines versunkenen Landes', *Berliner Zeitung*, 23 September 2008. <http://www.berlinonline.de/berlinerzeitung/spezial/kritiken/buecher/109996/index.php?ycl=rss> (accessed 18 October 2011); Michael Braun, 'Sächsischer Zauberberg', *Rheinischer Merkur* (16 October 2008). http://www.merkur.de/2008_42_Saechsischer_Zaub.30715.0.html?&no_cache=1 (accessed 18 October 2011) The first book of the text opens with 'Zitronen', lemons, a clear reference to Mignon's song from Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, 'Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?' (Knowest though where the lemons blossom?), except that the former are electric and used in a country whose inhabitants are unable to get to know the country where the lemons bloom.

¹¹ Helmut Böttiger, 'Weißer Hirsch, Schwarzer Schimmel', *Die Zeit*, 22 (September 2008), <http://www.zeit.de/2008/39/L-Tellkamp> (accessed 18 October 2011)

¹² Uwe Tellkamp, 'Kunst muss zu weit gehen', *Die Welt*, 27 September 2008, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article2499445/Uwe-Tellkamp-Kunst-muss-zu-weit-gehen.html>, (accessed 18 October 2011)

¹³ www.suhrkamp.de/turm (accessed 18 October 2011)

¹⁴ Cf. Julia Encke, 'Neo-kons in der Literatur. Macht euch mal wieder locker, Jungs', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 April 2005 <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/106/406882/text/> (accessed 18 October 2011) Udo Knapp, 'Rezension zum Buch "Der Turm"', *Ostseeanzeiger Der Rügauer*, 5 November 2008. <http://www.rueganer-anzeiger.de/archiv/artikel/rezension-zum-buch-der-turm/> (accessed 18 October 2011)