

REALITY OR ILLUSION?

A Study of The Emancipation of Women in the GDR

as Portrayed in Selected Stories from

Helga Schubert's *Lauter Leben*

by

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Abstract

Helga Schubert is a contemporary German author from the former East Berlin, German Democratic Republic. In the 1970s she was working as a psychologist and began publishing short stories on the side, her work in family therapy providing inspiration for her writing.

Among Helga Schubert's stories are those of women in the GDR. They tell of life in the communist system behind the Berlin Wall, in a society which, despite all the limitations imposed on its people, claimed to have emancipated women well before Western society took serious steps towards this goal.

Government policies were put in place to ensure that women were able to work; however, the intentions of government policies and their actual impact are rarely one and the same. Women were suddenly given a new role, but were unsure where that left their old one in the scheme of things. In a society with no freedom of the press, literature became the medium through which societal problems were aired, albeit cautiously, in the light of censorship. Women writers in the GDR wrote about personal issues and, as with any developing process, limits were always being tested. Whereas Anna Seghers wrote of ideologically-driven female heroines, Christa Wolf was the first to portray, in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969), a more realistic female character, explore her identity and individuality, introduce the possibility of failure and break the tradition of happy endings in GDR literature. Maxie Wander and Sarah Kirsch published protocol literature, documentaries of interviews in which women discuss several aspects of their lives. Kirsch's *Pantherfrau* (1973) focuses mainly on the careers of the women interviewed, whereas Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1977) reveals all aspects of women's lives, often delving into very personal issues such as relationships, sex and identity.

Helga Schubert's *Lauter Leben* (1975) combines reality and fiction, illustrating the everyday lives of different individuals in the GDR. There are stories in this collection about women trying to adapt to the new gender roles imposed upon them, and succeeding to various degrees. Helga Schubert was one of very few women who wrote and practised a profession concurrently. Her work in family therapy gave her special insight into the lives of ordinary women in the GDR. That she herself was a professional woman coping with the "new" role for women in society lends her even more credibility. Schubert's intention to stimulate thought and empower readers to make positive changes in their own lives is prevalent throughout her stories.

Though her characters are fictional, Schubert's portrayal of them is realistic. Through close examination of a selection of her stories, the true state of affairs with respect to the emancipation of women in the GDR emerges. Schubert's irony is an effective tool to depict the gap between illusion and reality in the presentation of the women in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen." Lacking self-confidence, these women are not as independent as they pretend to be. The situation of women is alluded to in other stories analysed in this thesis: Erika, a 53-year-old virgin who undergoes a transformation and subsequently finds a boyfriend; Käthe, a young female doctor whose dedication to her work leads her to neglect herself; Resi, a destitute middle-aged woman who is dependent on those around her for survival; the remarkable young wife of a stonemason who comforts and counsels her husband's bereaved customers; and a lonely elderly man coming to terms with death. True, the emancipation question does not constitute the main focus of these stories; however, Schubert's clever character portrayal provides clues as to the condition of women in the GDR. Women from various walks of life enjoy various degrees of emancipation, disallowing the construction of one generalised picture.

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1. The Emancipation of Women in the German Democratic Republic

“Was vielleicht zu erwähnen ist, ist ein gleichmäßiges Ernstnehmen von Frauen und Männern in der DDR, daß man als Frau für sich selbst, wenn auch auf niedrigem materiellen Niveau, aufkommen konnte - verbunden mit dem Recht zum Schwangerschaftsabbruch und den erleichterten Scheidungen -, brachte eine große innere Sicherheit. Meine Generation konnte immer sagen: Ich lebe nur mit dem, den ich liebe.”

Helga Schubert 1997

i. Helga Schubert¹

Helga Schubert was born on 7 January 1940 in Berlin. After completing her Abitur, she spent one year working on an assembly line. She studied psychology in East Berlin 1958-1963. Schubert then worked as a clinical psychologist/psychotherapist and was a doctoral candidate in psychotherapy 1973-1977 at the Humboldt university in Berlin. As of 1977 she was employed as a speech therapy trainer and counsellor at a marriage and sexual counselling centre until 1987. In 1977 she became a member of the GDR writers' union.

At the age of 20 she began writing poetry and approached the East German publisher Aufbau with a collection in 1970, whereupon they rejected her poetry, but suggested that she try writing short stories instead. With the encouragement of Sarah Kirsch, Schubert submitted a collection of short stories to Aufbau in the early 1970s; as of 1973, her short stories appeared in anthologies, newspapers and magazines. Her first book, *Lauter Leben*, was published exclusively in the GDR in 1975. Further prose publications include *Das verbotene Zimmer* (FRG 1982),

¹I compiled this biographical information from the following sources: *Bibliographische Kalendarblätter der Berliner Stadtbibliothek*, “Fördern und Fordern. Probleme junger Autoren im Gespräch mit jungen Autoren,” Grohnert, Hammerschmidt and Oettel, Leistner, Neumann, Schubert in Hahm and Pröve, Schubert 1985, Schubert 1992, Töpelmann and interviews with Meier, Opelt and Thomalla.

Blickwinkel (GDR 1984), *Anna kann Deutsch* (shortened version of *Lauter Leben* published in the FRG 1985), *Judasfrauen* (GDR and FRG 1990), *Die Andersdenkende* (1994) and *Das gesprungene Herz: Leben im Gegensatz* (1995). Helga Schubert has also written screenplays, plays for the theatre, radio plays and children's books. In 1982, she received a prize at the GDR film festival in Karl-Marx-Stadt for her screenplay for the film "Die Beunruhigung." She was awarded the Heinrich-Greif-Preis in 1983 and the Heinrich-Mann-Preis on 19 June 1986. In 1991, she received an honorary doctorate from Purdue University, Hammond/USA and in 1993 won the Hans-Fallada-Preis. She is married to psychologist, painter and writer Johannes Helm and has one son from a previous marriage.

In a piece entitled "Über mich selbst" in *Anna kann Deutsch*, Schubert confesses: "Über mich selbst schreibe ich, seitdem ich schreibe" (89). She draws on personal experience in her writing and has also gained inspiration from her work as a psychologist. In a published discussion amongst young authors in the GDR in 1976, Schubert explains the relationship between her two careers: "Ich habe mir gesagt, daß das eine das andere befruchtet. Je mehr ich über Psychologie weiß, um so besser kann ich schreiben, um so besser kann ich meine Patientin verstehen" (Fördern und Fordern 38-39). Illuminating the connection between reality and fiction in her work, Schubert describes her writing methodology:

Ich brauche, um eine Geschichte schreiben zu können, zwei Dinge, zunächst eine Idee und dann einen wirklichen Menschen, dessen Leben oder Erfahrung etc. dieser Idee entsprechen. So beginne ich zu schreiben. Aber während der Arbeit entferne ich mich mehr und mehr von dem eigentlichen Gegenstand, den ich mir zunächst immer vorstelle, gehe frei mit seinen Erlebnissen um, beziehe andere ein, denke mir Dinge hinzu. Und so entsteht schließlich eine eigene Geschichte, die mit dem konkreten Menschen, über den ich zu schreiben begann, nur noch wenig zu tun hat. Aber den konkreten Ausgangspunkt brauche ich unbedingt. (*Bibliographische Kalenderblätter* 5)

For this reason, Helga Schubert's characters, though fictional, represent realistic members of the societies in which they are portrayed, and from their stories, one can glean information about the issues, conditions and conflicts which exist or existed in reality.

ii. Introduction

Gleichberechtigung, equality of men and women, was high on the socialist agenda, a cornerstone of communist ideology. If full emancipation of women were to be realised in any society, then the GDR should have been an excellent candidate. The propaganda machine would have one believe that this society was successful in granting women full equality with men, but in fact this was not the case; the contradiction between propaganda and reality is blatant. A survey of literature on the status of women in the GDR published on both sides of the wall quickly confirms this. Contradictions are inherent in the quest for knowledge on the status of women in the GDR and also in Helga Schubert's *Lauter Leben*, whereby through her effective use of irony she explores the situation of women in this society.

Chapter one will outline the supporting political ideology and legislation concerning the emancipation of women in the GDR, providing a description of social measures undertaken in the attempt to achieve this goal. In the second chapter, I will show the trend toward writing about personal issues in the works of women in the GDR, including discussion of several anthologies and selected pieces by Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf, Maxie Wander and Sarah Kirsch. This literature selection evidences conflicts and difficulties women experienced in the GDR. The final

chapter is an examination of a selection of Helga Schubert's stories from *Lauter Leben*, providing interpretation while exploring her portrayal of gender roles and difficulties herewith.²

iii. Statistics and Insight

²Since I will ultimately analyse short stories in this work, some mention should be made of the short story itself, its elusive definition and how the short story lends itself to the purposes of East German writers, considering the conditions under which they worked. Great controversy exists as to how the short story should be defined. Curiously Wolfgang Kayser refuses to classify the short story as a genre, briefly defining it merely as a shorter piece of prose that can be read in one sitting. He considers novellas and fairy tales types of short stories, but contends that the length of the prose itself cannot define it as a genre. (366) In contrast, Manfred Durzak does consider the short story a genre and dedicates some sixty pages in his study, *Die Kunst der Kurzgeschichte*, to the viewpoints of various prominent German writers on this topic.

Clare Hanson and her colleagues address the apparent neglect suffered by the short story genre in literary criticism. As did Durzak's, Hanson's introduction includes summaries of what other writers have said about the short story. Interestingly, she pinpoints this genre as being an advantageous one for women: ". . . I would suggest that the short story has been from its inception a particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression of the ex-centric, alienated vision of women" (3) as well as other marginalized groups in society, such as black and homosexual writers. Mary Eagleton echoes this in her article "Gender and Genre" in the same work: "Many critics of the short story have stressed that it is not the primary literary form of our period, that it holds a marginal and ambiguous position in literary culture, and that it is peopled with characters who are in some way at odds with the dominant culture" (62). Though Hanson cautions against trying to define a single theory for the short story form, she is able to come up with a collective theory encompassing the view of her colleagues, although she admits that this is a generalisation:

It is an assumption shared, then, by the contributors to this volume that the short story is a highly distinctive art form, different in kind, not in degree, from its sister form the novel. The short story is a vehicle for different *kinds* of knowledge, knowledge which may be in some ways at odds with the "story" of dominant culture. The formal properties of the short story - disjunction, inconclusiveness, obliquity - connect with its ideological marginality and with the fact that the form may be used to express something suppressed/repressed in mainstream literature. We might put it one way by saying that the short story gives us the other side of "the official story" or narrative, or we might suggest that the short story suggests that which cannot normally be said. . . .
(6)

If this collective theory is true, then one can see why the short story is the ideal genre for Helga Schubert's purposes. Her stories consist not only of accounts of the personal lives of women, arguably a marginalised group despite the supposed emancipation of women in the GDR, but also include suppressed political views.

Indeed Durzak refers to the unique situation experienced by GDR writers and devotes a chapter to short stories depicting life in the GDR; his analyses serve as a model for my own work on Helga Schubert's short stories. Durzak addresses some of the problems faced by writers in the GDR, describing their situation as a paradox:

...daß sie [schriftstellerische Arbeit] einerseits nicht in jener sozialen Gummizelle allgemeiner Indifferenz operiert wie vielfach in der Bundesrepublik, sondern als wichtig von den bürokratischen Machträgern wahrgenommen wird und daß sie andererseits, gerade weil sie so ernst genommen wird, viel stärker mit gegenläufigen Steuerungsmaßnahmen, von der indirekten Zensur bis zum Veröffentlichungsverbot und Ausschluß der Autoren aus dem Schriftstellerverband, konfrontiert ist (Durzak 1980, 426).

This situation should be considered when analysing any work that was published in the GDR.

In this chapter I shall address the situation of women in the GDR as portrayed by the state's propaganda machine, then briefly explore the ideological foundation supporting the state's policies on gender equality. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into great detail with respect to GDR statistics. For further statistical information, please see Stern and Boeck (1970) and the *Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik* (1975). Contrasting the GDR propaganda written by Katja Stern and Brigitte Boeck is a comprehensive study by Jutta Menschik and Evelyn Leopold, western researchers who present a more sceptical view of the position of women in the GDR. Irene Dölling and Hildegard Maria Nickel, GDR researchers, present critical retrospective, thus more realistic, views on women's issues. First I will provide definitions of the German terms for emancipation and equality, since these terms will appear repeatedly throughout this work and, as a result of their close relationship, are often confused. *Emanzipation* is defined by the *Wörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache* as: "Befreiung aus entwürdigender Abhängigkeit" (1027). The definition of *Gleichberechtigung* is: "entsprechend der Bedeutung von *gleichberechtigt*"; *gleichberechtigt*: "mit gleichen Rechten" (1603). *Gleichberechtigung* was something that the GDR state could legislate into existence, but the extent to which women enjoyed *Emanzipation* in a non-legal sense in that society is harder to determine.

The foundation of socialism is equality among men and women in the context of a classless society. Stern and Boeck report that, thanks to "die Tätigkeit der geeinten Partei der Arbeiterklasse," the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED), the GDR could proudly refer to its accomplishments regarding the status of women as the "*Frauenwunder*" (23). The state was convinced that only through socialism could women become emancipated, echoing the convictions of communist figures Marx, Lenin and Bebel. The *Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für*

Statistik already claimed victory in 1975 (the year in which Helga Schubert's *Lauter Leben* was first published): "Unser sozialistischer Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern betrachtet die Verwirklichung der Gleichberechtigung von Mann und Frau als eine seiner größten Errungenschaften" (6). Though critics maintain that the overwhelming reason for the promotion of women in the GDR workplace was a pressing lack of manpower, the importance of the communist ideology must not be underestimated.

Marx and Engels deride the bourgeois for their treatment of women as property to be exploited (34). In his "Principles of Communism," included in Christopher Phelps' edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, Engels writes about the influence of communist society on the family, claiming that the abolition of private property and communal education of children removes the material dependence of women on their husbands and children on their parents (83). Lenin spoke often about the importance of the emancipation of women to the communist cause. In his speech of 21 February 1920, entitled "To the Working Women," Lenin proclaimed: "The proletariat cannot achieve complete liberty until it has won complete liberty for women" (79). Though Marx, Engels and Lenin included the status of women on their agendas, Moira Donald credits August Bebel with the most comprehensive treatment of the "woman question" from an early Marxist perspective (v-vi). Bebel, a founder of the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*), had this vision of the future woman: "Die Frau der neuen Gesellschaft ist sozial und ökonomisch vollkommen unabhängig, sie ist keinem Schein von Herrschaft und Ausbeutung mehr unterworfen, sie steht dem Manne als Freie, Gleiche gegenüber und ist Herrin ihrer Geschicke" (515). Ironically, the final prophetic words of his famous work, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, categorize women separately from workers: "Dem Sozialismus gehört die Zukunft,

das heisst in erster Linie dem Arbeiter und der Frau" (557). This is an apt indication of what was to emerge in the GDR, for though women did become workers, they also retained their traditional roles.

Article 20 of the constitution of the GDR, established on 6 April 1968, states:

"Mann und Frau sind gleichberechtigt und haben die gleiche Rechtstellung in allen Bereichen des gesellschaftlichen, staatlichen und persönlichen Lebens. Die Förderung der Frau, besonders in der beruflichen Qualifizierung, ist eine gesellschaftliche und staatliche Aufgabe".³ Menschik and Leopold report, however, that women tended to obtain education in traditionally female fields, such as care-giving, clerical work, teaching and textiles (87). These researchers emphasise the importance of career training in the process of emancipation: "Bildung ist die zentrale Voraussetzung für die Verwirklichung von Gleichberechtigung. Erst wenn die Frauen hier in gleichem Maße an Ausbildung partizipieren können, ist die Ausgangsbasis erreicht, sie in qualifizierten Positionen im Erwerbsleben zu finden. Erst von diesem Stadium an kann Arbeit erster Schritt zur Emanzipation sein" (67).

It took some time to bridge the gap, but women would eventually fill at least one half of all study places at universities, colleges and trade schools.⁴ To create a common basis for both boys and girls in the school system, the GDR legislated their obligatory attendance at *allgemeinbildende polytechnische Oberschule* until the tenth grade. Upon completion, as long as they were in line with the political orientation propagated by the state, boys and girls had equal

³Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik. *Die Frau in der DDR: Fakten und Zahlen*. Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1975, 15. Further references to this source will be given in the text with the abbreviation DFDDR. Since this was a government publication, its figures should be treated with caution.

⁴From 1960 to 1974, the percentage of female students attending university or college rose from 27 to 54. (DFDDR 42).

opportunity to attend *Fachschule* or *Hochschule*.⁵ In 1971, in all age categories, the percentage of men who had completed their career training was consistently higher than that of women, but women in the younger age divisions were closing the gap.⁶

Several aids and incentives were put in place to help women attain a higher level of education. Women who were not able to study full-time as a result of their family situation could go to *Frauensonderklassen*, for which employers had to grant them up to twenty paid hours per week leave for study. A woman endeavouring to study full time could receive up to 90% of her previous net income while pursuing an education (Stern and Boeck 65). Special allowances were to be made for any interruptions to study owing to sickness or pregnancy. Statistics show that female students were, however, overrepresented in some fields and underrepresented in others. In 1974, 79.9% of students studying *Leichtindustrie* were women compared to only 31.7% female participation in *Werkzeug- und Verarbeitungsmaschinenbau*. More balanced were the fields of chemical, electronics and glass and ceramics industries, with 50.6%, 46.1% and 56.2% respectively (DFDDR 38).⁷

Companies had to have a *Frauenförderungsplan* to advance women in the workplace. Its objective: “. . . eine planmäßige, mit der gegenwärtigen Entwicklung des Betriebes und seiner Perspektive übereinstimmende Förderung der Frauen und Mädchen zu gewährleisten” (DFDDR 25). It was, however, not necessarily implemented: “Um Frauen auszubilden, benötigt man Geld,

⁵A friend of mine who grew up in the GDR was not allowed to attend medical school because his parents were deemed capitalists by the state. The children of a teacher I worked with in the former East Berlin were also held back because she refused to become a member of the SED.

⁶For example, 77.6% of working men and 34.2% of working women aged 50-59 had had career training; whereas in the 20-29 group, the ratio was 84.1% men : 78.2% women (DFDDR, 34).

⁷Interestingly, women were allowed to choose any career as long as it would not endanger their health (DFDDR 40). This seems a rather sexist position, for the health of women and men should be equally important.

Zeit und Energie, so daß manche Betriebe diese Aufgabe lieber erst einmal auf die lange Bank schieben" (Menschik and Leopold 95). Though the company's women's committee was responsible for overseeing the realisation of the *Frauenförderungsplan*, it was not always successful.⁸ Training should provide women with access to and mobility within the workplace. Stern and Boeck paint a rosy picture for women workers in the GDR, while criticising the Western capitalist treatment of women:

Bei uns ist es undenkbar, daß eine Frau für eine Stellung im Beruf oder im öffentlichen Leben abgelehnt wird, eben weil es sich um eine Frau handelt. Oder daß ihr bestimmte Berufe überhaupt nicht offenstehen, daß sie "kuschen" muß vor den Männern, daß man von ihr wesentlich mehr verlangt als von ihren männlichen Kollegen, wenn sie beruflich bestehen will. (16-17)

Nickel points out, however, that most women were doing the most poorly paid jobs (40).

Though women were entitled to the same pay as men for the same work, for the most part, women and men were not performing the same tasks. Men continued to dominate the better-paid positions.⁹ Dölling elaborates further: "In der Tendenz verrichten Frauen die weniger qualifizierten, entsprechend weniger gut bezahlten Tätigkeiten, sie werden oft auch bei gleicher

⁸Several women's groups and organisations offered support and provided medium for (limited) social change. The *Frauenkommission*, made up of women from all walks of life studied the role of women in society, career and family and with this information acted to advise and support the party in issues of *Gleichberechtigung* and the implementation of resolutions (Stern and Boeck 24). The *Frauenausschüsse* were made up of women voted in from businesses in industry and agriculture and served to help women advance more rapidly within their companies, encourage community involvement and oversee the implementation of company plans concerning women. The chairs of these committees were union leaders in the FDGB (Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) (Stern and Boeck 53). The DFD, Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands, had the following agenda, according to Stern and Boeck: "... die staatsbürgerlichen und beruflichen Bildungs- und Wirkungsmöglichkeiten der Frauen fördern zu helfen, Einfluß auf die humanistische, fortschrittliche Erziehung der Kinder zu nehmen, für gerechte soziale Lebensbedingungen der Frauen einzutreten und mit der fortschrittlichen, demokratischen Frauenbewegung aller Länder zusammenzuarbeiten" (78-9).

⁹Menschik and Leopold explain: "Zwar ist in der DDR die gleiche Entlohnung bei gleicher Arbeit Gesetz, aber die bestehende Berufsstruktur unterläuft zum Teil wieder dieses Prinzip. So werden im allgemeinen die Berufe, in denen Frauen mit qualifizierter Ausbildung arbeiten, schlechter bezahlt, weil die produktiven Bereiche höher entlohnt werden. Gerade hier haben die Frauen die schlechteste Ausbildung" (125).

Qualifikation in weniger gut bezahlten Tätigkeiten eingesetzt” (Alte und neue Dilemmata 127).

Women were also grossly underrepresented in leadership positions.¹⁰ Menschik and Leopold proclaim this to be one of the weakest points in GDR *Gleichberechtigung*, outlining the positives and the negatives: “Zwar sind Frauen 25% der Schuldirektoren, 13% der Bürgermeister, 36% der Rechtsanwälte, 44% der Gewerkschaftsfunktionäre, doch ist in der Industrie nur jede 11. leitende Stelle von einer Frau besetzt. In diesem Wirtschaftsbereich hat jeder 3. Mann mit Hochschulbildung eine leitende Position inne, aber nur jede 17. Frau” (88). To those studying the GDR since its demise, as Dölling suggests, the gap between legislation and life there is becoming increasingly evident:

. . . das formal gleiche Recht auf Arbeit und Bildung, auf gleichen Lohn für gleiche Arbeit stellt sich real als höchst ungleich für Frauen und Männer dar. Frauen sind mehrheitlich weit weniger ökonomisch unabhängig als Männer, was durch die sozialpolitischen Maßnahmen bisher in gewissem Umfang ausgeglichen und auch verdeckt wurde, jetzt, mit beginnendem Sozialabbau aber deutlich zutage tritt. (Alte und neue Dilemmata 128)

With their entry into the workforce, however, the situation for women seemed less like emancipation and more like *Doppelbelastung*. Though, according to Nickel: “Eine Ausbildung, einen Beruf und einen sicheren Arbeitsplatz zu haben gehörte zum Selbstverständnis, zur Identität von DDR-Frauen” (39), a woman’s traditional role within the family also remained intact; however, since women were now able to support themselves, they could leave a relationship or marriage much more easily, contributing to a high divorce rate in the GDR.

¹⁰Christiane Lemke explores this situation at length in her 1981 article, stating in her introduction that the social positions of men and women are still not balanced, despite the measures put in place by the government: “. . . offenbar haben die politischen Maßnahmen aber nicht den gewünschten Erfolg gezeigt” (970). In this piece, she incorporates statistical data which indicate progress had been made between 1974 and 1981; however, women continued to be underrepresented in leadership positions. She cites the double duty women were subject to (work and home) as a major contributor to this disparity and concludes by stating that the social roles of women will only be successfully modified through widespread public debate, not simply by political policy.

Echoing Schubert's words in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, Stern and Boeck profess: "Die Zahl der Ehescheidungen in der DDR läßt sich allerdings zum guten Teil auch aus dem wachsenden Selbstbewußtsein der Frau erklären. Der Anteil der Frauen an den Antragstellern ist nicht zufällig wesentlich höher als in bürgerlichen Ländern, wo der Mann oft von seiner überlegenen ökonomischen Position aus der Klagende ist, der die Ehe löst" (73). Menschik and Leopold confirm this, reporting: "Gegenwärtig [1975] wird jede vierte Ehe (gemessen an den Eheschließungen im selben Jahr) geschieden" (154). They state also that 65% of all divorces are initiated by women (155).

Chris Weedon suggests that this unfortunate statistic is also attributable to the pressure put on people to marry young. The low birth rate in the early years of the GDR prompted the government to introduce incentives and support measures for young families, including priority status for living quarters and interest-free loans, from which ever-increasing sums were forgiven depending on the number of children produced within the first eight years of marriage.¹¹ The government encouraged people to have large families, which would, of course, uphold socialist values. Menschik and Leopold describe the socialist ideal of the family:

Alle Mitglieder der Familie sollen ein selbständiges Leben führen. In der Praxis heißt dies, daß die Erwachsenen einander helfen, ihren beruflichen Weg auszubauen und die Verantwortung für die Kinder, die auch in der DDR primär in der Familie versorgt und erzogen werden, wechselseitig von Eltern und Staat getragen wird. . . . Die Wunschvorstellungen der DDR, die alte Form der Kleinfamilie mit neuen sozialistischen Inhalten zu füllen, hat sich jedoch nicht

¹¹In DFDDR the incentives for starting a family are outlined: "Ein zinsloser staatlicher Kredit in Höhe von 5 000 Mark mit achtjähriger Tilgungsfrist kann für das Einrichten der Wohnung in Anspruch genommen werden. Wird in dieser Zeit das erste Kind geboren, werden 1 000 Mark von diesem Kredit erlassen, bei der Geburt des zweiten Kindes weitere 1 500 Mark und beim dritten Kind die restlichen 2 500 Mark" (70).

konfliktlos durchsetzen lassen. So liegt die DDR in der Zahl ihrer Scheidungen im Weltmaßstab (nach den USA) an der Spitze. (Menschik and Leopold 28-9)¹²

Deep-rooted traditional beliefs surrounding family and gender roles do not change overnight.

Menschik and Leopold point to the inevitable friction created in the transition period from fascism to socialism as a further factor contributing to the high divorce rate in the GDR. Dölling claims that, contrary to the intentions of the SED, the measures put in place for women in the GDR, especially those for mothers, did not free them from their traditional role, but rather cemented them in more firmly (Alte und neue Dilemmata 127). It was the woman who took time off to care for a sick child or newborn. She was the parent granted more flexible working conditions.¹³ The continued observance of the *Haushaltstag*, one paid day per month for married women with children, shows who was deemed responsible for taking care of the household (Menschik and Leopold 114). Weedon points out the woman's continued role as primary caregiver: "In divorce cases custody of the child is almost always awarded to the mother. This is a pointer to deeply held social assumptions about who is best made responsible for childcare" (xvi). Even in the dying days of the GDR, it was evident that division of labour within the family concerning childcare had not changed. In her 1989 article, Ulrike Helwerth points to the continued lack of discussion about and participation of men in raising their children:

¹² The statistics on single mothers and divorce according to Nickel (1990): "30 Prozent aller Neugeborenen in der DDR wurden in den letzten Jahren von alleinstehenden Müttern zur Welt gebracht; 50 000 Ehen wurden pro Jahr geschieden" (39).

¹³ By law, either parent could take time off to be with a sick child, but this usually fell to the woman. A single parent, mother or father was granted special support, as outlined by Menschik and Leopold: "Für alleinstehende Mütter oder Väter wird besondere finanzielle Unterstützung gewährt, wenn ein Kinderkrippenplatz nicht vorhanden ist. Sie bekommen auch 90% ihres Lohns über mehrere Wochen im Jahr, wenn das Kind krank ist und sie deswegen zu Hause bleiben müssen" (114).

Daß von der besseren Vereinbarkeit von Vaterschaft und Beruf bisher keine Rede ist, stimmt viele Frauen sauer. . . .Es kommt bisher kaum vor, daß ein Vater Beruf und Karriere an den Nagel hängt, um Haus und Kind zu versorgen. Und wenn doch einmal ein Mann von seinem Recht Gebrauch machen und das Babyjahr für sich beanspruchen will, stehen ihm häufig Schwierigkeiten mit der Betriebsleitung, aber auch mit seinen KollegInnen ins Haus. (14)

Nickel confirms these statements, providing concrete statistics on the amount of time working women put into the household:

Hausarbeit ist die notwendige Kehrseite von Berufsarbeit, und sie ist noch immer Frauensache. Trotz der fortschreitenden Technisierung der Haushalte und des Ausbaus gesellschaftlicher Dienstleistungen ist der Aufwand für Hausarbeit in den letzten 25 Jahren ziemlich konstant geblieben. . . . Drei Viertel der Haus- und Familienarbeit werden von meist voll berufstätigen, d. h. 40 bis 43¾ Stunden pro Woche außer Haus beschäftigten Müttern erledigt. Frauen sind auch für das in Zeiteinheiten nicht zu messende Familienklima zuständig; sie müssen viele kleine unbezahlte Dienste leisten, wenn der Familienalltag funktionieren soll. . . . Männer sind hingegen die Hauptverdiener und Haupternährer in den Familien. Sie verdienen ca. 25 bis 30 Prozent mehr als Frauen und können sich deshalb nicht leisten, auf Erwerbsarbeit zugunsten von Hausarbeit zu verzichten. (41)

This seems to imply that if wives were earning as much as their husbands, the men could justify spending more time doing housework, since they would not be jeopardising their share of the family's income, i.e., since they would not carry the greater responsibility in providing for the family, they would feel they could direct more of their energy into tasks around the house. Conversely, from a material standpoint, the wife's work would then be as important as the husband's, and she could justify directing less of her energy into household tasks. In order for women and men to achieve true equality, they must share all responsibilities; in other words, men must be responsible for their fair share of housework and raising children. Ulrike Enders states it eloquently: "Reale Gleichberechtigung der Frau kann nicht durch die Orientierung an der gesellschaftlichen Stellung des Mannes, welche die Familie nicht einbezieht, erreicht werden, sondern nur durch eine Gleichverpflichtung von Mann und Frau in allen Lebensbereichen" (36).

It seems, however, that women often willingly sacrifice opportunities for high-powered careers in order to put their energy towards their families; in much of the literature available on the subject, a certain apathy among women regarding their underrepresentation in politics and leadership positions is apparent. Indeed, Helwerth claims that many women sacrifice their careers for the sake of a harmonious marriage: "Denn viele Männer wollen keine Frau, die in der sozialen Hierarchie über ihnen steht, selbst wenn sie mehr Geld nach Hause bringt. Sie fürchten, wie in einer Studie ermittelt wurde, vor allem den Spott ihrer Arbeitskollegen" (14). Menschik and Leopold point out a lack of moral support provided by male partners: "Zu betonen ist noch einmal, daß einer der stärksten Hinderungsgründe gegen die Weiterqualifizierung der Wunsch der Ehemänner ist, die Frauen mögen mehr Zeit für sie haben" (105). Even Stern and Boeck will admit that not all men have embraced the women-friendly policies of the SED and that they need to help out more at home (63-4). Weedon pinpoints the limitations of the purely legal approach to the emancipation of women:

. . . as it is now widely recognized, it is not possible to bring about equality by legal means alone. Long-established attitudes and beliefs about women and men and their appropriate spheres of influence are not changed overnight. Moreover, redefinitions of family life and relations at work require change *on the part of men* as well as women. These changes mean greater responsibility for men in the home as well as a willingness to work under women outside the home. (xiv)

Dölling acknowledges the accomplishments that women made thanks to the policies of the SED; on the other hand, she states: "Andererseits haben diese Veränderungen bisher nicht zur Aufsprengung ihrer ökonomischen, politischen, kulturellen Position als das 'zweite, andere, mindere Geschlecht' ausgereicht" (Entwicklungswidersprüche 30-31). Menschik and Leopold offer an explanation for this status: ". . . die Belastungen der Frauen durch Familienaufgaben

stellt nach offizieller Meinung in der DDR das Haupthindernis dar, das sich ihrer Gleichberechtigung noch entgegenstellt" (141). Nickel sums up the discrepancy between propaganda and reality perfectly:

Propagandistisch ging die Rechnung auf; Gleichberechtigung konnte vollmundig nachgewiesen werden. Die meisten Frauen erfuhren aber tagtäglich die Kluft zwischen Realität und Propaganda. Sie spürten am eigenen Leib und am Zerfall der Familien, wer die Last dieser von oben verordneten, nur formalen Gleichberechtigung zu tragen hatte – die Last einer Gleichberechtigung, die Frauen das Äußerste abforderte, nicht aber gleichermaßen Männer zur Aufgabe traditioneller Privilegien veranlaßte. (41)

It is this *Kluft* that I will examine as it is portrayed in Helga Schubert's first collection of short stories *Lauter Leben*. Dölling includes Schubert in a list of GDR authors who explore the concept of the emancipation of women: "Sind Probleme des Zeitbudgets, der 'Rollenverteilung' im Haushalt und andere seit Jahren soziologisch erfaßt und dokumentiert, ist die Emanzipation der Frau als diffiziles und konfliktreiches Ineinanderwirken von sozialen und psychischen Prozessen bislang vor allem in der Literatur zur Sprache gekommen" (1980, 60). In a society where freedom of the press was non-existent, writers nonetheless provided an arena for thought and discussion of various issues in society, but of course within the boundaries set by the censors. Dölling points out the use of irony in this endeavour: "Ironisch-zugespitzte, ins Extrem getriebene Darstellung von Verhaltensweisen und Situationen . . . sind oft verwendete Mittel, die historische Überholtheit wie praktische Wirksamkeit traditioneller 'Geschlechterrollen' und ihre in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft mögliche Überwindbarkeit bewußt zu machen" (1980, 60). Indeed, in chapter 3 I will show how Helga Schubert uses this device effectively in *Lauter Leben* to portray the extent to which in their daily experience women enjoyed real *Emanzipation* in a state where *Gleichberechtigung* had been created by legislation.

2. A Tradition of Women Writers in the GDR

“Obwohl den Frauen in der DDR mehr Rechte gewährt werden, so besteht doch auch hier das Erbe weiblicher Diskriminierung fort und wird in der neuen Frauenprosa jetzt offen benannt. Die Frauen suchen nach Identität, nach Selbstverwirklichung als Individuum, nach neuen Werten und neuen Lebensformen. Dabei wird deutlich: jede Frau hat ihr eigenes Leben, ihr ganz persönliches Schicksal, ihr Recht auf individuelles Glück.”

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i. Introduction

Over the forty years that the German Democratic Republic existed, a tradition of women writing about women emerged. Early GDR literature had been dominated by male authors, whose female figures were typecast to the ideal that the socialist doctrine projected; however, these characters were a far cry from the real women of the GDR. Only through the appearance of works about women by women could the two-dimensional stereotype of the emancipated East German woman be destroyed. Stories written by women in the early years of the GDR tend to contain mostly political elements as they were meant not only to adhere to but to promote the doctrine of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED).¹⁴ In reference to the era whose impending demise was signalled by the publication of Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in 1969¹⁵, Wolfgang Emmerich summarises:

Der gesellschaftliche Auftrag dominiert die privaten Belange, genauer: gesellschaftlich-politisches Engagement und individuelle Triebwünsche (die als solche nicht direkt artikuliert werden) sind in einem nicht auflösbaren Konflikt aufeinander bezogen. Die Heldinnen, zumeist stark vorbildhaft, heroisch - und

¹⁴Groth and Groth offer a good summary of *kulturpolitische* developments in the GDR as they pertain to literature. See also Emmerich 1996. In his chapter “Der Autor als Erzieher - der Leser als Mündel,” 43-48, he specifically addresses the role of literature as dictated by the state.

¹⁵This book was originally published in 1968, but its production run was halted. It was finally given a full run in 1969. For more information about this controversy, please see Emmerich 1996, 56ff.

dadurch eher entmutigend - beißen sich durch in einer von Männern geprägten Welt und erreichen, wenn alles 'gut' geht, die von diesen besetzten Kommandohöhen. Hingegen wird Selbstverwirklichung im privaten Bereich, vor allem in der Geschlechterbeziehung selten konsequent, "zu Ende" behandelt. Hier besteht nach wie vor eine Tabuzone. (1980, 108)

Writers who conveyed a positive image of the GDR and depicted protagonists upholding the anti-fascist pro-communist stance were demanded by the state. Early women's literature in the GDR was infused with communist ideology; however, a move toward depicting the more personal aspects of women's lives did take place, beginning in the late 1960s. Women authors in the GDR established and maintained a trend of writing about both public and private issues, much as Western feminism promoted the examination of political and personal issues through literature as well as open discussion.

In the GDR one could discuss issues in literature - with limitations - that could not be discussed in the media; thus, as Eva Kaufmann points out, women's literature took on a double role: "Frauenliteratur leistete in doppelter Weise Ersatz, einmal wenn sie Tabus artikulierte, die die gesamte Gesellschaft betrafen, und zum andern, wenn sie die Lage der Frau in Sozialismus kritisch reflektierten. Letzteres verbindet sich in den Texten oft mit ersterem" (110). This does not mean that all taboos could suddenly be expressed with the advent of women's literature; on the contrary, the exposure and exploration of taboos was a gradual process, the boundaries always being tested and, eventually, expanded. In this chapter, these interconnected elements will become apparent as I touch on three anthologies featuring women's literature and discuss examples of work by several female authors in the GDR who, among others, helped to establish

the trend of women writing about the personal lives of women: Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf, Maxie Wander and Sarah Kirsch.¹⁶

Though an early and prominent female writer, Anna Seghers did not spearhead the establishment of this trend. She often wrote about female characters; however, these were of the same type as those portrayed by her male contemporaries, driven almost exclusively by strong communist convictions and usually still shown in the diminutive role of “helper” to the more accomplished and heroic male protagonist. The personal stories of women, “real” women dealing with personal as well as political issues, would only appear in GDR literature beginning with Christa Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in 1969 (Emmerich 1980, 109). Sarah Kirsch and Maxie Wander followed, publishing the GDR’s first “protocol literature,” i.e., transcribed interviews with women, in 1973 and 1977 respectively.¹⁷ These authors and their work provided the backdrop for Helga Schubert’s writing. In Chapter 3, I will demonstrate that Helga Schubert’s work contributes to the trend that these, her role models and peers, had inaugurated.¹⁸

¹⁶It is beyond the scope of this thesis to include all of the prominent female writers who contributed to this trend. My intention is to highlight some of those authors whose work seems to have influenced or complements Helga Schubert’s *Lauter Leben* in exploring the emancipation of women in the GDR. Beth V. Linklater states that the canon of East German writers, for most Western critics, consisted of Kirsch, Wander, Wolf and Morgner (71). Within the context of women’s anthologies, one work of Morgner’s will be considered here; however, since Schubert does not delve into the area of sexuality to any great extent in *Lauter Leben*, I have limited my treatment of Morgner accordingly. It should also be mentioned that Maxie Wander was an Austrian who chose to live in the GDR.

¹⁷Kirsch, Sarah. *Die Pantherfrau: Fünf unfrisierte Erzählungen aus dem Kassetten-Recorder*. 1973. Berlin: Aufbau, 1974; Wander, Maxie. *Guten Morgen, du Schöne: Protokolle nach Tonband*. 1977. München: dtv, 1997. In contrast to the other works examined in this thesis, these two are non-fiction.

¹⁸It is certain that Helga Schubert read the work of and was influenced by Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf. She published a critical article on Anna Seghers, “Scheherezade Radványi” (1980), and wrote a fiftieth birthday tribute to Christa Wolf in *Die Andersdenkende* (1994) so it is obvious that these authors had some influence on her, though given the magnitude of Seghers’ and Wolf’s popularity in the GDR, it would be unthinkable that they would not have. The literary community in the GDR was, relatively speaking, small and the number of publications reflected this, so it is very likely that Helga Schubert would have had access to and have read all of the works I shall discuss in this chapter. Schubert’s connection with Sarah Kirsch will also be discussed briefly at the end of this chapter.

i. Anthologies of Women's Writing

The mere existence of anthologies of stories about women and gender roles in the GDR proves that a tradition around these topics existed. In the afterword to *Im Kreislauf der Windeln* (1982), a selection of short stories by women originally published in other collections between 1971 and 1981, Horst Heidtmann suggests that this literature constitutes a new genre (270). These stories portray the issues with which women deal, the problems they face in daily life, for example: lifestyle changes; independence; relationships; and identity.¹⁹ The thought-provoking volume *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* (1975), edited by Edith Anderson, comprises selected stories written in response to a call for short prose on the subject of gender swapping. According to Emmerich it constitutes: “. . . das erste Buchunternehmen der DDR, das dem Thema Frauenemanzipation bewußt und ausschließlich Raum g[ab]” (1980, 111). The authors' approach to the issue of gender roles and equality is an interesting one. Each character has already experienced life as a member of one sex and suddenly must cope with being of the opposite sex. Authorial intention is that of facilitating a new understanding between the sexes. These stories clearly demonstrate the existing inequality between men and women in the workplace and in society at large. In some cases, the characters do not want to switch back to their original sex.

Considering the same issue, *Geschlechtertausch: Drei Geschichten über die Umwandlung der Verhältnisse* appeared in print in West Germany in 1980. Kirsch's "Blitz aus heiterm Himmel" and Wolf's "Selbstversuch" had already been published in *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*; however, the third, "Gute Botschaft der Valeska in 73 Strophen" by Irmtraud Morgner,

¹⁹Helga Schubert's "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" (1975) and "Mondstein" (1977), appear in this anthology.

had been rejected from this collection. Evidently this story, among others also denied publication, went beyond some of the guidelines set out for *Blitz* (Emmerich 1980, 101). In response, Morgner wrote an entire novel around this story, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura: Roman in dreizehn Büchern und sieben Intermezzos*, which was subsequently published in 1974. Morgner pushed the existing limits in the area of sexual expression in GDR literature.²⁰ Emmerich summarises the function of the character Valeska: “Ihre Lebensgeschichte und ihr Lebenswandel sind Beispiel eines unkonventionellen, rebellischen Umgangs mit den Konventionen, wie man (und Frau) im Sozialismus zu leben und zu lieben habe” (1980, 115). Indeed, in the short story, Valeska starts out with little self-confidence: “Sie [Valeska] hielt sich für eine jederzeit ersetzbare Mitarbeiterin, die jedesmal selbst überrascht war, wenn sie einen Auftrag erfolgreich erledigt hatte” (27-8). She feels inferior to her husband Rudolf professionally, remains unfulfilled sexually and at the same time plays the role of housewife “[d]enn Rudolf war Hausfrauen gewohnt” (30). After her unexpected sex change Valeska flees to Moskow, where she has a sexual encounter with her friend Shenja and is surprised to discover that having male sexual organs does not immediately result in dominant urges, as her experience to this point had led her to believe: “Nachdem beide erfreut waren, fiel Valeska ein, daß die erstmals erprobte Apparatur ohne herrscherliche Gefühle und Unterwerfungsvorstellungen funktioniert hatte” (48). Until Valeska could experience living in a male body, she could not know to what extent Rudolf’s behaviour had been dictated by mere

²⁰Linklater offers a comprehensive study of sexuality in Morgner’s works in her recent publication “*Und immer zügelloser wird die Lust*”: *Constructions of Sexuality in East German Literatures* (1997). Linklater’s approach to Morgner’s work focuses on the sexual “ . . . for amongst ‘official’ GDR writers it is Morgner who most convincingly and consequentially uses the theme of sexuality in her work. Her role in the ‘erotic emancipation’ of GDR literatures has been recognised by many critics” (71).

biology. Morgner also questions the importance of the father figure in a humorous way. When trying to decide how to tell her son about her situation, Valeska comments: “Drei Väter? Ob Kinder einen brauchen, erscheint mir sogar bisweilen zweifelhaft, ob sie eine Mutter brauchen, bezweifeln nicht mal patriarchalische Gesetze, was zum Teufel werd ich Arno sagen?” (48) Even in a patriarchal society, the importance of women as mothers cannot be denied.

If these stories reflect the gender roles that actually existed in society at that time, then clearly the emancipation of women was more a matter of theory than of practice. Though encouraged by the state, women’s emancipation was not necessarily accepted by society as a whole. The following authors and their work mark important milestones in the development of a literature in the GDR which would ultimately depict the real issues with which women were confronted and explore their personal lives to an unprecedented extent in this society.

ii. Anna Seghers

Netty Radványi, alias Anna Seghers, who began publishing stories even before the GDR came into existence, is the first reference point on the developmental path that women writers of the GDR created for themselves over time. Seghers wrote many stories dealing with the two World Wars and the experiences of individuals, both men and women. Her work is very political, promoting the communist ideology. Though there are some personal elements to her stories, in the sense that we learn about personal opinions and feelings of some characters, they are very much driven by her political convictions. Underlying each personal revelation experienced by a character in Anna Seghers’ stories is a political message. In view of the

repetitive nature of Seghers' work, one need only consider one representative story to illustrate this point.

Though Anna Seghers typically features third-person narrators in her stories, she did write a few that have a first-person narrator who claims to have learned the tale from the protagonist. Her usual third-person narration creates a distance which does not allow for exploration of the intimate side of her characters; the reader always feels very much outside the action. Even in first-person narration, Seghers is not able to delve into the personal side of her protagonist to the exclusion of the political message she is trying to convey. Such is the case with "Vierzig Jahre der Margarete Wolf" (1958). The story is told in the past tense by a third-person narrator; however, the protagonist, Margarete, functions as a first-person narrator within the framework of the story. Margarete's story begins in the 1920s when she is working in a chemical plant. Her family is torn: her father and her husband have drastically conflicting political views (Margarete is a politically active communist). When the Nazis come to power, Margarete's brother and best friend are jailed, her husband murdered. Seghers does touch on personal feelings here: "Seit Gustavs [Margarete's husband] Tod war ich kalt geworden. Leben und Sterben war mir eins. Aber jetzt wollte ich wieder stark sein. Ich wollte die Gestapo überstehen, die Luftangriffe, alle Art von Todesgefahr. Ich wollte den Sieg der Roten Armee erleben" (189); however, this expression of feeling is driven by political conviction. In Anna Seghers' texts personal feelings are only expressed in connection with political goals, as a means to an end. They have no significance in their own right. In the texts of Anna Seghers' generation, the inner sphere of the protagonist was only considered to the extent that it could be used to meet party objectives.

Helga Schubert mixes praise with criticism in her article on Anna Seghers.²¹ On one hand, she appears to praise Seghers' work for its ability to whisk her away from reality, but at the same time she criticises this very function. Although her work can serve as an escape for the reader, Anna Seghers' lack of realism is problematic in Helga Schubert's opinion. Though Schubert does not openly criticise Anna Seghers' political views, one gets the feeling that Seghers' uncritical devotion to the communist cause is the very point that Schubert is targeting. Seghers' characters are predictable in that they are either consistently virtuous or become so in the end. This fairytale quality is not present in Helga Schubert's work: harsh reality remains key. Schubert writes of this lack of realism in Anna Seghers' stories:

Es ist dieses Schlafwandlerisch-Sichere, was mich an ihren Arbeiten fasziniert, der herbe Geschmack im Mund, den ich beim Lesen habe. Dann trete ich ein in eine Geborgenheit, die ich sonst nicht kenne, beginne – für die Zeit des Lesens – an das Unzerstörte, Unzerstörbare, Unverletzbar zu glauben, das sie in der Natur, in einem Volk, in einem Menschen beschreibt. (112)

When Helga Schubert writes that she does not know this sense of security otherwise, we can perhaps infer that she does not feel that Seghers is painting a realistic portrait of the GDR.

Helga Schubert is not alone in her ambivalent view of Anna Seghers. In a recent article, Luise Rinser admits that she is somewhat torn in that she admires Anna Seghers as a woman and person, but is critical of Seghers' adherence to the GDR system in her writing: "Wenn man, wie ich es tat, Buch um Buch von Anna Seghers liest - Romane, Novellen, Kurzgeschichten, Aufsätze -, erfährt man Verärgerung und Trauer darüber, daß ein starkes Talent sich so weitgehend von der Partei-Ideologie-Kultur reglementieren ließ" (133). Both in the former East

²¹It should be noted that this article was written for and published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, a monthly periodical on literature criticism in the GDR, very much subject to censorship.

and West this overwhelming ideological aspect of Anna Segher's writing is negatively received and casts a shadow over the aesthetic qualities of her work. Indeed, it is hard not to experience a sense of distaste in reaction to Anna Seghers' work after having read several collections of her short stories. On the one hand, her storytelling ability is impressive; on the other hand, one is simultaneously repelled by the near fanatical quality of the political messages conveyed with no attempt at subtlety. The next author to whom I shall turn my attention has also been accused of promoting party ideology too strongly in her earlier work; however, Christa Wolf does not remain static in her writing: she takes a step beyond the politically-driven work of contemporaries such as Anna Seghers, to explore critically the heretofore forbidden domain of the personal life of a woman.

iv. Christa Wolf

Christiane Zehl Romero examines the connection between Seghers and Wolf in an article exploring the foundations of the tradition of women's writing in the GDR. Not only did Wolf interview Seghers several times, but she also published numerous critical essays on her mentor and colleague. Romero traces timely similarities between Seghers' works and those published shortly thereafter by Wolf. Without implying plagiarism, Romero merely suggests the important influence that the elder had on the younger writer. Together she credits them with the birth of women's writing in the GDR: "Es kann keinen Zweifel geben, daß der Aufschwung und die Entwicklung im Schreiben von Frauen in der DDR Wolf und - vor allem auf der von Wolf entworfenen Linie - auch Seghers viel verdankt" (224). Wolf would go far beyond her mentor,

introducing private issues in women's writing with the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969). Though *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) came out six years earlier and contained some personal elements, it focused primarily on the protagonist's socialist ideals as opposed to her personal inner development.

Nachdenken über Christa T. consists of a series of nearly chronological accounts in which the first person narrator reminisces about her friend, from their first encounter to Christa T.'s death of leukemia. That the main protagonist dies supports Emmerich's claim that *Nachdenken über Christa T.* marked the beginning of the end to the traditional "happy-end" literature of the GDR (1980, 109). Flashbacks lend authenticity to the reminiscence, since they are a part of the process of memory retrieval, illuminating the past in bits and pieces. The story is told in the past tense, switching into present tense when the narrator is undergoing self-reflection and when dialogue or first-hand diary entries are recorded. In the prologue, we learn that Christa T. has died. The narrator tries to explain her²² reasons for writing this work: her friend is fading from memory and thus she experiences a compulsion to create a medium through which the real Christa T. can finally be recognized (posthumously) and remain tangible; however, she explains that it is more for herself than for Christa that she is undertaking this work: "Und bloß nicht vorgeben, wir täten es ihretwegen. Ein für allemal: Sie braucht uns nicht. Halten wir also fest, es ist unseretwegen, denn es scheint, wir brauchen sie" (8). Those who were close to her seem to need her memory, her energy, because she was different. She did not simply conform; she was

²²I assume that the narrator is female simply as a result of the types of experiences and confidences accorded her by Christa T. It seems very unlikely that Christa T. would have informed a male friend of hers, for example, that she had fallen in love with someone other than her husband and was having an affair (151-56).

unique and possessed the inner strength to be so. Indeed, the Stasi literary critic, “Jenny”, who reviewed *Nachdenken über Christa T.* took great exception to Wolf’s protagonist, claiming: “So werden Bürger unseres Landes als Negativ-Kontrast neben die Titel-‘Heldin’ gestellt, die - bei ihrer ständigen Suche nach dem ‘Wirklichen,’ der wirklichen Wahrheit, oder dem wirklich Menschlichen, oder dem ‘Eigentlichen’ des Lebens - mit einem Heiligenschein umgeben wird” (18). Jenny concludes her report with the verdict that: “. . . in unserem Staat ist es [the book] ein Fremdkörper” (22). Christa Wolf did not set out to strengthen her readers’ commitment to the SED with this work; its publication was therefore controversial. The title figure’s first blatant display of individuality in the narrator’s presence causes the latter to begin to accept, and even to like Christa T. Still children, they were in the park together with a group of kids:

So ging sie [Christa T.] vor uns her, stakste, erhobenen Hauptes auf der Rinnsteinkante entlang, hielt sich plötzlich eine zusammgedrehte Zeitung vor den Mund und stieß ihren Ruf aus: Hooohaahooo, so ungefähr. Sie blies ihre Trompete, und die Feldwebel und Unteroffiziere vom Wehrbezirkskommando hatten gerade Pause und sahen sich kopfschüttelnd nach ihr um. Na, die aber auch, hat der Mensch Töne? Da siehst du nun, wie sie sein kann, sagte eine zu mir. (14)

Another example of Christa T.’s individuality is given when, in January 1945, still a child, travelling West, she refuses to stand for the national anthem, though she is surrounded by those who do. For comfort, Christa T. wrote things of a personal nature in a little book, to which the narrator now has access:

Wie bin ich zu bedauern, ich armes, armes Kind, sitz hinter festen Mauern, und draußen geht der Wind. . .

Zehn Jahre alt, ausgeschlossen aus der Gesellschaft der anderen wegen Ungezogenheit, da ist das Büchlein, mit Blümchenseide bezogen. Da ist der Trost entdeckt: in den geschriebenen Zeilen. (24)

Christa T.'s personal diary entry is contained within the writing of a woman narrator and author (Christa Wolf). Indeed, in order to reconstruct Christa T.'s life on paper, the narrator works from both memory and a stack of Christa's papers; however, she recognizes the deceptive nature of memory: "Die [the papers] mich gelehrt haben, daß ich meine Erinnerung an sie, Christa T., vergessen muß. Die Farbe der Erinnerung trägt" (7), an idea which functions as a leitmotiv throughout the novel. The reader is repeatedly reminded to be suspicious of the degree of truth which can be attributed to the narrator's tale. While recounting events, the narrator struggles herself to discover the truth, and, in some cases, to distinguish between what actually happened and how she wished things had happened.²³ At the same time, the narrator is not unaware of the great responsibility which she has taken on and it is with a tinge of dismay, it seems, that she realises the power which she now possesses by having access to Christa T.'s personal writings: "Schlimmer: Ich verfüge über sie [Christa T.]. Ganz leicht kann ich sie herbeizitiere wie kaum einen Lebenden. Sie bewegt sich, wenn ich will" (7). Despite the primary references that she has access to, throughout the book, the narrator comments on how difficult it is to capture the essence of Christa T.: "Denn sie [Christa T.] ist schwer zu fangen. Selbst wenn ich es schaffen könnte, alles getreulich wiederzugeben, was ich von ihr noch weiß oder in Erinnerung gebracht habe, selbst dann wäre denkbar, daß derjenige, dem ich alles erzähle, den ich brauche und jetzt um Beistand angehe, daß er am Ende nichts von ihr wüßte" (115). She struggles with defining her friend's identity in her search for the truth and doubts herself, doubts her ability to do Christa T. justice. The possibility of failure is introduced. Whereas Seghers' female characters are

²³See also pp. 27, 66, 169.

always heroines, Wolf suggests fallibility in her characters. One also cannot help questioning the narrator's motives. Is she writing this work as a tribute to Christa T., as she claims, or is she somehow seeking some personal glory? Is this not her own journey of self-discovery? Indeed, we seem to learn almost as much about the narrator as we do about Christa T. It is as though the narrator is discovering both Christa T. and herself for the first time, in the process delving into private areas of both their lives.

Overall, the scholarship agrees that this novel was a landmark work, signifying a shift towards self-discovery and individualism in GDR literature. Whereas earlier work had focused on the state and promotion of its ideologies, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was centered on the individual, Christa T., and the narrator's self-discovery while undertaking to recount Christa T.'s life. Another important element in this work is recognition and acceptance of failure, for which there had been no room in previous GDR literature (Romero 219). Protagonists had been heroes, championing the socialist cause. In this work, the narrator constantly fights her fear of failure, of being unable to do Christa T. justice. An attempt to discover truth, a tone of genuineness prevails. The narrator does not put on a pretence, but rather admits the shortcomings of her memory and recognizes the power she has over Christa T., now that she is writing her story. By allowing her protagonist and narrator to be more "human," their effect on the reader is more empowering than overpowering, as Emmerich suggests above. Instead of feeling anxious at having to live up to an impossible image²⁴, a reader could recognize the characters as fallible and,

²⁴One of the women interviewed in Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, Karoline, married with five children, felt immense pressure to fulfil the ideal picture of the new woman: "... wenn ich unsere Gegenwartsliteratur las oder Radio hörte, dann dachte ich: Wieso gelingt *mir* das nicht, was diese phantastischen Frauen so spielend bewältigen? Wieso bin ausgerechnet *ich* so ein Versager? Nachher bin ich draufgekommen, daß die Wirklichkeit ganz anders ist, und die positiven Heldinnen sind nur aus Papier" (244-45).

as a result, identify with them more easily. More attainable success inspires readers, whereas the monumental feats supposedly attained by Seghers' heroines, for example, only serve to overwhelm and almost dwarf the reader, who begins to feel that he or she has not achieved anything so worthwhile. In contrast to Seghers' protagonists, Helga Schubert's characters are not faultless. In this way Wolf paves the way for a more realistic character portrayal and the quest for individual identity set against the backdrop of a society in which the individual was deemed less important than the collective good. This constitutes a level of social criticism that raised controversy at the time of the novel's publication. Wolf was a proponent for the utopian vision of socialism, thus, though agreeing with socialism, she did not necessarily condone the practises of the SED.²⁵ *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is a good example of social criticism, as is *Was bleibt*, which on its publication in 1990 sparked a vigorous debate over the role of writers in the GDR and Wolf's supposed involvement with the Stasi.²⁶

²⁵Robert von Hallberg asks Helga Schubert on 18 September 18 1990 about her relationship to Christa Wolf. Schubert maintains that she prefers to keep her distance from other writers (192), but that since she and her husband moved to Neu Meteln with Christa Wolf's help, they had had a connection. When asked about the complicity of GDR authors raised by the *Was bleibt* controversy, Schubert maintains that she never actively supported the state: "I didn't protect the system, but I didn't try to topple it either. . . . I didn't remain silent, but I only voiced my criticism in approved internal groups" (190). She describes Wolf as being much different in this respect, since Wolf was a member of the party and also a candidate for the Central Committee of the SED. Schubert says: "I never regarded her as a dissident but as a significant writer, and it was only when I got close to her that I noticed that she was not writing a basic criticism of the system, and so, as far as I was concerned, she was on the other side. . . .she educated the princes [Honecker and other prominent politicians]." Schubert refers to Wolf's pre-*Wende* ability to use her elevated status to obtain releases for those in political detention and claims that this pragmatism causes Schubert to classify Wolf as a writer, as opposed to an artist: ". . . artists are people who really expose themselves to reality and make their own summaries of it. She [Wolf] is not like that, because she is psychologically so stable that she does not constantly have to reassure herself by looking at reality, but can take other people's thoughts and, in spite of that, is not remote from reality herself. For that reason she is more of an essayist than an artist, and for that reason I found her less interesting when I got to know her" (197).

²⁶*Was bleibt*, the controversial story of a writer under surveillance by the Stasi, was written by Christa Wolf in June and July 1979, then revised in November 1989, but only published after the dissolution of the GDR, in 1990. Its publication sparked a fierce debate as to Christa Wolf's credibility, even as files were dug up linking her to the Stasi herself. The story sheds some light on the conditions that writers experienced when working in the GDR, specifically the surveillance that they were put under when held in suspicion of having subversive motives. Christa

v. Maxie Wander

Wir können uns eigentlich nicht wundern, daß in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft Konflikte ans Licht kommen, die jahrzehntelang im dunkeln schmorten und Menschenleben vergifteten. Konflikte werden uns erst bewußt, wenn wir uns leisten können, sie zu bewältigen. Unsere Lage als Frau sehen wir differenzierter, seitdem wir die Gelegenheit haben, sie zu verändern. . . . Wir suchen nach neuen Lebensweisen, im Privaten und in der Gesellschaft. Nicht gegen die Männer könnten wir uns emanzipieren, sondern nur in der Auseinandersetzung mit ihnen. Geht es uns doch um die Loslösung von den alten Geschlechterrollen, um die menschliche Emanzipation überhaupt. (Wander 1997, 9)

These words constitute the beginning of the *Vorbemerkung* to Maxie Wander's remarkable book *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1977). She captures the essence of the change and conflict that women in the GDR were experiencing, echoing the conclusions drawn in Chapter 1, that women's emancipation can only take place when old gender roles are discarded by both men and women. Christa Wolf wrote the foreword to this book, as Wander hoped she would.²⁷ Though Wander was a contemporary of Schubert's, I am unaware of the existence of any written commentary on Wander or her work by Schubert; however, Wander refers to Schubert in a letter dated 16 August 1977. Wander tells her friend of her newly begun book on men and points out differences in personality between men and women, wishing she could gain the insight of a psychologist to explain them:

Wolf's political commentary on GDR policy, which placed Stasi outside her protagonist's window, is quite explicit. Wolf has been heavily criticised for not publishing this book earlier; however, I do not believe pre-*Wende* publication would have been possible because of strict censorship which suppressed open criticism of the system.
²⁷Wander wrote directly to Schubert on August 28 1977, not long before her death (November 1977), sharing details of her illness (Schubert had also had a bout of cancer) and giving praise for some of the stories she recalled reading in *Lauter Leben*. Wander congratulates Schubert on the afterword to *Lauter Leben* written by Sarah Kirsch and expresses her hope that Christa Wolf or Gerti Tetzner will do the same for her.

Frauen wollen Menschen werden, Männer wollen was erreichen, wollen Erfolg haben oder glauben es wollen zu müssen. Es wäre schön, könnte ich die Spuren in die Kindheit verfolgen, aber da ist ja auch vieles unbewußt und verschüttet. Ein Psychologe könnte das viel besser als ich. Die Helga Schubert müßte so etwas machen. (1997, 261)

Wander does not give herself enough credit here. Though she was not a psychologist, she certainly was able to penetrate to the deep inner workings of the women she spoke with.²⁸

Much secondary literature on women's writing in the GDR refers to *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*.²⁹ Wander documents interviews with nineteen women, in which they share some of their most personal experiences, aspirations, fears, opinions and dreams.³⁰ Covering a range of ages (16-92) and walks of life (from schoolgirl to housewife, lecturer to physicist), she truly captures a cross-section of female experience in the GDR. Rendering the work as authentic as possible, Maxie Wander transcribes these women's stories in a way that is phonetically and grammatically true to their respective dialects. For example, Ute is quite obviously from Berlin: "Und ick, na ja, ick weeiß ooch nicht" (94). Surprising are the number of adulterous affairs, divorces, second marriages and abortions in these accounts; inspiring are the hope and perseverance that many of these women exhibit despite the troubled paths many of them have travelled. Overall, a sense of growing independence is portrayed in these accounts. Women in various stages of emancipation

²⁸In his foreword, Fred Wander praises Maxie for her way of interacting with people (1998, 12). Without this gift, through which she was able to encourage others to speak of themselves, *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* would not have come into being.

²⁹For example, see: Dölling 1980; Emmerich 1996, 290; Enders, 26; Hanke 135; Linklater; Müller-Rückert; Nagelschmidt; Romero 224. (Page numbers are not given if the work is referred to several times throughout the reference).

³⁰In the leadup to her comprehensive work on Morgner and Stötzer-Kachold, Linklater points out the sexuality discussed in *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*: "... Wander's narrators talk about their first sexual experience, about masturbation, about sex education, and about the role of the pill in their lives" (49), pointing out that other critics have attributed this work with breaking sexual taboos. Linklater also discusses the alternative lifestyles that are mentioned in Wander's work (58).

discuss their situations, issues, progress, frustrations and successes with the new world that has opened up for them. Some display open criticism of the equality promoted by the system, believing it to be a farce, like Karoline (quoted above in footnote 12) or Angela: “Das Gerede von Gleichberechtigung ist blödsinnig. Ernsthaft. Ich glaube nicht, daß sich das verwirklichen läßt. Niemals. Da sind uns schon von Natur bestimmte Grenzen gesetzt” (114). Some simply refuse to be emancipated, like Steffi, who indignantly proclaims: “. . . ich bin *keine* emanzipierte Frau! Ich will überhaupt nicht gleichberechtigt sein, ich will meine Vorrechte als Frau auskosten” (181). Others embrace emancipation and blossom in their new-found independence, for example Lena, who says: “Wir Frauen sind keine ewigen Ammen, wir haben ein Recht auf ein Eigenleben” (216).

The impact of these women’s new lifestyles on society is reflected in their relationships. Some of them have partners who have adapted well to the new gender roles, whereas others are still stuck in patriarchal tradition. Although Erika was always independent within society, i.e., she did not conform to fashion, she remained subservient to her husband: “Gegen meinen Mann aber gabs nie eine Kontrastellung. Nachdem wir zusammengefunden hatten, war er absolut Chef im Ring. Ich durfte nirgends mehr hingehen, zu keiner Schulveranstaltung, zu keiner Freundin” (192). The women’s perspectives on politics are also transcribed. Indeed, Berta refers to hearing Rosa Luxemburg speak and how this influenced her: “Die Rosa Luxemburg, die hat sehr auf mich gewirkt. Ich war so viel für mich allein, und keine besseren Leute um mich, da hab ich viel nachgedacht über alles. . . . Ich hab immer gedacht, wenn das eintreffen wird, wissen Se, was die so erzählt, hat sie ganz gute Ideen gehabt, die Rosa” (254). Many of the women outline their

family histories, revealing a wide diversity of backgrounds. Karoline's family moved to Germany from the Ukraine and had lost their papers on the way which became a real problem when, in Hitler's era, it came time to prove that they were indeed of German ancestry. They narrowly escaped the concentration camps as a result of the missing documents.

The issues brought to light in Wander's book, and for that matter, in other East German women's literature, are not necessarily unique to women in the GDR. Much of what is presented here applies just as well to Western women: childhood, adolescence, love, sexual awakening, relationships, child-bearing and raising, death. These stages in life are common to us all, and so we, as readers, can relate to Wander's subjects. This book and Sarah Kirsch's *Die Pantherfrau* were the first of their kind in the GDR and therefore must certainly have had an influence on literature, particularly women's literature, in this society. *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* is a key work contributing to the tradition of women writing about personal issues in the GDR. Kirsch concluded her 1988 afterword to the English translation of *Die Pantherfrau*: "*The Panther Woman*, as I then called the book in a wild mood, counted as the predecessor of many similar products of the country, which over the years appeared in greater numbers, and sassier, because the women who were interviewed had become more self-aware and critical. Among these literary mixed products, the protocols of Maxie Wander were a high point" (109).

vi. Sarah Kirsch

Sarah Kirsch occupies the final place in the series of writers discussed here. Although *Die Pantherfrau* was published four years before Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, I have chosen to discuss Kirsch's work last because of her important role in the publication of Helga

Schubert's *Lauter Leben*, discussion of which follows directly. Not only did Sarah Kirsch help to establish the trend of personal writing in women's literature, of which Helga Schubert would become a part, she is also, at least partially, responsible for Schubert's success. Though recognized chiefly as a poet, Sarah Kirsch has also written short stories and was the first to produce a book of interviews of women in the GDR. Sarah Kirsch's *Die Pantherfrau* was published in 1973, four years before her emigration to West Berlin. Kirsch's intention with this work, as stated in her *Nachbemerkung*, is to chronicle accurately how women in her time lived and felt (133); however, the five diverse interviewees relate little of the personal sphere in their lives, in contrast to those in Wander's work, *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, which focused more on the private lives of the women she interviewed. In her introduction to the English translation of *Die Pantherfrau*, Marion Faber explains: "By deemphasizing the more traditional 'women's topics' of love and family, the book offers a vision of women *apart from their association with men* as fully enfranchised, productive individuals whose lives are intrinsically interesting in and of themselves" (x). Kirsch's narrators talk mostly about the career paths they have chosen, the various jobs they have done to get to where they are. All of these women are emancipated to the extent that they have jobs and are not financially dependent on men. Kirsch conducted these interviews in 1971 and 1972 with the help of a tape recorder and, as Wander would also later do, Kirsch tried to remain true to the dialects of her narrators in her transcription.

Her poetic touch is evidenced by the paragraph following each narrative. A type of poetic summary, Kirsch chooses particular sentences from the women's stories and has put them, unaltered but out of context, in italics together in a paragraph. The result is a combination of key

lines from each interview, which, by echoing previously read material, leave the reader with a somewhat stronger impression as to the identity of the narrator. The disjointed nature of the sentences composing these final paragraphs make them all the more interesting. An example from the closing paragraph of "Staffelschwimmen" illustrates this point: "*Der Schwimmsport hat mein Leben geprägt. Es gab Zeiten, da war ich mit Jutta keine Einheit. Ich sage ja und kann mich am nächsten Tag überhaupt nicht erinnern. Bevor ich das erste Mal von zu Hause wegging, hab ich sehr viel geweint. Wenn ich nicht im Wasser lag, lag ich im Bett, vom Studium hielt ich nicht viel*" (113). In Ursula Heukenkamp's generally positive review of *Die Pantherfrau*, she points out the pervasiveness of the emancipation issue in Kirsch's work:

Obwohl niemals ohne Ironie behandelt, sind doch die Komplikationen der Gleichberechtigung sowohl in den Gedichten als auch in dem bereits erwähnten Erzählungsband immer als ungeteiltes Leid der Frauen gezeigt. Nicht hilflos zwar, aber doch sehr alleingelassen, haben immer sie die Kraft und das Selbstvertrauen aufzubringen, die für die Bewältigung der alltäglichen Gleichberechtigung nötig sind. Immer sind die es, die die Moralität der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen tragen. Ihre Verwandtschaft untereinander besteht in ihrem Bewußtsein, daß Unabhängigkeit der Preis ihrer Würde ist, den zu bezahlen sie fähig sein müssen, selbst wenn das Alleinsein bedeutet. (127)

Alleinsein is an especially important theme in the first story of Schubert's *Lauter Leben*, the analysis of which appears in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Sarah Kirsch played an integral role in Schubert's ascension to authorship, sponsoring her membership in the Writers' Union in the GDR, which was approved in 1976. As Schubert explained to von Hallberg, two sponsors were required for this; Aufbau Verlag was her other sponsor (186). In her interview with Ariane Thomalla, Schubert explains how she got her start as a writer. Since her mother was a librarian, Schubert has always read a lot. For years she wrote poems, daily journal entries and accounts of

her dreams. Then she began with short stories and “. . . zufällig hab’ ich mal alles der Sarah Kirsch gezeigt. Die hat gesagt, das muß veröffentlicht werden und hat’s zum Verlag gebracht und hat mir unheimlich geholfen” (1106). As mentioned previously, Kirsch wrote an afterword for the first edition of *Lauter Leben*, published in 1975, praising Schubert’s talent, her ability to look into the human soul. Kirsch alludes to the encouragement to be gleaned from reading these stories: “. . . sie [Schubert] ermuntert uns: eher lassen wir uns vom Donner erschmeißen, bevor wir uns mit Verhältnissen begnügen, die nicht menschlich sind. Oder: LIEBER EIN BLUTIGES OHR UND ZUFRIEDEN” (158).

3. Appearance versus Reality: The Emancipation of Women as Depicted in

Lauter Leben

“Die [DDR] Autorinnen reiben sich an der staatlich proklamierten Idee der Emanzipation und decken die Widersprüche zwischen dieser und der Realität auf.”

Nagelschmidt 51

i. Introduction to Helga Schubert's *Lauter Leben*

Although Helga Schubert disdains being classified as a writer of *Frauenliteratur* (Bigarelli 255), she is looked upon as such. In *Lauter Leben*, an entertaining and thought-provoking collection of snapshots of situations in daily life and a few short critical essays, her protagonists and narrators are chiefly female. The themes with which she deals are those not necessarily specific to women in the GDR: independence, identity, work, relationships, adultery, raising children and politics. Though these issues exist for men as well, the angle that Schubert takes is decidedly female. Since she is female, it is natural to assume that she has more of an insight into the female psyche than a man would, hence her focus on female characters.³¹ Emmerich states that male authors in the GDR were not successful at portraying realistic emancipated women in their stories: the men tended to project the ideal woman, but not the realistic one (1980, 111). This practise was not exclusively restricted to male authors, however: Anna Seghers' female characters also fit this idealised type.

³¹ Helga Schubert does not want to exclude men and she does not want to be associated with a literature that is often pigeon-holed as one only for women.

The title of Schubert's first collection gives away the contents; *Lauter Leben* can be directly translated as "nothing but life" or "lots of life." *Lauter*, the adjective, means "pure" or "honest"; the adverb, "nothing but." Indeed, Schubert's descriptions of situations in everyday life live up to the title of her first book. As Opelt points out in her opening sentence: "Einen treffenderen Titel als 'Lauter Leben' ließe sich für Helga Schuberts erstes Buch gewiß nicht finden" (4). Although perhaps not as obvious as the definition provided above, another meaning for this title is possible. *Lauter* is also the comparative form of the adjective *laut*, loud. The book's title is an indication of the content of stories within (dealing with everyday life), but is also simultaneously a challenge to the reader to live more loudly, i.e., to take a more active role in one's life. This interpretation is consistent with Schubert's didactic purposes in writing. In an interview with Pollatschek, Schubert explains: "Ich würde die Leute gern ermutigen, ihr Leben zu verändern" (29).

Apart from an article by Alyth Grant, Schubert's *Lauter Leben* has been virtually untouched by German literary scholars, and for this reason I would like to focus my attention on it here. The criteria by which I chose the stories for analysis in this thesis were very simple. I looked for stories that clearly deal with the issue of gender roles and the situation of women in the GDR. Analysis of the selected stories will confirm that Helga Schubert belongs to the trend towards personal writing in women's literature. She is a writer often overlooked, and so the necessity of this study is evident. Though the popularity of Christa Wolf is undisputed well beyond the borders of the former GDR, its citizens were also well aware of Wolf's

contemporaries and Helga Schubert's books found their place on bookshelves across the former East Germany.³²

ii. Critical Reception of *Lauter Leben*

Lauter Leben was published only in the GDR, the original edition appearing in 1975, followed by three subsequent editions, the fourth published in 1983. The overall reception of Schubert's first collection in the East was positive, which is not surprising, considering that the publication of "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" in Heinz Knobloch's anthology *Kreise ziehen* in 1974 had brought Schubert immediate recognition (Buder 11, Rothbauer 150).³³ Alyth Grant is the only western scholar to date who has turned her attention to *Lauter Leben*. She notes that its publication year was the same as that of Anderson's *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*, which attracted more attention. *Lauter Leben* has remained relatively unrecognized in the West, affording no newspaper reviews, although it is mentioned in reviews of Schubert's later works.

The first review of several on *Lauter Leben* (1975) appeared in *Tribüne*, an East German newspaper, in December 1975. Horst Buder points out that Schubert portrays characters with various backgrounds and lifestyles in everyday situations. Indeed, Volker Hammerschmidt and

³²This was confirmed during my recent stay in Berlin, whereupon I learned that three women from the former GDR who I saw on a regular basis had Schubert books at home.

³³Thirteen stories from *Lauter Leben* plus three others were published in West Germany in 1985 under the title *Anna kann Deutsch*. Agnes Hüfner gives it a lukewarm review, declaring it weak in general, paling in comparison with *Das verbotene Zimmer*, published with acclaim in the FRG in 1982. Hüfner offers some praise for Schubert's female portraits, but otherwise deems the stories banal and lacking in the irony to be found in *Das verbotene Zimmer* in which "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" was published. Reviews of *Das verbotene Zimmer* are positive, with one exception: Gunhild Böhm, Carl Corino, Konrad Franke, Norbert Schachtsiek-Freitag, Johannes Maassen and Marieluise de Waijer-Wilke offer words of praise, whereas Rainer Wochele claims that Schubert's writing style could only be appreciated in the GDR, refusing to grant her work literary merit.

Andreas Oettel suggest that Schubert belongs to a tradition of literature in which individual fate and everyday life are the main subject: "Im Zentrum ihrer [Schubert's] Erzählungen steht der einzelne, auf ihn ist alles bezogen; gesellschaftliche Bedingungen, die Sphäre der Produktion sind in ihren Erzählungen nicht ausgeklammert, jedoch nie Selbstzweck" (3). Certainly this central character's struggle to cope with society and her position within it are a major focus of Schubert's work. Through reading her stories, the reader earns a broadened, or at least altered, perspective on life:

Da begegnen uns Menschen unterschiedlichster Herkunft und Lebenshaltung, und der Blick auf sie wird geweitet, Sehgewohnheiten werden verändert, das kleinteilige, oftmals verstellt und in seiner Bedeutung heruntergespielt, wird vorgezeigt, überträgt Einsichten und Erkenntnisse, die den Leser als Partner suchen, und wenn sie ihn nicht immer befriedigt entlassen, dann darf die Ursache bei beiden gesucht werden. (Buder 11)

Buder maintains that Schubert gives the reader freedom to think; she does not fill in every detail. Leonore Krenzlin, however, has a slightly different opinion. In her review of May 1976, she claims that the reader is not asked to fill in the gaps, but rather to question how he or she would personally react to the various characters depicted. Krenzlin's article becomes more critical than that of her fellow reviewer. She points out that character development is not portrayed; depicted are mentalities, lifestyles and ways of dealing with the world, including all the contradictions within people and their characters; however, character development is much more prevalent in novels. By virtue of their limited length, short stories cannot generally portray character development to any great extent. Krenzlin further contends that Schubert does not give a full picture of the inner spirit of her characters, but rather: "Ihr Erzählgestus ist der des Berichtens, sie beschreibt streng von außen, was man an ihnen beobachten kann und was sie von sich selbst

sagen" (10). Hammerschmidt and Oettel use almost the exact same wording to describe Schubert's writing style, proclaiming that we learn nothing about the inner lives of her characters (3). I disagree with the reviewers on this point. Though the narrator is often at a distance, the reader is still privy to the characters' inner workings, as shall be pointed out in the following analyses.

Krenzlin concludes that despite the pitfalls of some stories: "... wirken die Geschichten Helga Schuberts gewinnend: durch die genauen Beobachtungen, durch eine so unböse wie unwiderstehliche Komik, durch die unbefangene Verwendung einer mittels Verknappung stilisierten Alltagssprache" (10). Krenzlin labels Schubert's work comic; however, ironic is the more appropriate designation, as will be made evident in the following analyses. Opelt, too, misunderstands Schubert's irony: "Wenn sie [Schubert] von ihren alleinstehenden Freundinnen erzählt, die versichern, die Freiheit zu schätzen und insgeheim doch auf einen Freund warten, bei dem sie bleiben möchten, dann provoziert sie zum Lächeln, ohne Spott, eher vertrauensvoll, weil sie verborgene Gedanken durchschaut und akzeptiert" (4). But these contradictions evoke, not a trusting smile, but rather a sense of concern and sympathy for the women who are in this unenviable position. Both Opelt and Krenzlin, GDR critics, seem to have taken Schubert's stories too lightly. Nevertheless, Opelt recognizes the therapeutic merit of Schubert's work, as evidenced by her concluding paragraph:

So taucht Helga Schubert in viele Lebenskreise ein, und sie nimmt viele Wege wahr, auf dem der einzelne nach seiner Persönlichkeit sucht. Das alles findet sich in den Geschichten der Schriftstellerin wieder, die für Verunsicherte wie ein Schlüsselloch sind, durch das sie erkennen können, daß andere ähnlich mit sich und ihren Schwierigkeiten ringen. (4)

But these stories go beyond merely providing the reader the opportunity to recognize that others are suffering under similar conditions. Schubert admits to having a didactic purpose behind her writing (Pollatschek 29). She strives to help people to view their own lives in a different light and realise their power to make changes. Schubert wants to have a meaningful impact on her readers and I sincerely believe that she succeeds in this. Through her careful descriptions of reality, she offers new perspectives on issues and situations in everyday life that many would simply overlook.

In his favourable review, Rothbauer deems the stories in *Lauter Leben* old but told in a new way; they are modernized, to fit the contemporary woman, who emerges as the main theme of Schubert's collection: "Die zusammenfassende und dabei auch interpretierende Allerweltserfahrung in einem vertrauten und dabei doch neuartigem Ton – dies macht wohl Helga Schuberts besonderes Talent aus" (151). Although he repeatedly refers to this new style of story-telling, he does not venture to define it directly. It is likely that he is referring to Schubert's descriptions of daily life and individual fates, a trend pointed out by Hammerschmidt and Oettel in their publication thirteen years later. Rothbauer suggests that Schubert's technique of exact description calls to mind previous experiences of the reader, whereby this recognition facilitates further enjoyment of the texts. He points out that attitude is what makes Schubert's descriptions and use of simple rhetorical devices so effective. He does not, however, define what he means by *Haltung*, stating merely: "Die Haltung der Erzählerin also macht wohl aus altbekannten Stoffen in altbekannter Weise eine neue Art von Erzählung, von der man meint, sie so noch niemals gehört zu haben" (150). Rothbauer claims that the satirical effect, created by Schubert's listing of

things, remains in the background. His point is understated. Of course, one must remember that his review was published in a GDR journal and that it was necessary to play down any satirical effects which might result in the text reflecting poorly on the state.

Though his review is largely positive, Rothbauer seems to criticise Schubert, claiming that her female characters are all of one type: “Es sind bei allen so äußerlich verschiedenen Lebensläufen doch immer eine bestimmte Art von Frauen, von denen Helga Schubert am liebsten und am besten erzählt. . .” (152), referring to Anna [“Anna kann Deutsch”], Resi [“Resi”] and Erika [“Das späte Mädchen”] as examples. He confusingly goes on to state that a certain degree of security in the professions of these female characters causes the stories to lose some of their melancholy: “Ein bestimmter Grad der Sicherheit, im Beruf, auch nur in den äußeren Verhältnissen, wie bei der Töpferin mit ihren schönen Porzellanfiguren - und gleich verliert die Geschichte (im Gegensatz etwa zu der von der Frau des Steinmetzen, “Trauriger Tag”) etwas von der kaum merklichen Melancholie, die den anderen [Geschichten] wohl auch noch ihren Reiz gibt” (152). One wonders if he is implying that the small amount of security to be found in these women’s stories should be done away with. Rothbauer concludes that men do not fare well in this book, but rather remain on the outside of the action. Helga Schubert focuses on the stories of contemporary women, deemed emancipated and equal under the law.

Ten years after Rothbauer’s, the first and, to my knowledge, only discussion of *Lauter Leben* to appear in the West was published in North America. In the title of her article, Grant captures the essence of my interest in Schubert’s work: “Allein zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit: Helga Schuberts *Lauter Leben*.” Helga Schubert’s treatment of the conflict

between reality for GDR women and the expectations set out for them by their society is also the focus of my analyses. The tone of Grant's article is positive, in that she supports her argument well using Schubert's stories. Grant does not make any harsh judgements on Schubert's work, but at the same time is not overly effusive about it; however, she validates Schubert's ability to portray the conflicts with which women were dealing, as they searched for an identity in a society in which gender roles were changing: "Gerade im Leben von Frauen hat sich durch die sozialen und politischen Änderungen sehr viel verändert. Das damit verbundene neue Rollenverständnis führt fast zwangsläufig zu psychischen Konflikten" (81). These conflicts constitute the main focus of the stories that Grant examines in her article. As Rothbauer points out, the GDR had laws to emancipate women, but laws alone are not enough to achieve such a thing. As previously mentioned, "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" afforded Helga Schubert recognition in the GDR, encompassing the problems that women had in their new role, and the conflict between independence and the desire to be in a relationship. Grant offers interpretations of five stories from the collection to illustrate this tension. While my discussion of "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" is more comprehensive than Grant's, her argument is consistent with mine in several areas, as shall be evidenced throughout the subsequent analyses. Grant concludes with a reflection which reiterates difficulties associated with the emancipation of women in the GDR:

Bestimmt die Sprache schon das Verhalten und die Einstellungen der Menschen oder widerspiegelt sie nur die Zustände und das Bewußtsein der Gesellschaft, in der sie gesprochen wird? Die Frage bleibt offen. Ersichtlich wird aber, wie schwer es sein muß, die Kluft zwischen den alten, im Unterbewußten noch vielfach geltenden Normen und den neuen Normen und Ansprüchen so zu überbrücken, daß ein Leben im Einklang mit diesen möglich wird. (87)

The question of cause and effect with respect to language and behaviour is one which I will not attempt to answer in this thesis. Helga Schubert's reflections on the plight of women in GDR society, caught between roles old and new, as evidenced in *Lauter Leben*, are the focal point of the following analyses.

Before embarking on analysis of "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," the first story in the collection, I would like to provide a brief overview of the common characteristics of the stories to be discussed in this thesis. As alluded to previously, in choosing stories from *Lauter Leben*, I looked for elements reflecting the emancipation question. At the same time, taking Grant's work into consideration, I decided to examine stories which were not included in her article; however, we both turn our attention to "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," because of its close relevance to this issue. I will also discuss "Das späte Mädchen," "Das Bein," "Resi," "Trauriger Tag" and "Der Schimmel." In each of these stories, individuals are described (though in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," the individuals belong to a group whose members supposedly share the same characteristics, thereby allowing one to view the group as a single entity). The reader is not given a complete history of the protagonists, but rather only vital background information which pertains to the situation at hand. Each of the characters portrayed is an individual, trying to cope with his or her own situation. In each case, the character's work life is described. All, with the exception of "Das Bein," explore the personal relationships of the characters in question, though to differing degrees. Independence is a major theme in all of the works to be discussed.

The citations included previously from the reviews of *Lauter Leben* offer a piecemeal indication of Schubert's style. She has a direct approach which does not lead, but rather engages the reader, such that thought is stimulated and questions are asked to which the answers may only come from within. Schubert is concise and deliberate in her choice of words, and uses fragments for emphasis, which cause the reader to pause and consider the point being made. Rather than flowing like a narrative, her stories are most often almost report-like, evidenced to an extreme in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" in which the paragraphs are offset by blank lines, indicating the self-contained nature of each unit of text. There are no direct dialogues in these stories, but Schubert includes some indirect speech. Direct speech is to be found in "Der Schimmel"; however, no replies are given, i.e., we deduce the responses of the narrator's guest through his own words. None of the texts include quotation marks.

Lauter Leben features a mixture of narrative voices; however, the stories I have chosen are told in the third person, except "Der Schimmel." Most narrative voices are female, as are the protagonists; again "Der Schimmel" remains an exception, as stated above, the narrator/main protagonist in this story is an elderly man. In all cases, the narrator remains at a distance, seldom describing the protagonists' emotions. This stance offers objectivity, which helps readers come to their own conclusions as to the message offered and does not dictate an intended reaction to the characters. This is, for example, in direct contrast to the stories of Anna Seghers, written with the intention to sway readers to the communist cause, leaving them no room for self-reflection and objectivity. As mentioned above, Schubert has a didactic purpose: not to persuade her readers to conform to a certain ideology, but rather to empower them to make and follow through with their

own decisions. By offering readers a new perspective on some everyday aspects of life, she provides them with a greater sense of objectivity, with which they may examine and alter their own lives in positive ways. She does not dictate, but rather facilitates. Her extraordinary understanding of human nature, no doubt won through her work as a psychologist, helps her to achieve this end. Her style is often ironic, her humour sometimes dark, as I will demonstrate in the subsequent analyses.

iii. Analysis of “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen”

“Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen” is the first story in *Lauter Leben*. Dr. Sigrid Töpelmann of Aufbau Verlag describes the reaction with which this story was received: “. . . der Abdruck ihrer ‘Alleinstehenden Freundinnen’ in der ‘Weltbühne’ [a GDR publication] machte sie mit einemmal in weiten Leserkreisen bekannt und Einladungen für Lesungen und Bitten um Abdrucke neuer Arbeiten kamen überreichlich” (634-35). In light of this comment, it is surprising that this story has not received more critical attention to date.³⁴ It deserves attention in that it not only fulfils the selection criteria outlined above, namely that it deals with gender roles and emancipation of women in the GDR, but it is also the very first story that most readers would have ever read by Helga Schubert. The importance of the opening story in a first-time publication of short stories cannot be understated. With what Dorothea Körner deems a “liebenswerte Erzählung” (7), “Meine alleinstehende Freundinnen,” Helga Schubert succeeds admirably in

³⁴ One must take into consideration, however, that Dr. Töpelmann may have overstated the impact of Helga Schubert’s first story in the interest of selling more books, since this article was printed in the *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel*.

drawing the reader in, entertaining while stimulating thought and certainly whetting the appetite of her audience. The characteristics that evoke this reaction will be considered; however, the main focus of this analysis will be Helga Schubert's treatment of the emancipation question in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen."

To begin with, the structure of the story is worth contemplating. One of the longer stories in the collection, it is five and a half pages long and is broken up into eighteen distinct paragraphs set off by blank lines. Three paragraphs have an "afterthought," one or two lines included after the first paragraph, indented, but not separated from the main paragraph by a blank line. These sentences demand extra attention, since they are structurally highlighted. The eighteen distinct paragraphs that make up the short story are organized quite logically. The first-person narrator takes the reader on a systematic tour of the protagonists' accommodations, beginning with visiting etiquette and then proceeding to a description of the apartment building, the foyer, the door to the apartment and then the rooms within. Interestingly enough, the bedroom is not described; however, it is possible that these are bachelor apartments, as housing in the GDR was a difficult matter at best. Space was at a premium. In fact, to get a larger apartment one had to be married (and some would even go so far as to marry for this specific purpose).³⁵ After

³⁵Menschik and Leopold point out: "Die Wohnungsknappheit in der DDR ist ein indirekter Zwang zur Ehe. Es ist einleuchtend, daß verheiratete Paare bei der Wohnungseinteilung Priorität haben, wenn eine solche Feststellung auch nicht mit einer positiven Wertung wechseln darf" (145). This situation is confirmed in Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, when Angela makes reference to the need for an official stamp signifying married status to get an apartment: "Ich weiß nicht, warum manche Mädchen so scharf aufs Heiraten sind. Sie glauben vielleicht, daß sie den Mann mit dem Stempel besser halten können. Vielleicht wird sich einmal was ändern, damit man auch ohne Stempel eine gemeinsame Wohnung bekommt und etwas ausprobieren kann" (113). This is also evidenced in Morgner's "Gute Botschaft der Valeska in 73 Strophen" in Emmerich's *Geschlechtertausch*: "Da eine gemeinsame Wohnung infolge außerordentlichen Wohnraummangels in absehbarer Zeit nicht in Aussucht stand, hatte Valeska der Eheschließung nicht prinzipiell widerstrebt" (27).

describing the accommodations of her subjects, the narrator goes on to discuss their attitudes towards their outer appearance (hair, makeup). She then delves into more personal issues: children and, in the exact middle of the story, paragraph nine deals with the children's fathers and paragraph ten with marriage. Both provide direct contrast with the title given to the main subjects of the story: *alleinstehende Freundinnen* are, by definition, single, thus to speak of the fathers of their children and their views on marriage (everyone must marry at least once) is full of irony.

Indeed, the definition of *alleinstehend* is repeatedly called into question in this story. The reader is encouraged to explore the various meanings and connotations ascribed to this word which, in its most positive sense, implies independence and confidence, whereas its negative connotation is simply the state of being alone. In the past, a woman who was *alleinstehend* was looked down upon by society, considered a "spinster" if she was unsuccessful in finding a man to marry. In contrast, contemporary society considers independent women worthy of respect. In "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," however, the thin veneer of implied independence becomes more transparent with discussion of their boyfriends and self-confidence issues. The final three paragraphs have the female friends recovering some of their independence, with reference to work, vacations and finally, their unending generosity. This last paragraph is a tribute to them from the narrator, who spends the entirety of the short story subtly criticising these friends, or at least exposing them for what they truly are, which seems to point to the opposite of the very title they are given. It is as if the narrator wants to end on a positive note, but even this paragraph is controversial. After giving an overview of the progression of topics covered in the story, I would like to look at each paragraph more closely.

The opening line of each new paragraph tells exactly what it is about. There are no surprises in this respect; however, the irony, with which certain aspects of these women's lives are described, uncovers a hidden chaos that the outer structure, compartmentalised and neatly ordered, belies. In fact, her creation of the outer structure may be Helga Schubert's way of trying to help her readers control their own chaos. Bigarelli addresses this: "Ihre Prosa unternimmt den Versuch, das innere Chaos zu begrenzen und einen Zusammenhang für die Dinge zu schaffen, die uns Angst machen. Schreiben kann eine Möglichkeit sein, etwas über das Leben herauszufinden und einen Sinnzusammenhang zu stiften, wobei der Schriftsteller sich als emotionaler Sinnstifter erweist" (33). Helga Schubert wants to help people through her writing, partly by portraying reality as modifiable. In an interview with Pollatschek, she speaks of her desire to help her readers: "Ich will dem Leser helfen, über sein eigenes Leben nachzudenken. . . . Ich würde die Leute gern ermutigen, ihr Leben zu verändern. Ich möchte sie sensibilisieren, freundlicher, aufmerksamer miteinander umzugehen" (29). By showing readers that reality is alterable, she empowers them to take more control in their lives. Helga Schubert uses irony to achieve her goals in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," and for this reason, it is a fitting first Helga Schubert story to approach. In a 1990 interview with Bigarelli contained in the latter's 1998 monograph, she responds to his question as to whether she considers herself a humoristic or ironic writer: "Humoristisch bin ich überhaupt nicht. Ich bin ganz ironisch und ich kann durch meine Literatur auch niemandem zum Lachen bringen, höchstens dadurch, daß ich etwas ganz paradoxes schildere" (243). Helga Schubert's use of irony is one of the attributes that contribute to the positive reception of her work in general.

A survey of various glossaries of literary terminology reveals that there is no one standard definition of irony. Owing to the subtle shift of emphasis on various aspects of irony from one definition to the next, consideration of multiple explanations is helpful, in order to get a full understanding of how this literary device is used in Helga Schubert's text. Irony is defined by Chris Baldick in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as ". . . a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency, in which an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance" (114). In *The Harper Handbook to Literature* Frye, Baker and Perkins offer a more direct definition: "In general, irony is the perception of a clash between appearance and reality, between *seems* and *is*, or between *ought* and *is*" (250). Irony can reflect a certain truth about human nature; in an interview with Edith Opelt, Helga Schubert explains some of the insight she has gained through her work as a psychologist, which is evident in this story: "'Hauptsächlich habe ich gelernt', sagt Helga Schubert, 'daß der Mensch nicht einsichtig ist, sondern aus vielen widersprechenden Meinungen besteht, über sich selbst und andere, daß es dem Menschen schwerfällt, sich zu akzeptieren, wie er ist. Er gibt seinem Bedürfnis nach, anders zu sein, und gerät dabei in Konflikte'" (4). The narrator cleverly shows how her single friends are caught in this very conflict.

A Glossary of Literary Terms defines structural irony as follows: ". . . the author, instead of using an occasional verbal irony, introduces a structural feature which serves to sustain a duplicity of meaning and evaluation throughout the work" (92). Helga Schubert utilises structural irony in the form of constant repetition in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen." Twelve of the eighteen paragraphs begin with the words "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen," including the

first four. If the paragraph does not begin with these three words, then they are present somewhere else within the paragraph, at least once. The constant repetition provides structural irony. The single women described by the narrator who would like to be perceived as independent are actually far from it. In fact, with each subsequent repetition of the words “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen” and the further details ensuing, the irony grows. Grant suggests that “[d]ie Aufmerksamkeit der Leser wird durch vielfache Wiederholung immer wieder auf die Formulierung im Titel gelenkt und dadurch werden sie zum Nachdenken über deren Bedeutung angeregt” (74). At the same time, outer form mirrors content, the continual repetition suggesting a reflection of the number of single female friends that the narrator has. No specific number is given, but we know the narrator has at least three friends who fit this category, as she refers to three descriptions of bathrooms belonging to different friends in paragraph four. One gets the impression that there are several women who fit this category in the narrator’s life.

In fact, the narrator’s description is full of generalisations, implying that what she is describing applies to all single women. Given Helga Schubert’s sparse style of writing, i.e., she does not tell everything but rather leaves a lot of room for speculation on the part of the reader, one could view these generalisations as representation of GDR conformity. The narrator’s ironic descriptions of this predictable group serve as criticism for their lack of individuality, an ailment extending to the society in which they live that demands such conformity. There are no names, and practically no specific examples (an exception is the incident with the truck driver, which will be addressed later in this analysis). In the first paragraph alone the pronouns *man*, *jemand*, and *niemand*, all unspecific words, appear.

The detail with which Schubert describes people, objects and situations in a generalised context is a source of irony in this work. Generalisations are non-specific by nature; however, Helga Schubert provides a great deal of specific detail in her descriptions that are supposed to apply to all single women. Can these women really be this similar? How is it possible that they all have blue checkered tablecloths? The first definition of irony comes to mind: the “apparently straightforward statement” is that these women have blue checkered tablecloths; the “context which undermines this statement, giving it a different significance,” is the fact that the narrator is describing many women, not just one or two. The focus is shifted away from the blue tablecloth itself to the realisation that these women are incredibly predictable and similar to one another. Grant maintains that: “[d]ie Generalisierung ist . . . der Hauptaussagemodus des Textes. Dadurch und durch die Manipulation der Erzählperspektive entsteht das Bild einer Lebens- und Verhaltensweise, das in sich widersprüchlich ist und zu dem angestrebten Ideal der selbständigen, selbstbewußten Persönlichkeit auch im Widerspruch steht” (75). The women who seem so proud to be standing on their own, independent, are in reality quite dependent, as is evidenced throughout the course of the story.

Grant alludes to a possible explanation for this discrepancy. She points to the gap which existed between understanding of the new roles for women in the GDR and the expectations and rights provided by law. Such a situation causes insecurity among members of society, who, in an attempt to deal with this insecurity, instinctively move back to traditional behaviour patterns and speech. The inadequacy of the old system only serves to intensify alienation and isolation. She goes on to conclude that “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen” addresses the problems that

women have in this new role (74). Maxie Wander expresses her frustration at the status of emancipation in the late 60s: “In meinem Kopf geht es wie ein Bohrer, gefangen, gefangen! Fred hat zehnmahl mehr Freiheit als ich, und das empfinde ich als ungerecht. Obschon er sich große Mühe gibt, mich zu entlasten. Aber trotz Gleichheit vor dem Recht sind die Frauen in diesem Land noch immer beschissen dran!” (1998, 136) and the result of her decision to stay home and care for Fred and the children: “Ich habe nichts geleistet, außer meinen Kindern eine gute Mutter zu sein. Aber das behaupten viele Frauen von sich. Ist das meine Schuld allein? Wir [Fred and Maxie] glauben beide an die neue Gesellschaft, aber erzogen wurden wir doch von der alten” (1998, 165). Society simply was not able to leave the traditional roles behind. Not even those who were consciously trying to adapt to the new society were able to do so successfully. These diary entries were probably written at least five years before Helga Schubert wrote “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen,” and it does not appear that women had reached a much greater degree of emancipation in that time. Role-playing is a favourite pastime of the single women in “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen.”³⁶ It stems from the constant conflict between the desire for independence and that of wanting to be in a relationship. It seems that these two desires are not easily met simultaneously in the case of these women and irony is used to show this.

The narrative voice through which this irony is presented is an intrusive narrator who makes judgements on the *alleinstehenden Freundinnen*, exposing the inconsistencies between who they claim to be and who they really are. Since the women being described take the narrator into their confidence with respect to their relationships with men, this suggests that the narrator is

³⁶Maxie Wander also refers to the role-playing to which she succumbed in order to keep her marriage happy (1998, 164).

female. We immediately gather that the narrator is *not* an *alleinstehende Frau* since she would classify herself among them if she were: “*wir alleinstehende Freundinnen/Frauen.*” although it is possible that Schubert deceives the reader in this regard. When one is fearful of admitting to one’s own situation, but needs advice on a matter, the first inclination is to put the situation into the third person: “My friend. . .”; however, this does not seem to be the case here because the narrator is at a distance and maintains an aloof, rather judgmental stance throughout. Though the narrator is first person, the personal pronoun *ich* is never used, only the possessive *meine*. The narrator clearly does not object to the connection that exists between herself and the subjects, but makes it known that she does not belong to this group.

Irony and contrast are interwoven throughout the story. In the first paragraph, on visiting etiquette, a contrast is immediately presented: one can visit the girlfriends without calling ahead and even bring someone along, but the girlfriends always call ahead, even if from the corner, just to make sure you are alone and they never bring anyone with them. Immediately, the actions of the narrator and those of her subjects are contrasted. The question arises as to why the single female friends would act differently than the narrator in this situation. The fact that the women always call ahead shows that they are considerate, whereas the narrator does not pay them the same respect when she visits. Grant suggests this is an indicator of their lacking self-confidence, which is to blame for their inability to really be independent or form proper relationships: “Dort heißt es, daß die Freundinnen nicht die Großzügigkeit anderer für sich in Anspruch nehmen, die sie jederzeit anderen gewähren” (77). Serving as a frame for the story, this suggested unreciprocated generosity is echoed again in the final paragraph: “Meine alleinstehenden

Freundinnen kann man um etwas bitten. Sie leihen einem ein Ohr oder ein Buch, je nachdem. Wenn sie Geld hätten, würden sie auch das borgen" (10).³⁷ The narrator gives yet another reason as to why the women call ahead: "Sie wollen, daß man dann allein ist" (5). This indicates that the narrator does not live alone; it suggests that she is married, confirming the suspicion alluded to earlier, that the narrator does not fit the category of women which she is describing in this story. The women want to make sure that the narrator is alone at home and do not bring anyone with them when they visit her: they seek a private consultation. Women tend to talk about very personal issues when they are alone together. The narrator's single friends look to her for support and perhaps advice as well, since one presumes that she has a successful relationship and, accordingly, a healthy perspective on such matters. It is this very perspective that draws out contrast and irony, encouraging the reader to recognize the gap between illusion and reality in this story.

In the second paragraph, the reader's attention is drawn to the contradiction between what the women say and how they really feel: "Sie sagen . . . Aber in Wirklichkeit. . ." (5). The narrator claims to know better. The women do not want to live in the new buildings; they prefer the old ones. "Ihre Wohnungen sind nämlich unverwechselbar" (5). These comments suggest a hesitation to accept modernity and change, which evokes the question as to whether this attitude prevails over more than just apartment buildings. Clear contradiction stimulates thought; the reader is prompted to consider the reason for the discrepancy. This continues throughout this short story. Bigarelli remarks on this constant questioning evoked by Helga Schubert's writing:

³⁷All page references for quotes from *Lauter Leben* in this work pertain to the fourth edition, published in 1983.

“Wie immer in der besten Prosa sind es nicht die Antworten, sondern die Fragen nach dem Wichtigsten für die menschliche Gesellschaft, die den Leser beschäftigen. Bei Helga Schuberts Literatur geht es meistens um ein solches stilles Fragen, Befragen und Sich-Fragen” (33). The use of irony encourages the reader to attempt to discover the root and significance of the discrepancy. An early example of this is the opening line of the third paragraph, where both contrast and irony are present: “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen sind stolz auf ihre Besonderheit” (5). *Ihre* is ambiguous: does it refer to the individual women or the plural, the women as a group? The irony is clear: the narrator is defining all of her single friends under one common heading, therefore they cannot be individually peculiar or special, they can only be so as a group.

For emphasis, Schubert follows with the sentence fragment: “Darauf vor allem” (5). In the ensuing paragraphs, we expect to discover the special quality that these women possess; however, the irony of this statement reveals itself as it becomes increasingly evident that it is rather a lack of individuality that characterises these women. Sentence fragments of this nature are present throughout, inviting speculation as to their meaning. Could the fragments serve to mirror the status of the *alleinstehenden Frauen*? Could the fragments’ passivity, evidenced their lack of verbs, symbolise the women’s unwillingness to change? In some cases, the fragments are meant to clarify, for example in the second paragraph, where the location of the apartments within the buildings are specified: “Entweder im vierten Stock oder zu ebener Erde in einem Laden” (5). Grant suggests that they also serve to expose the truth about the *Freundinnen*: “Einzelne Sätze . . . haben deutende Funktionen oder widersprechen der berichteten Aussage der

Freundinnen" (76). Direct contradiction provided by the narrator encourages the reader to seriously question the credibility of the women being described. Grant suggests that the women are unaware of the discrepancies they embody and for this reason repeatedly fall into the same patterns resulting in ultimate disappointment: "Vorgespielte Unkonventionalität und Freizügigkeit in der Lebensführung können jedoch die Sehnsucht nach Zweisamkeit nicht verbergen. Da die Frauen die Widersprüche nicht erkennen, sind sie immer wieder bereit, sich etwas vorzumachen oder sich täuschen zu lassen. Folglich werden sie immer wieder enttäuscht" (77). These patterns become evident as the story progresses.

As mentioned above, the narrator's generalisations are often ironic. On the one hand, she describes the homes of the *alleinstehenden Freundinnen* in great detail; on the other hand, since these descriptions apply to a group of single women, they are generalised. The group members all have the same characteristics and must therefore be bereft of individuality, the only exception in the story being the placement and decoration of their bathrooms. One can view the descriptions of the toilets on a purely literal level; however, Schubert's simplicity of style can be deceptive. In an interview with Ariane Thomalla, Schubert explains:

Ich tarne mich mit Einfachheit. Doch ich hoffe, daß man es auf verschiedenen Ebenen verstehen kann. Zunächst ganz einfach als Geschichte oder als Beschreibung. Wenn man's dann noch einmal genauer liest, merkt man, daß durch die Zusammenstellung der einzelnen Beschreibungspunkte ein Mosaik entsteht, das mit einer ganz bestimmten Absicht geschrieben ist. Nämlich, um etwas durch ganz genaues Beschreiben in den Griff zu kriegen oder als veränderbar zu zeigen. (1106)

It is this mosaic which I am in the process of uncovering in order to determine what the entire picture is, in this case, with respect to emancipation of women in the GDR. The author gives us

important guidance with this self-commentary on style. Bigarelli maintains that: “[m]an muß Helga Schubert in jedem Satz ganz ernst nehmen, wenn man ihr gerecht werden will, bescheidener: wenn man sie nur verstehen will” (23). cursory treatment of her choice of words is thus not enough. It is important to dig a little bit deeper.

Toilets are havens of privacy and the exaggeration here is evident. One friend’s toilet is in the cellar behind two locks and is completely covered in wax cloths: “So sitzt man unter einem Wachstuchhimmel” (6). The occupant is completely enclosed and has the impression of being *below*, whereas, in direct contrast, another friend has her toilet on a podium, *above*, and the walls are decorated with panty hose packages. The contrast between high and low is clear; but what do we make of the differing decor? Wax cloths were commonly used in Germany after the war. They came in different patterns and could be used as tablecloths or as bathroom wallpaper, as indicated here. The poorer citizens used them because they were cheap and easy to keep clean. That the ceiling is also covered in this material suggests that there may have been a need to protect the occupant from condensation dripping from the ceiling. The use of pictures from pantyhose packages as decoration also suggests practicality, this time with a decidedly feminine touch. Their choice of decorating materials indicates the pragmatism of these women in the face of financial constraints. The third friend described keeps a bicycle in front of the entrance to the bathroom that must be moved in order for someone to use the toilet. This bicycle acts as a signal for everyone that the bathroom is currently in use. There are surely much more subtle ways of indicating this. A locked door might be enough. Could this be a reference to the fact that in the

GDR, privacy was a near unobtainable commodity? Any attempt to achieve privacy would not go unnoticed.

The following paragraph addresses the emancipation question from a different angle: it considers kitchens, one of the traditional domains of women. The ones described in this story serve to lend more weight to this female stereotype: the walls are decorated with recipes and the tables covered with checkered tablecloths. Again, Schubert describes the kitchens in detail, even specifying the colour of the checkers (blue). It seems that these women have not denied their traditional roles; however, the three-part mirror gives cause for consideration in this context: “Sie haben sich einen kleinen Elektroboiler und zum Ansehen einen dreiteiligen Spiegel daneben anbringen lassen” (6). In an interview with von Hallberg, Helga Schubert alludes to mirrors when discussing her intentional lack of contact with other writers: “. . . I have almost no personal contacts with other writers, because I look upon writers as mirrors, and I am myself a mirror. My mirror does not want to be reflected in another mirror; one is enough” (192). For Helga Schubert, mirrors have symbolic meaning, which should be considered when attempting to discover the significance of the mirrors in the fifth paragraph of “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen.”³⁸ Metaphorically, Schubert functions as a mirror for society and her writing is composed of her reflections. The mirror in her story has three parts. Why? The three parts may signify three roles that an average woman in the GDR may fill simultaneously: mother, worker, intimate partner, i.e., wife or girlfriend. Though the *alleinstehende Freundinnen* are no longer wives and certainly

³⁸In their entry on realism, Frye *et. al.* note that “[r]ealists often thought of their art as a mirror, convinced that if they reflected the surface of life accurately, they would also reflect it truthfully” (386). Schubert wants to capture reality through her writing and she does not want the projected realities of other writers interfering with hers.

not always girlfriends, the symbolism of the mirror still applies, since it signifies possible roles of women, not necessarily that they must all be filled at the same time. Just as the number of simultaneous reflections varies depending on the mirror's features, placement and the location of the object to be reflected, so does the number of roles a woman fills, based on her abilities, situation and position in relation to others. Sigrid Damm and Jürgen Engler propose that the emancipation of man and woman consists of three elements: "Erst die glückliche Verbindung von Beruf, Verhältnis zu den Kindern und erfüllter Partnerbeziehung bedeutet tatsächliche Emanzipation von Mann und Frau im Sinne menschlicher Erfüllung" (55). If a single mirror reflects one image, does it not stand to reason that a mirror having three parts might reflect three images, symbolising three identities, three roles? In the story, the narrator indicates that the mirror is there "zum Ansehen" (6). On a first reading, one would simply assume that the mirror has been brought into the kitchen so that the women could look at themselves, indicating vanity; however, if one considers this further, another possible meaning may be uncovered. One looks in a mirror to check one's appearance, but appearances are superficial. It becomes evident, however, that these women are more concerned about their appearances than they will admit. A mirror reflects outer appearance, and the superficial view that society has of a person. Indeed, *Ansehen* does not simply denote physical appearance; it can also refer to reputation. Many tend to judge on appearances alone, which can create a reputation not based on fact. This is, however, exactly what the women are trying to do. They attempt to project a wishful image of themselves, an image more emancipated than their true state. This is the crux of the entire story, for which irony is an effective tool, for, as we recall, the conflict between the appearances and reality is the

essence of irony, at least in one definition. The mirror suggests the leitmotiv of appearances and appearances can be deceiving. The single women are trying to be something that they are not and therein lies the irony. In order to view the mosaic and determine its shape, one must first recognize the pieces.

The sixth paragraph describes the living rooms of the unattached women. Schubert uses a choice of words in the opening line to this paragraph which suggest various positions: *stehen*, to stand, is a part of the word *alleinstehenden*; *fallen*, to fall, is a part of *auffallen* and *Liegen* is the nominalisation corresponding to the verb meaning to lie. These words suggest actions, levels and positions that would take place on a regular basis in a room in which one spends much time. Through the careful choice of words, structure and function are reflected in one another. A sentence fragment is embedded in this paragraph, seemingly out of place, which reflects its content: "Daneben Glasvitrinen mit Nippes von den Großmüttern" (6). The living rooms have wide couches or mattresses covered with carpets or blankets and pillows, creating a relaxed, warm, cozy, and even, as Grant suggests, seductive atmosphere (78). In contrast, the fragment tells of glass showcases (the glass emphasized by the prefix *Glas-*; the word *Vitrine* already denotes a glass cupboard) displaying knickknacks from their grandmothers. Neither the glass showcases nor the knickknacks seem to fit the atmosphere previously described. Grant attributes the discordant decoration to a corresponding lack of clarity as to identity: "Vielleicht soll die Einrichtung Neugier auf die Vielfältigkeit des Geschmacks und der Interessen der dort Wohnenden erwecken. Doch die mangelnde Klarheit über die eigene Identität und die eigenen Wünsche, die sich darin widerspiegeln, kann nur zu Enttäuschungen führen" (78). Identity and

confidence are closely linked, therefore, as long as the women do not have a clear idea of their own identities, they are unable to project a cohesive image, revealing a lack of confidence which hinders the formation of healthy relationships. Form reflects content in the placement and style of the sentence fragment. The knickknacks, gifts from their grandmothers, represent another generation entirely, in which women's roles were much different, much more traditional. The influence of the older generation in this story is thus not overlooked; it simply proves itself out of place. The disparity is further evidenced by the women's rejection of *Übergardinen*, presumably because they are associated with the older generation, yet acceptance of the knickknacks. Mention of the hidden television evokes questions. Its unobtrusive location suggests that it plays an unimportant role in their lives, i.e., these women are more interested in literature, a more traditional form of entertainment; however, one could speculate that they do watch television, but do not want to draw attention to this pastime. The women likely prefer literature to television, since GDR programming was predictable and state-controlled, whereas literature offered discussion of issues that could not be debated in public; however, GDR citizens could also receive channels from the West. In this context, the hidden television could suggest an attempt to mask forbidden access to western culture.

The practical side of the narrator's single female friends is indicated by their choice of lighting: architect lamps. Also they have covered the white walls with pictures so that they do not need to be repainted often: "Die Wände sind weiß gekalkt und voller Bilder, so daß sie die Wände nicht so oft kalkan müssen" (7). A deeper level of symbolism is recognizable here. Whitewash may have been the only option open to these women when they were considering

home decoration; however, white is also the symbol for innocence, virginity. The pictures that cover these walls were obtained by various means. The women traded them or bought them in a stroke of generosity or, sometimes, painted them themselves. The pictures may represent relationships or sexual encounters which cover the white walls, which represent innocence; however, though walls can be whitewashed anew, innocence is impossible to retrieve, except, theoretically, through religious means. For example, the Christian belief maintains that people may be forgiven their sins (i.e., return to a state of innocence and purity) by taking Jesus into their hearts and asking his forgiveness. The Roman Catholics believe in confession to absolve their sins.

Directly following the fragment referring to the self-painted pictures is a clear allusion to religion: "Eine Ikone hängt auch dabei, falls es IHN doch gibt" (7). The capitalisation of *ihn* is an unmistakable reference to God. The placement of a religious reference in this particular spot seems to corroborate the argument for a symbolic meaning for the walls and pictures pointing to innocence and sin. This becomes even more interesting when one considers that the state's position on religion was atheist. Since religion was generally frowned upon there, the open display of the icon is a sign of subversive behaviour. The rebellious nature of this act reappears in the eighth paragraph. *Doch* confirms that this conflict exists: these women have been told that there is no God; *doch* implies contention. If these women do only have this icon "just in case," then it shows instability in their system of beliefs. These women do not have a strong sense of what they believe in, and this could arguably be a function of the lack of self-confidence and identity already alluded to earlier in this analysis.

Some rather curious acts are uncovered in the seventh paragraph. In the sixth paragraph we learned that the televisions are *versteckt*, hidden, and in the seventh that these women secretly, *heimlich*, own hair curlers. These words add to the irony surrounding these single women, since they obviously do not succeed in hiding anything from the narrator. Why do these women keep their possession of innocent objects, such as hair curlers, a secret? They do not go to the hairdresser, but instead cut each other's hair. This activity solidifies their group dynamic that bypasses the system by taking care of itself. It also shows their practicality once again, since they likely provide each other this service as a result of financial constraints. The secrecy behind the curlers is attributable to the notion that these women do not want to admit that they depend on any artificial means to maintain their outer appearances. The next line, once again ironic, confirms this: "Meinen alleinstehenden Freundinnen ist es ganz egal, was sie anhaben. Und nur zufällig paßt das Samthosenbraun zum Pulloverocker" (7). These friends supposedly do not care what they are wearing; it is only by chance their clothes are so well colour-coordinated.

The two-word sentence fragment, appearing here for the first time, further emphasizes the contradiction between illusion and reality: "Sagen sie" (7). The narrator does not necessarily believe everything the women say, echoing the discrepancy between what is and what is said already evident in the second paragraph. The abruptness of the fragment further accentuates its meaning and importance. The leitmotiv of appearances surfaces once again. We learn next that the women spend a lot of money on eye makeup. In keeping with the previous train of thought, could the act of seeing also be masked by artifice? Just as makeup serves to create an illusion for the onlooker, could it, in a figurative sense, also obscure the vision of the wearer? Then, these

women do not only project a false picture of themselves, once again betraying their lack of emancipation, but also see the world in a skewed manner. The illusory persona is then further confirmed by the trailing sentence tacked onto paragraph seven, the first of three such constructions in the story. This arrangement sets off the final sentence and lends it more importance. In paragraph seven, the tacked on sentence is a blunt self-contradiction: “Wenn sie [die alleinstehenden Freundinnen] schon nichts für sich tun, müssen sie wenigstens etwas für sich tun” (7). The first part of the sentence states that they do not admit to doing anything to take care of themselves, and the second part is the justification for doing something for themselves after all. They will admit to taking some maintenance measures, justifying it to others by contending that they are not at all vain otherwise, which is an untruth. The gap between façade and reality becomes ever clearer, skillfully related by the narrator’s ironic method, which Grant points out involves intervening progressively more as the story unfolds, in order to expose the contradictory behaviour of the friends. Quoting the above citation, Grant writes: “An dieser Stelle gipfeln die Widersprüche in der unsinnigen Aussage . . . und die Ironie wird zum Spott” (76).

Paragraph eight begins with a sentence containing a redundancy that introduces contradiction in a new way: “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen haben, sofern sie nicht kinderlos sind, ein Kind” (7). This absurd way of expressing such further classification draws attention to itself and encourages the question: must a woman be defined in terms of her biological ability to bear children? One is either a mother or childless; by this definition, no other category exists, implying that women must always be connected to motherhood. This leads once again to the emancipation question. Traditionally, women have been looked upon as mothers; a

role which denoted certain respect in Western culture, particularly in Nazi Germany. The new situation for women in the GDR called this traditional role into question. With the advent of heavily subsidised daycare, women were no longer merely destined to stay at home and raise children; they were encouraged to work, but where did this leave them with respect to their families? During the time in which Helga Schubert wrote this story, and even today in Western society, including the former GDR, the question remains. In some people's eyes, women are still defined by their utilisation of their biological ability to bear offspring. To define women by whether or not they have children confines them to their traditional role, which is the point that Helga Schubert strives to make here.

This raises another question: how independent are single mothers? It seems to be a contradiction in terms to some degree, for a woman with a responsibility to a child is clearly not as independent as one without. One draws the conclusion that emancipation in the East was not nearly as well-developed as the government would have people believe. The fact, however, that in the GDR women had the means and ability to leave relationships with the fathers of these children, combined with the cases in which the men initiated the breakup, resulted in a great number of women raising children on their own.³⁹ The narrator goes on to generalise about the way in which the single mothers bring up their children. These children are raised differently: Schubert uses the negative of the comparative: "nicht . . . wie andere Kinder" (7). The

³⁹ Already in the mid-1960s women were walking away from their marriages if they felt unsatisfied. Maxie Wander did some court room reporting and in a letter to some friends dated 21 July 1965 related a surprising finding: "Hat Euch Fred erzählt, daß ich für eine Zeitung Gerichtsreportagen schreibe? Vor allem Scheidungsgeschichten, ein trauriges Kapitel. Die Statistik weist hohe Zahlen auf, und es sind hauptsächlich die Frauen, die um Scheidung einreichen. Wenn das nicht ein Erfolg ist? Die Menschen entwickeln sich, und die Frauen sind auf einigen Gebieten weit voraus. Sie langweilen sich in der Ehe. Das wird doch hoffentlich in den Köpfen der Männer etwas bewirken?" (108-109). Wander clearly views this discovery as evidence of progress.

explanation for their more relaxed upbringing: "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen wollen ihre Kinder antiautoritär erziehen, aber die Kinder danken es ihnen nicht so, zunächst" (7). This sentence provokes questions. It suggests that the women want to raise their children in an anti-authoritarian way, but no explanation is given as to why. Furthermore, does this imply that the women, too, are anti-authoritarian? To take the narrator's words literally, at face value, would be to believe the women's explanation for their child-rearing methods; however, given the doubt that the narrator has planted in the reader's mind thus far, it would be wise to consider the narrator's critical stance. It is likely that the narrator's criticism is not of the way that the women raise their children, but rather that they do not admit to the truth concerning their methods. One must consider the possibility that the single women are simply unable to discipline their children and are trying to justify any bad behaviour by contending that it is their intention to raise their children this way, denying any loss of control or respect.

The narrator states that the children do not thank their mothers for raising them in such a way, at least not right away. The children resemble their fathers, but in what sense? Is it that they are anti-authoritarian or that they are ungrateful (or both)? An abrupt, short sentence follows directly: "Und da ist der Haken" (7). Its position and near-fragmentary nature (beginning with 'Und') draw attention to this particular sentence. It is placed where it is for emphasis; it signals the climax. The reader's interest is piqued and thus in an appropriate place. For the next two paragraphs not only constitute the exact middle of the story, but also a turning point. The image of the independent single women has been slowly deteriorating since the beginning of the story, but from this point onwards this downfall is hastened drastically. As alluded to earlier,

paragraphs nine and ten are about relationships, between the alleged independent women and the fathers of their children and their boyfriends, respectively. The narrator also relates here the opinions these women hold on marriage. These relationship constellations place these women in positions that portray them as anything but *alleinstehend*. Recognition of this stark contradiction, i.e., being single versus married or having a boyfriend exposes the great irony of this short story. The only true claim to independence that these women have is the fact that they support themselves financially.

The ninth paragraph begins with a claim that these women parted amicably with the fathers of their children. Ironically, the sentence begins with the word *mit* which is contrasted to *auseinandergegangen*. This is directly followed by *Sagen sie* (for the second of three times in this story). The narrator once again gives the distinct impression that what these women are saying and the reality of their situations are two distinct things. Are the women trying to convince themselves as well as others that it went this way? The single women stress the contention that most of the men, the fathers of their children, wanted to stay and marry them, thus the suggestion is that the children were born out of wedlock. Moreover, this promise of marriage comes only if the men are not already married. Their opinion that everyone should be married at least once follows directly and is the opening line to the tenth paragraph. This suggests justification for their own situations, i.e., that they were once but are now no longer married. The third and final use of *sagen sie* follows the conditional: if they do not have a boyfriend, they say, under no circumstances would they be able to cope with having a man in their apartment every day. *Sagen sie* once again is a strong statement on the part of the narrator that what is being relayed is

dubious. *Auf keinen Fall* heightens the irony as well: the reader continues to wonder whether these women are trying to convince others or themselves. Right away another direct contrast is presented: “Wenn sie einen Freund haben, wohnt er bei ihnen” (8). Not only does this disclaim what was just said, but it once again renders the title *alleinstehend* absolutely invalid.

Alleinstehend implies living alone. The presence of the live-in boyfriend remains unofficial, however, as indicated and emphasized by another sentence fragment: “Aber unangemeldet” (8).

Aber introduces a condition on what is stated directly beforehand. The boyfriends live with them, but unregistered. This lack of recognition of official status could be attributed to several different factors. It suggests that the relationship may be fleeting, hence the need to go through the bureaucratic procedures is diminished. It could also signify that this living arrangement is supposed to be a secret, should the man in question already be married to someone else. Another plausible explanation is that these women are in denial. They have not fully admitted to their renunciation of the title *alleinstehend*. Registering a male partner as a cohabitant would certainly deprive these women of their single status. They continue to try to create the illusion of independence, when in reality they are as dependent as they have ever been.

The word *unangemeldet* ties this paragraph in with the first one, uncovering yet another contrast. These women never arrive *unangemeldet* for a visit, thereby adhering to a certain social codex; however, they subvert administrative procedures by not registering their boyfriends as cohabitants. The suggestion that this is a rebellious gesture is reinforced by the reference to freedom in the subsequent sentence: “Soviel Freiheit brauchen meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen” (8). The lack of official recognition of their living arrangements allows a certain

degree of freedom from the legal standpoint, as the boyfriends would hold no claim to the apartment or its possessions in the eyes of the law. The refusal to register these men as cohabitants does translate to freedom from the state; however, with an extremely active secret police force, it is unlikely that their living arrangements would go unnoticed. The only freedom they have really achieved is the ability to evict these men at any time without having legal ties to complicate matters. This indicates some degree of emancipation. Just as these women were able to leave the fathers of their children, they are able to evict their boyfriends. They are not financially dependent on these men and can thus survive on their own, *alleinstehend*, if they need to. The question is whether they want to be on their own. This story would suggest otherwise. In a paradoxical way, although they have lost independence by allowing a man to live with them, they still maintain some degree of it by remaining the sole official inhabitants of their apartments.

The emancipation issue is a constant thread throughout the story and the increasing tension between appearances and reality offers a critical standpoint, not only on these women, but also on society in general and the politics that define it. These women exercise a certain amount of freedom in their personal lives. Paradoxically, women were granted more relative freedom within a society that limited the freedoms of its citizens in general. In terms of decisions over their own bodies and with respect to careers, women in the GDR had more freedom than their Western counterparts; however, as citizens of this dictatorship, restriction on travel afforded them less freedom in that respect.

As long as these women have boyfriends, they cannot be entirely free in a personal sense, though, and are thus no longer truly *alleinstehend*. As soon as one is involved in an intimate

relationship, important decisions inevitably involve both parties, thus one does not enjoy the same degree of freedom as one did when single. In the eleventh paragraph the narrator comments on their state when they do have boyfriends: “Wenn meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen einen Freund haben, werden sie traurig. Weil sie ihn lieben, wie das auch klingt” (8). This is an unexpected response to being in love. Normally one associates happiness with the early stages of love, at least. Everything these women say with respect to their relationships is predictable to the narrator. The women cannot convince her that it really will be different this time. The women assure the narrator that these are the men they will stay with, but the narrator, and hence the reader, knows this is not really the case. The one word fragments - “*Jedesmal. Alle*” (8) - imply that this is a common and repeated occurrence. The narrator has heard this many times before and the result is the same each time for every one of her single friends. The fragments also reinforce the point that though these women believe what they are relating at the time, things never turn out as they predicted. Their hopes are always dashed. The narrator seems to have a very good understanding of the relationship dynamics at work and the reaction of the men: “Und die Freunde spüren zwar die Hoffnung, aber noch mehr die Anstrengung und werden mißtrauisch” (8). The men become suspicious because they detect their girlfriends’ anxiety over the relationship. Suspicion is also an interesting reaction; not the one that first comes to my mind. The unsaid result here is the end of the relationships, for the single women will go through this yet again, or so says the narrator.

In the twelfth paragraph, the narrator sheds some light onto why it might be that these women always end up alone, *alleinstehend*. They have little or no self-confidence, as suggested

here and evidenced elsewhere in the story as well: “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen finden sich nicht schön. Zum Ausgleich sind sie viel netter, als sie es wären, wenn sie sich schön fänden. Darum nimmt ihnen niemand diese Überzeugung, nicht einmal ihre Freunde. Oder, darum nehmen gerade ihre Freunde ihnen diese Überzeugung nicht” (8). Even their boyfriends do not try to help build their girlfriends’ self-esteem in this respect. This revelation makes evident the selfishness of the people that these women surround themselves with, the narrator quite possibly included. It appears that the women are not the only ones who are insecure in their relationships, for the men must also be insecure not to want their girlfriends to realise how beautiful they are. The men must fear that the women would leave them if they realised that other men find them desirable as well. Schubert uses repetition here, reiterating: “Oder, darum nehmen gerade ihre Freunde ihnen diese Überzeugung nicht” (8). Does this mean that only the boyfriends are guilty of not bolstering their girlfriends’ self-esteem? It certainly emphasizes the fact that these men are not supportive in a positive sense. On the contrary, they support the women’s deprecatory opinions of themselves. This window on the types of relationships these women form is an important one, the repetition signalling its significance. *Gerade* also serves to emphasize that it is the boyfriends who are especially guilty of this offence. One would assume that emancipated women have a healthy self-esteem. These women, however, have a tenuous self-confidence at best, and the relationships they enter tend to foster their insecurities.

Their insecurities are further evidenced in the thirteenth paragraph. At first, one thinks that they must indeed be emancipated, since the narrator tells us that these single women take the birth control pill; however, this is quickly contrasted with the comment that they do not tell their

boyfriends at first: "Weil die sich sonst ihr Teil denken" (8). The women are evidently concerned that their new boyfriends would get the wrong, or at least an undesirable, impression of them. The lack of comfort these women exhibit around this issue indicates a continuing uneasiness about the new freedoms they have been granted and the role they have been offered in society. From the dynamic portrayed, it seems that both women and men fall back into the traditional thought patterns around sexuality. The women still want to project an aura of innocence in order to conform to the traditional ideal that men desire. This shows a public denial of their true identities, for these women are on the birth control pill but do not wish to admit to it. This suggests once again their lack of confidence. The official inference is that they do not want to overload their new boyfriends with information; in reality, they do not want to reveal their true identities. Again appearance and reality are contrasted here.

The women also perform a certain ritual with their other friends once a *neue Epoche*, or new relationship, begins. They pay a farewell visit to the narrator and explain how things will be different now that they have a new boyfriend. They basically cut off all forms of communication with the outside world. This signifies a profound, certainly unhealthy and perhaps even dangerous, loss of independence. The women break contact with their friends and focus on their men. Sadly this is not an uncommon situation. Suddenly his needs are put well above hers. The explanation given for the eventual removal of the notepad outside the door and disconnection of the telephone is: "... es könnte ihn stören" (9). The women must believe that they do not need contact with anyone else once they have a man in their lives. Schubert is, of course, showing the extremes here and thereby making a mockery of the situation. This continues in the fifteenth

paragraph as the narrator describes the conclusion to the visit. As the girlfriends are leaving the narrator's apartment, they give a short assessment of their new relationship: "Er ist endlich einmal ein ganz normaler Mensch. . ." (9). The others were obviously not normal (but of course they said the same thing about the last boyfriend). She can no longer understand the excuses his predecessors gave. This one is clearly better than the rest. The short and generic description of the new man indicates his perfection. He is a type, not an individual, just as the women are. Threads of social commentary are evident in the description of the new boyfriend. He lived first for his job, but has now turned his attention towards a woman, whom he knows how to treat, though it is suggested that she taught him this. Now we are given two possible profiles: He is either a stocky Adonis, implying that he is very attractive, who does not think much. Or he is the type of man who does not succumb to an obsession with achievement or cars; he is a thoughtful and sensitive man, who understands her and does not think right away about going to bed with her. The first description is centered on the man's physical qualities. The wording suggests that the man's attractiveness precludes the possibility of his fitting the subsequent description, that of a sensitive and understanding boyfriend, whose physical attributes are not even mentioned. These are the only two types described, implying that they are the only possibilities.

The reference to *Leistungsmarotten* and *Autofimmel* suggests social commentary. It could be directed at the East or the West, depending on the approach one takes. Individual achievement resulting in elevated social status was not encouraged in the GDR. The communist agenda officially promoted equality and fairness, in contrast to the capitalist, free-market economy of the Western world, which rewards performance and achievement with the bestowal of recognition

and material wealth. Cars are status symbols; they can be excellent indicators of the amount of success an individual has achieved (or at least the amount of success the owners want others to believe they have achieved). Thus, an obsession with cars would be not only unrealistic but also very much frowned upon in the GDR, where Trabis and Wartburgs were the typical vehicles to be found on the streets. On the first reading, it would appear that this social commentary is directed at the West; however, the description is illusory, as so much else concerning the women in this story. It suggests that the capitalistic urge to achieve and earn wealth and prestige is an inclination that cannot even be suppressed by a communist dictatorship and is indeed alive and well in the GDR. We assume that the remainder of the description applies to both types of men.

The boyfriend, whether attractive or sensitive, apparently does not believe in marriage as a modern form of cohabitation: "Er hält die Ehe nicht für eine moderne Form des Zusammenlebens. Will aber den Glauben anderer Menschen, die daran einen Halt suchen, nicht zerstören. Darum läßt er sich auch nicht scheiden, was meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen verstehen. Vorerst" (9). The claim that he does not want to impose his ideas about marriage on those who think otherwise and his use of this as justification for not having divorced his wife are dubious at best. The fact that the girlfriends believe this weakly-veiled excuse for lack of commitment shows how gullible and desperate they are. The placement of *Vorerst* is notable and creates some ambiguity. It could mean that, for the time being, the friends believe the men's explanation for their decision not to get divorced, but will start to question it, or that the men are not getting divorced for the time being, but will eventually. Furthermore, it could apply to the entire paragraph, in which case the entire assessment, if valid at all, will only be so temporarily.

The placement of this single word as a fragment at the very end of the paragraph leaves the reader speculating as to its intended meaning. Contrast and irony continue to play a significant role here. The profiles of the men begin very positively, only to be shattered by this excuse given at the end for their adulterous behaviour. Ironically, the women speak of the excuses, *Fisematenten*, given by their previous boyfriends as though this new one were exempt, yet the description ends with him following directly in their footsteps. Regardless of what is specifically referred to by the word *vorerst*, implied is that whatever the girlfriends naïvely believe in the beginning will inevitably change or prove itself false, sparking future difficulties.

In response to the inevitable breakup, the last three paragraphs find the women recovering some of their lost independence. The structure of the story reflects its content: like a cycle, they are described at the beginning as having some independence which is systematically stripped away by the narrator, exposing their inherent dependence on men, in this case the boyfriends that they manage to find, then culminating in the failure of the relationships, bringing them back to a somewhat forced independent state again. The pattern of disappointment that these women experience, as suggested by Grant, seems unbreakable because they cannot recognize the root of their difficulties and, therefore, are unable to work on eradicating it (77). I agree with Grant who attributes their unhealthy dependence on men for providing them a sense of identity to their lack of self-confidence: “Was die Freundinnen zu traurigen, manchmal lächerlichen Figuren macht, ist, daß die überlieferte Norm [societal] auch für sie noch gilt: alleinstehend zu sein bedeutet, daß einem etwas fehlt - der Mann. Von dem Mann hängt die eigene Identität ab” (78).

Once these men are no longer a part of their lives, even more importance is placed on their work, one of the foremost sources of a sense of independence and very much encouraged by the GDR.⁴⁰ By working, these women are able to feed themselves and their children. They do not need a husband or boyfriend for this. At the same time, they both enjoy and work hard at their jobs. “Ihre Arbeit ist ihnen wichtig, weil sie ihr einziges Außerhalb ist” (9). *Außerhalb* means outside, suggesting that these women have a need to get away from, escape something. The question is: what? If they need an outside, it implies that there is an inside that they want to escape. They seem to want to escape their true selves and inevitable situations, since they are constantly trying to project a false image. It could be the attempt to escape the traditional gender role that confined women to the household. If one is trapped within something, literally or figuratively, it is automatically assumed that escape is desired or needed. Work is certainly a change from home; it is also a domain separate from family and personal life. The reader is left pondering what it is that these women are escaping and must then contend with another fragment, “Nach den Männern” (9), the meaning of which is unclear. Are men the primary escape that work is second to or is it that after having all the hassle with men, the workplace is the *Außerhalb* referred to?

⁴⁰An indication of the state of emancipation of women in Germany today was reported recently by Michael Woodhead in *The Sunday Times*. A bill has been introduced in Germany requiring that men give their stay-at-home wives a monthly allowance and that these women have a legal right to see their husbands' bank statements. The article cited the statistic that: “[o]nly 40% of married women in Germany work, one of the lowest figures in Europe.” This statistic is presumably valid for a reunited Germany. One must bear in mind that high unemployment figures, especially in the former eastern provinces, will have had an impact on this figure. I suspect that the percentage of married women working in the former East Germany is higher than that of the West and that the figure printed represents an average of the two.

A second fragment follows: "Im Interregnum" (9-10). *Interregnum* is a political term meaning temporary government. This could be understood at least in two different ways: that the temporary government denotes the woman or the man. It most likely refers to the woman during her time between boyfriends, when she temporarily has complete control over her own domain. If the temporary government is the man, then it implies that she is normally in control, but not when she is with him. Basically, both perspectives amount to the same thing, a woman ruling her own life in the absence of a man. His involvement in her life automatically demotes her to the status of submissive subject; however, we must not forget that whichever arrangement it refers to, it is temporary, and during this time, work is important and provides escape. "Sie sind fleißig. Ihre Arbeit ist ihnen wichtig, weil sie ihr einziges Außerhalb ist. Nach den Männern. Im Interregnum. Darum fallen sie auch im Beruf auf Lob und Tadel herein" (9-10). This is yet another ambiguous sentence. The reason as to their actions denoted by *Darum* could be either *ihre fleißige Arbeit* or *Im Interregnum*, but likely refers to both. *Hereinfallen* means "to fall into" or "to fall for." The second definition fits here because in the two-line paragraph directly following, we learn that these friends claim not to have any extracurricular relationships with their employers. It is suggested that perhaps these women are sensitive to both praise and criticism, possibly taking it all too seriously. Their needy condition, their resulting overdependence, now on their work, makes them sensitive to feedback, which could be misinterpreted and lead to difficult situations with their bosses. Citing the above passage, Grant alludes to this transfer of dependency: "Trotz Freude an der Arbeit ist diese nur Ersatz für den fehlenden Mann" (79).

The placement of the next two lines, not at the beginning of a new paragraph, but rather stuck onto the end of the sixteenth paragraph, lend them an emphasized importance. The narrator contends: “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen haben es nie mit ihrem Chef” (10). The connotation attached to *es* is an affair, or at least sex. “So was nutzen sie nicht zu so was aus” (10). The use of two *so was*, one near the beginning and one near the end of the sentence points to the interchangeability between the things for which they stand. In other words, if *so was* is meant to refer to “sex with the boss” and “praise or criticism,” the positive sense denoting a promotion, and they are interchangeable, then this changes the causality. The narrator claims that they would not exploit such things in order to obtain other things. The intention is either to use sex to get praise or use praise to get sex.⁴¹ *Tadel* could result from either or both of these situations. Either way, the contradiction remains, for the two possible situations are opposite to one another, furthering the cause of irony in this work.

The penultimate paragraph also deals with a type of escape. Vacation constitutes an escape from everyday life. The narrator’s single friends take long trips. They are curious and always go to somewhere different. This suggests not only curiosity, but also restlessness and is rather ironic in light of the travel restrictions imposed on GDR citizens. “Aber sie trampen nur, wenn sie noch jemand bei sich haben” (10). Although these women will travel alone, they will not hitchhike alone. The safety issue surfaces, showing that there is a limit to the extent that a woman can be independent in modern society, regardless of geography. They will hitchhike if

⁴¹In another story from *Lauter Leben* which Grant examines in her article, but will not be analysed here, “Aus dem beruflichen Alltag,” 32-35, the main protagonist, Lore, confuses the praise awarded her by her boss with sexual interest, prompting her to pursue him and when he ultimately decides to stay with his wife, Lore commits suicide. In her case, her hard work was not for a professional promotion, but rather a personal one.

traveling with someone else, presumably a man. The narrator warns that one should not hitchhike alone in the evenings, for something could happen. This something remains ambiguous and beyond this point, the paragraph becomes problematic. The narrator gives us justification for her warnings about hitchhiking by giving an anecdote: "Sie sind schon mal in eine ganz andere Richtung gefahren, nur weil der LKW-Fahrer gesagt hat, daß er nicht an die polnische Ostseeküste fährt, sondern woandershin und es dort viel schöner ist als da, wo er nicht hinfährt" (10). The truck driver did not drive them to where they wanted to go, claiming that it would be much nicer where he was going. Usually the destination is clarified before the hitchhiker gets into the vehicle, so this apparent change of direction lends a negative, and somewhat dangerous, connotation. It shows how these women are powerless, since they have no control over the vehicle or the driver. The male-female power struggle comes to light. *Woandershin* could refer to anywhere. It possibly refers to an unwanted sexual encounter. The specificity of this paragraph is rather alarming. The details of this experience are not so general as to likely apply to more than one woman's experience, one would hope, yet the sentence formulation is such that common experience is suggested, the subject still appearing in the plural.

That the women fall under the power of the truck driver is in keeping with the pattern that has been established throughout this story. The women are subservient, regardless of how emancipated they pretend to be. Their children are ungrateful and they are treated poorly by their partners and even strange men. "So lernen sie die Welt kennen" (10) is the tacked-on phrase that directly succeeds the truck driver experience. Set off from the rest of the paragraph, it is implied that this comment refers to the entire paragraph that precedes it. It appears that these women are

learning about the world through travelling, but they are doing it the hard way. What they learn appears to be the continued dominance of men and their powerlessness in the face of this.

The final paragraph tries to end on a positive note. After having subtly criticised and exposed her single friends for who they really are, the narrator focusses on some good qualities they have. These single women are generous and reliable; they make good friends. They help out wherever it is necessary: "Sie leihen einem ein Ohr oder ein Buch, je nachdem. Wenn sie Geld hätten, würden sie auch das borgen" (10). The query that comes to mind is whether these women give too much, in general. Low self-esteem, attributed to these women at the beginning of the story, often translates into an eagerness to please. From what the narrator has related about their experiences, this often results in their being exploited by others. The story ends on a personal note. The girlfriends re-establish their friendships on the outside that had been temporarily terminated owing to the new boyfriend who is no longer present.

The conflict between reality and illusion is present throughout the story. Helga Schubert uses irony to emphasise the contradiction between dependence and independence. The women try to present themselves as emancipated, independent single women who do not need men in their lives, but in reality they are dependent on men, constantly in and out of unsatisfying relationships, still, for the most part, filling the traditional role of the woman at home, in addition to their new role as working women. GDR society facilitated the move towards independence for women, but it still was not easy. The pieces of this story fit together to form the mosaic that Helga Schubert spoke of. The emancipation question, "are women really emancipated in the GDR?" is raised repeatedly. The gender roles between which women were struggling in the

1970s are in play throughout every contradiction in the story. The emancipation of women is a personal, as well as political, issue for women; the narrator's close commentary on the process of emancipation that these women are undergoing provides a personal view of the situation in which her single friends find themselves.

At this point I wish to analyse some stories from *Lauter Leben* to which Grant did not turn her attention, and in which the emancipation question is evident. I endeavour to complement Grant's work and present this pervasive issue in Helga Schubert's first collection of short stories.

iv. Analysis of "Das späte Mädchen"

"Das späte Mädchen" is the third story in *Lauter Leben*. It is a relatively long story: six and a half pages. The length is necessary for it is a story depicting change, in which the original state must first be described before the transformation can be recognized and deemed significant. A third-person narrator tells the story of Erika, a 53-year old virgin who has inherited her parents' estate. Her parents always looked after her and taught her to be frugal, thus Erika is a wealthy woman. When she was young, her controlling mother arranged for her to marry a soldier, long-distance, merely in order to get an extra coal card. Erika had only met him once before their symbolic marriage and never saw him again, since he was killed at Stalingrad. Evidence for the distanced narrative perspective is the narrator's frequent use of the titles *Frau* and *Fräulein* preceding Erika's name, and is confirmed when the reader does not learn of Erika's feelings about the marriage to her husband or his death. The narrator refers to Erika as *Fräulein* Erika

once, when describing her maiden status at her symbolic wedding (21), and as *Frau* Erika throughout to designate her married and then widowed state. Two exceptions are notable near the end of the story: the narrator refers to her as Erika when she is telling Elfriede about her new boyfriend's visit and also when listing her duties (26). The absence of the title indicates that Erika has returned to a state of girlhood for a time, since during the rest of the story no title is given when the narrator tells of Erika's youth. Erika's mother sent her daughter to a school run by nuns to be educated and afterwards Erika secured a life-long position in the office of a state-owned (*volkseigenen*) company. Her position is presumably a clerical one, a typical job for women in both the GDR and the West. After her husband's death, Erika did not remarry or develop a social life, at least partly owing to her mother's dominating influence: "Die Zeit war angefüllt mit Sparen und den Warnungen der Mutter vor Männern" (22). While they were alive, Erika was controlled by her parents and, therefore, did not experience autonomy. Her mother even made efforts so as to control her from beyond the grave, by buying her enough household articles before her death.

Here Helga Schubert offers an ironic twist to the story: after the death of her parents, Erika discovers that the man her mother married was not her biological father. Her mother had always presented herself as an upstanding individual and had kept this secret from her only daughter. Appearances and reality are contrasted. A hypocrite, she had called Erika's distant husband a *Hurenbock* for having had an illegitimate child, while she was guilty of the same offence. Erika learns only later from the neighbours: "Die Mutter ist jedem Kerl nachgelaufen, von dem sie hoffte, daß er sie nimmt, und war froh, daß sie überhaupt noch einen Mann

abbekam" (22-23). Again, the reader does not learn Erika's reaction to the news, implying a distance between the protagonist and the narrator. This information provided by the neighbours explains a few things: Erika's mother had desperately needed to find a man to support her and her child, since for her generation motherhood out of wedlock would have been a terrible disgrace and left her in poverty. It therefore stands to reason that her mother did not want Erika to have to go through the same ordeal that she herself had experienced. Though her intentions may have been honourable, Erika's mother is depicted in a negative light. Schubert clearly disdains such a controlling individual. Her mother made sure that Erika would never be in want of anything: "Du brauchst dir nie mehr was zu kaufen, wir haben für dich ausgesorgt, sagte die Mutter" (23). Her parents' saving and planning plus Erika's guaranteed employment would allow her to maintain a comfortable lifestyle without having to depend on a man. The story gives no indication as to Erika's income, thus it is impossible to predict how comfortable she would be without her inheritance. She would likely be in a similar financial situation to that of those *alleinstehenden Freundinnen* who did not have children to support. Her mother's generation of women were dependent on men to support them, especially if they had children, whereas the women of Erika's generation are attaining at least some degree of independence because they are working outside the home. In this story Schubert depicts both extremes of women's roles: Erika, the contemporary, and her mother, the traditional. She also provides a third female character who fills both roles simultaneously.

The gender roles that Erika and her mother represent are contrasted. No mention is made of whether her mother ever worked outside the home. Erika's mother embodies the dependent

woman. She was supported by her husband, whereas Erika is working full time and supports herself, though her parents' estate has provided an excellent financial foundation. In two and a half pages, Schubert sets the stage for the story by revealing Erika's upbringing and present status. For many years, Erika allowed herself to be controlled by her mother; however, once her parents pass away, Erika does not stagnate forever: one year after she is left alone in the house, she finally ventures to change her pattern one time and, in doing so, achieves happiness. This is evidenced by her supervisor's comment: "Mit Ihnen ist was, sagt der Chef, Sie sind so gut gelaunt" (26), whereas early in the story the narrator describes Erika in her single state as being neither happy nor unhappy: "Traurig ist dieses Leben nicht, aber schön auch wieder nicht" (23). Schubert's use of irony is evident here: Before her transformation, Erika's life seems rather *lifeless*. Society considers 53-year old singles in a negative light, i.e., in general, society thinks it is a bad thing to be alone at this age, and this depiction certainly supports this view. Far from being a carefree single woman, who is empowered and happy on her own, Erika is financially independent, but has emotional needs that are unmet. Only twice a year does she attend social events, and both are work-related: "das Betriebsvergnügen und der Theaterbesuch mit der Brigade" (23). The designation *Betriebsvergnügen* is rather curious, in that the actual entertainment is not specified, and sounds far too official to be much fun. The people at these functions are those she already knows and works with, so there is little chance for her to find a companion there. Indeed, these two events are also just a part of the routine she has followed for over thirty years.

Not long after her parents die, Erika decides to have the exterior of her house renovated in an attempt to stave off boredom during the summer and fall, this reasoning pointing to a rather unsatisfying life. The renovation of the house is a metaphor for the lifestyle change that Erika undergoes. The once submissive daughter, who used to follow her parents' direction, organizes the manpower and materials that are needed for the job, locating a source of stone chips and arranging the purchase. It should be reiterated that by this point in the story, the reader has been introduced to two women: Erika, financially independent but alone, and her mother, a dependent housewife. Conversely the personalities of these women seem paradoxical: Erika, though financially independent, is submissive; her mother, dependent, was dominant. The wife of the man from whom she is to acquire the stone chips appears at first to be a housewife as well: "Die Frau steht in der Küche, alles ist sehr sauber und ordentlich und der Kauf schnell besiegelt" (24). Now these two women are contrasted: Erika is doing business, whereas the man's wife is depicted in a clean and orderly kitchen. The two roles that women fill, separately or simultaneously, are presented in one short line.

As independent as Erika appears, however, this man seems to feel that he must support her: "Eine alleinstehende Witwe, das erfuhr er beim Kaffee, will er gern unterstützen" (24). His natural assumption is that her status as a single widow indicates need on her part. This is ironic, since Erika was never dependent on her husband; they never lived together as a married couple. The man's offer is a fair one, since he is referring to his truck, with which he might transport the stone. It is, however, the indication that he would gladly "support" Erika, *eine alleinstehende Witwe*, that points to traditional gender roles. Schubert has worded this exchange in such a way

as to highlight traditional gender dynamics. He could have simply offered to transport the stone, without the justification of doing it to help the single widow, a designation that belittles Erika. Now connected to this man are a capable wife in the kitchen and a single widow presumably in need of help. When he makes the delivery, Erika invites him in and learns more about his family. He and his wife are apparently separated but still living in the house together “. . . bis das Mädchen aus der Schule und der Junge aus der Lehre ist” (24). The man’s description of his wife’s double role is both enlightening and ironic: “Die Frau arbeitet im Gastwirtschaftsgewerbe abends und nachts und er in der Fabrik in Schicht. . . . Zu Hause machen sie noch zusammen Mittag und Abendbrot. Und die Frau wäscht für ihn. Sie hat viel zu tun, denn sie muß ja für vier Personen sorgen” (24). His wife runs the household, takes care of the family and works full-time as well.⁴² The fact that they apparently make meals together does show some progress towards emancipation in the home, but is hardly enough to relieve this woman of her burden, *Doppelbelastung*, substantially. He admits that his wife is overworked, but does not undertake to help her (beyond meal preparation), take on half of the responsibilities at home or even do his own laundry. Ironically, he would gladly help a single widow outside his home, and leaves his wife overworked at the same time. The sentiments expressed in chapter one of this thesis pertaining to the need for a shift in men’s roles and responsibilities are echoed here. Erika’s new male friend even admits that Erika’s situation is better: “Frau Erika hat es besser. sagt er” (24).

In both of her encounters with this man, Erika finds herself attracted to him. One indication is her self-consciousness regarding her age, which she does not tell him at first;

⁴²Part-time work was not encouraged, thus hard to qualify for in the GDR.

another clue is the comment: "Er nimmt einen guten Eindruck mit, glaubt sie" (24). She clearly cares what his impression of her is. Further evidence is her consultation with her neighbour, Elfriede. Erika's choice in a *confidante* is a conscious one: "Die [Elfriede] kann schweigen und kennt die Männer. Sie ist die richtige Vertraute" (24). Elfriede is a good friend. She wants to help her friend in her new relationship, and is protective at the same time. Elfriede is immediately suspicious of the man's supposed separation. They ponder the possibilities for discovering its validity; Elfriede finally decides it would be best to invite him for the weekend and see whether this poses a problem, i.e., whether he is able to stay away from home overnight. When he calls to ask Erika how the renovations are proceeding, she invites him to come over and see for himself the following Saturday afternoon. Without hesitation he accepts the invitation and this time arrives in his Sunday suit. Elfriede comes over to investigate and observes his reaction when she suggests Erika sell the house. When he agrees with her: "Richtig, sagt der Mann, endlich jemand Vernünftiges" (25), Elfriede satisfies herself that he is not after her friend's house. Erika has prepared for her new friend's visit. It seems that she had either rejected or suppressed her femininity to this point, but is now beginning to rediscover it: "Frau Erika hat am Vormittag das Wohnzimmer und das Schlafzimmer geheizt und sich auf Elfriedes Rat nicht die Liebestöter [long underwear] angezogen. Sie hat auch den BH an, der seit einundsechzig im Wäschefach lag. Und am Vormittag trug sie im Pony drei Lockenwickler" (25). She is wearing a bra and has put curlers in her hair, but is not yet the embodiment of traditional womanly household competency: her laundry remains dirty and she has to do her dishes in the wrong place. She is determined not to let her guest see this, though: ". . . er darf auf keinen Fall sehen daß die Schüsseln im

Abwaschtisch voller Stoffflicken sind und sie deshalb im Ausguß abwaschen muß" (25). Illusion and reality clash: Erika tries to hide the truth, wanting to convey the image that she can be a good housewife; however, when she gets a tablecloth out of the cupboard, he sees how untidy it is. He kindly offers to help: "Dabei helfe ich Ihnen mal, sagt er" (26). Again, this is a situation in which it seems that he questions her competency and offers to help; it is unlikely that this offer is born out of a desire to uphold the ideals of gender equality. We already know that he is rooted in traditional gender dynamics by observing the division of labour within his family unit.

When Elfriede enquires about the visit after his departure, she learns that Erika has told him her age and his response is a comforting one: "Ich werde ja auch älter . . ." (26). He claims he liked her from the beginning because she dared to do something: she arranged to have her house fixed up singlehandedly. He explains that his wife is unfortunately not like that. The irony is evident. Firstly, how could his wife possibly dare to do anything out of the ordinary? She is far too busy. What he values in Erika is something that she is in a position to possess by virtue of her abundance of free time. Secondly, Erika had never dared do anything like this before. She would not even go dancing when her parents were still alive because it would have meant parting with ten marks each time. Indeed, Elfriede remarks that Erika should not let on how *trantutig* (unmotivated, lethargic) she had been before. In other words, Erika should hide the reality of her identity and create an illusory self, or become someone she has never been before. Elfriede gives her friend advice on how to be more feminine: "Zieh deine gute Sachen an, da kommen bloß die Motten rein. Geh zum Friseur. Kauf die ein Paar neue Winterstiefel, die mit der Schnalle hinten waren vor zehn Jahren modern. Und kauf dir ein Parfüm. Und endlich schwarze Wäsche" (26).

Though the man clearly liked Erika as she was, she follows Elfriede's advice. She suddenly has much more to do. Will she soon end up as busy as this man's wife? At work her (male) boss notices something different about her - she is in a good mood - which he attributes to the presence of workers at her house. That her boss is male is also typical for the GDR.

That very evening, she and Elfriede already discuss whether she will marry this man. Though the couple has not yet talked about marriage, her new male friend has future plans for cleaning out her house and relaxing in the garden, but for now he will only visit on weekends. Though Erika has divulged the "secret" about her age, he has not told her why he is separated. He, therefore, remains in the more powerful position, having more information about her than she does about him. The secrecy around his separation lends some suspense to the story, which withholds information as to the final outcome of this relationship; however, Erika thinks realistically and decides that even if they only stay together for a year, she will now heat the house on weekends and plant flowers in the spring. Now that there is a man in her life, she will change her routine and do things to make her house more pleasant, not for herself on a regular basis, but for him, when he is around. She would not go to this trouble merely for herself. Deep down, she cannot believe that it is this easy: "Und ganz innen kann sie es noch nicht glauben, daß es so einfach ist" (27).

Schubert concludes the story with eight dependent clauses. The first seven refer directly to Erika's new boyfriend, the eighth to her own change in behaviour that led to this new relationship. Erika's near disbelief in and excitement about her new situation are aptly conveyed through these sentence fragments, which follow rapidly on the heels of one another. The

fragments represent a shedding of the layers of concern that her upbringing had caused her to develop. She had been alone for so long, that Erika can hardly believe she has a boyfriend. She is finally recognising her ability to determine the course of her own life, now that her parents are gone. She is empowered. She can have a man over to the house without fear of reprimand: "Daß er einfach kommen kann, und keiner schimpft mit ihr" (27). Her age is not a deterrent to this man and he is not after her wealth. She is amazed that he liked her from the very beginning. She was lacking in self-confidence before she met him, as is evident from her surprise at his interest in her. Her new relationship and fledgling self-confidence are attributed to the fact that one time she ventured to do something out of the ordinary: "Weil sie einmal war wie vorher noch nie" (27).

The ending conveys hope: one need not remain stuck in a certain routine forever. As stated elsewhere in this thesis, Schubert hopes her stories will show her readers that reality is malleable and empower people to make changes in their lives. This is certainly one such story. Throughout the course of the tale, the reader is also exposed to the emancipation question. The reader sees both extremes of women's roles, traditional and contemporary, as represented by Erika's mother and Erika herself, and also meets a woman who is fulfilling both roles simultaneously. Where Erika's mother focused merely on family, and Erika only on work, the wife of Erika's new friend must combine both. This is the *Doppelbelastung* referred to in chapter one and it is likely that this is at least part of the reason as to why her husband is straying. A typical GDR man, still stuck in the traditional role, he expects his wife to do his laundry for him, while he, paradoxically, at the same time covets Erika's ability to undertake things his wife would never have the time for. Erika's new-found autonomy, i.e., that she is not controlled by her

parents anymore and makes big decisions on her own (renovating the house, buying stone chips herself instead of paying someone else to do it), and the wife's apparent lack of it are contrasted (she is still doing her husband's laundry and they still live together, showing that she does not have the confidence or the resources to take the kids and leave him). The predicament of working mothers and wives is cleverly displayed. Erika, a single woman, works full time and is financially independent, but wants to be in a relationship with a man. The message is one also present in "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen": women who are single cannot really be happy. Erika's work-only status not only left her lonely but also bereft of femininity. This was a typical stereotype for single working women in society; however, with the advice of her friend Elfriede, whose status we curiously do not learn, Erika sets about to discover femininity. Erika must also now live up to her partially-projected image that attracted this man to begin with. The counsel of her friend is to hide her past behaviour, since the man is attracted by Erika's newly acquired empowerment.

Erika is undergoing a transformation, during which time reality and illusion are in conflict. Contrasts are evident throughout the story, beginning with Erika's discovery of her mother's hypocrisy, continuing in her attempt at playing the role of housewife and her plans to change her outer image. Contrasting traditional and contemporary women's roles are also depicted. "Das späte Mädchen" is both a representation of the existing difficulties surrounding gender roles in GDR society and a hopeful story of change. The *spät* in the title refers to a late bloomer who discovers her ability to make positive changes in her life, even at the age of 53. That the author approves of Erika's transformation is evident in the way she describes Erika's

life after the change. The description of Erika's life while her mother was alive is dreary and oppressive: "Zu Lebzeiten der Eltern kam Frau Erika immer pünktlich von der Arbeit nach Hause und ging auch nie tanzen. Da hätte sie ja zehn Mark rauswerfen müssen. . . . Nun sitzt sie da mit ihren dreiundfünfzig Jahren, ihrer guten Stellung und ihrem reichen Erbe, allein in ihrem Haus, oben und unten" (23). Once she is on her own in the house, she experiences a cold and solitary existence, evidenced by her not bothering to heat the house: "Wenn sie im Winter nach Hause kommt, lohnt sich das Heizen nicht" (23). Her sandwich is her only bed companion, the television her only entertainment. She is the epitome of boredom and loneliness; however, she acts like a girl once she has a man in her life, hence the title word *Mädchen* and the narrator's reference to her in the present tense without the title *Frau* on two occasions (26). Suddenly she makes contact with her friend Elfriede and thinks of planting flowers. Rejuvenation and colour now characterise her dramatically improved quality of life, over which she now has control.

v. Analysis of "Das Bein"

"Das Bein" is a four-page third-person narrative in which Schubert succinctly portrays the personality of a young female doctor by describing two mishaps that befall her. There is no evidence of an unreliable narrator. Moreover, the report-like style combined with the non-judgemental stance of the narrator (no personal commentary is directed at the protagonist) and the fact that Schubert is a psychologist, i.e., a professional caregiver like the protagonist, all lead me to conclude that the authorial and narrative voices are one and the same. As alluded to earlier, Schubert states that she has always written about herself and her experiences with people. In this

snapshot, she provides some evidence of the emancipation of women in the GDR. In the 1970s, it was commonplace there for women to become doctors, whereas the Western world has lagged behind in this respect.⁴³ Schubert respects the character she presents here, though she shows how Käthe's virtuous qualities sometimes lead her to neglect herself. Käthe is on holiday before taking her first posting, but nevertheless responds to the call of a sick neighbour, and in doing so slips and has a terrible fall on the woman's highly polished stairs: "Die Nachbarin hat die Stufen gebohnert, damit sie wie Linoleum aussehen . . . Käthe [geht] wieder, rutscht aus und fällt die Treppe hinunter, die gebohnert ist, damit sie wie Linoleum aussieht" (28). The repetition of the phrase concerning the highly polished stairs is an ironic device used by Schubert. The suggested pride in the appearance of the stairs seems absurd when viewed in light of the danger that they present. In the process of aiding an ailing neighbour, Käthe ends up in the hospital herself.

Käthe's self-confidence and expertise is evidenced in the way that she deals with the ambulance attendants, directing them to splint her leg and take her to the hospital where she had worked as a student. She almost loses her leg, but, owing to her medical knowledge and assertiveness, Käthe convinces the doctors to perform a very expensive and advanced surgical operation that she had learned about in a lecture. Unfortunately, Käthe has very little money and her insurance has lapsed, likely due to her transitory status, as neither student nor working doctor: "Aber sie ist nicht mehr und noch nicht wieder versichert" (29). It seems ironic that a doctor should have no medical insurance. By virtue of the socialist system, however, the

⁴³Consider the number of female doctors one finds in Canada who are now in their 50s: very few, if any. It was a surprise to me when I visited a female doctor of this age group in the former East Berlin. It seemed very odd, as I had only ever had male family doctors of that generation. Of course, there are now at least as many women as men entering the profession in Canada.

surgeons are able to go through official channels to schedule the surgery and take care of the insurance. The surgery is successful and as soon as she can put weight on her leg, she takes a taxi home. Her precarious financial situation to this point is evident here: “Zum erstmal in ihrem Leben nimmt sie sich eine Taxe, sonst ist ihr das zu teuer, lieber läuft sie zwanzig Kilometer” (30). This is also an indication that Käthe is an energetic individual, which will be confirmed throughout the rest of the story. She is not lethargic, as Erika was.

In fact, she goes to work immediately, far too early, feeling guilty at having cost the system so much money. Everyone is amazed at Käthe, that she is at work so soon. Käthe is presented as a type of superwoman, who overcomes all obstacles to do her duty to society. She is, however, self-driven, not controlled by society, as Erika was controlled by her mother. A young professional woman, she is an example of the new female image in the GDR. She is, however, a member of the care-giving sector, a field in which women in the GDR were generally over-represented.⁴⁴ Schubert presents Käthe as being totally dedicated to her work. No mention is made of her personal life at all, which might lead one to assume that she is too deeply immersed in her work to have a relationship. Schubert presents Käthe in a snapshot, however, not mentioning her background, family or hobbies, so the omission of details about any men in her life is likely intentional and not meant to imply that she will be a “spinster.”

Four years pass and Käthe is doing better financially, as evidenced by her possession of a car. Unfortunately, she gets into another freak accident. This time her knee is injured and, though in terrible pain, she knows to wait for the haematoma to develop before having an x-ray. The

⁴⁴Please see Chapter 1, p. 7.

following day the surgeon who examines her knee tells her not to walk on it, somehow realising the futility of his advice: "Laufen Sie nicht, sagt resigniert der Chirurg" (31). She goes to work anyway, on crutches, in order not to let down one patient who has come a long distance to see her. Though she puts this patient ahead of her own needs, it appears that she might be learning to take care of herself after all, since she allows another doctor to take on the rest of her patients.

In this story, there is no sign of gender conflict; however, Käthe comes across as a good model of a young professional woman in the GDR. Schubert does not use Käthe as propaganda, as Anna Seghers would have done. Through depiction of this character, the author is simply exposing her readers to an aspect of everyday life in the GDR. Käthe is similar to Erika in that she is financially independent; however, their relationship to their work is completely different. For Erika, who has no university education, work is a matter of routine: "Zu Lebzeiten der Eltern kam Frau Erika immer pünktlich von der Arbeit nach Hause. . ." (23). In contrast, Käthe's work is practically a way of life. She sometimes neglects herself, consumed by dedication to her profession. She must, however, learn to achieve some balance. After Käthe's first injury, she returns to work much too soon; but, after the second one, she is willing to let another doctor take all of her cases, save one. Schubert's ironic flavour remains pervasive: Käthe begins to realise that she must take care of herself; it is an important lesson for a health professional responsible for teaching others to do this. Similar to Erika, though in not as dramatic a fashion, she alters her behaviour in a positive way. The reader assumes that Käthe has, however, always had a sense of dignity, as she recognises her worthiness in that she pursued the study of medicine and now holds this honourable position in society to which she is fully committed. Erika, on the other hand,

seems to gain dignity over time, her self-worth increasing through undertaking the renovation of the house and beginning a relationship with a man. The protagonist in the following story is, however, bereft of dignity.

vi. Analysis of “Resi”

“Resi” is five pages long, divided into fifteen distinct paragraphs. “Das späte Mädchen” and “Das Bein” did not feature paragraphs set off by blank lines as do “Meine alleinstehende Freundinnen” and “Resi.” This formatting suggests that each paragraph is an entity by itself and should be considered distinct. “Das späte Mädchen” and “Das Bein” are narrative stories that simply flow from one paragraph to the next, telling a cohesive story, whereas the offset paragraphs suggest a series of snapshots. A third-person narrator tells the situation of Resi, a GDR woman, probably in her mid-30s. The narrative voice is once again synonymous with the authorial voice, the style of the story report-like, the narrator simply telling of Resi and not offering any explicit criticism. Schubert uses short sentences in the present tense to list Resi’s activities, indicating habitual behaviour. Resi has a weekly routine encompassing different housecleaning, housekeeping and babysitting jobs, all typical “women’s work.” In the first paragraph, we learn what housekeeping duties she carries out to earn fifteen marks, tax free, on Mondays. The second paragraph describes her after-work routine at the residence of employer, who seems generous, offering her coffee, a meal and sometimes even a used pair of shoes or children’s things for her nephew. Though she does not earn much money at this job, she receives

food and gifts, and is even able to bring her nephew along to work when there is a school holiday.

The narrator states in the third paragraph that Resi is poor. This is surprising, considering that she lives in a socialist society, which one would expect to have a safety net in place for those who are unemployed or disabled. Fortunately, she is able to rely on a network of people - friends, family and employers - to help her survive. Resi lives rent-free with her brother's family and the woman who feeds her on Tuesdays also pays her insurance. On Wednesdays and Thursdays she eats at home in return for watching her nephew while her sister-in-law is working at a restaurant part-time. As previously mentioned, restaurant work, i.e., waitressing, is often female. We learn in paragraph four that a friend of hers is a furrier's assistant and sews a new fur collar into Resi's winter coat every other year. Resi has little autonomy; however, though clearly dependent on many people, she refuses to be dependent on a husband. Indeed, on Fridays she cooks for her widowed brother-in-law and stays overnight. Later in the story, in the thirteenth paragraph, we learn that she sleeps with him in the same bed, but nothing happens between them; at least, she hopes that he will not try anything: "Und als er sich im Schlaf in ihr Bett dreht, hängt sie fast draußen" (78). Apparently he wants to marry her once the mourning period is over, so that he has someone to take care of him. She does not like the way he enjoys arguing and is not clearly not interested in a sexual relationship with him: "Er soll gesagt haben, daß sie ihm bloß die Wirtschaft zu machen braucht. Aber sie kennt die Männer" (78).

In fact, she is not interested in marrying at all. Paragraph six is about a boyfriend who visits sometimes on weekends. In her youth she had wanted to marry him, though he was already

married, but now she is no longer interested in looking after a man: "Doch jetzt braucht sie keinen mehr zum Heiraten. Bloß immer Socken waschen. . . . Jetzt sagt sie sich, wozu mit einem Kerl belasten" (76). She has a support system in place now and is described as being content with her life and friends. For Resi, at this point, a husband would be more trouble than he is worth. It seems unlikely that she was in a position in the past in which she needed to marry for financial support, since she had had a good job at Osram, in the West, before the wall went up. Her current lack of full-time employment is partly her own choice, but is also due to a problem with her eyes, preventing her from working as a tailor, the discipline she had studied. She made a conscious decision to work as a cleaning lady because: "Die Leute reißen sich um einen, und man hat sein Mittagessen" (76). It seems that cleaning ladies were in high demand in the GDR. The promise of a meal also makes the position attractive to Resi, who must otherwise rely on family for most of her food. Though Schubert describes Resi as though she is content with her situation, her extreme dependence on others leaves her with little dignity.

The reader learns more about Resi's youth and free time activities in paragraphs seven and eight. Resi used to go out a lot and have flings, judging a potential partner by whether he would buy her a drink or not: "Mittwochs kamen immer die Geschäftsleute. Und wenn sie einen an die Bar einladen und was springen ließen, wußte man gleich, die waren nett. Dann hat man sich verabredet" (77). Now she plays cards with two girlfriends. They save their winnings for a yearly bus tour, lunch included, and their New Year's Eve celebration. The money is tight, as evidenced by the exact listing of items on which it will be spent for their festivities: "Für neun Pfannkuchen, drei Bratwürste, eine Flasche Rotwein, Salzstangen und eine Flasche Spezi" (77).

In paragraph nine we learn more about Resi's girlfriends. One divorced her husband just prior to his accidental death. Resi thinks her friend should have waited a few weeks; she could have benefited from his life insurance policy. Her other friend is having an affair with a younger married man who lives in her building and whose unsuspecting wife buys vegetables from her, thus she must be a cashier in a grocery store. Her two friends celebrate New Year's Eve with Resi, since none of them have men to spend it with. The way that their stories are told, at a distance and with little or no insight into their feelings, does not suggest that any of them regret their status.

Though she is not a mother, Resi does have contact with children. She takes on some of the responsibility for her nephew, as mentioned previously, bringing him to work on Mondays during school holidays and taking him on elevators and escalators for fun, an activity for which his parents are "too old." Some criticism is evident here in that it is suggested that her sister-in-law does not relate to her son as well as Resi does. Resi's sister-in-law must also work during the day, which explains why Resi would bring her nephew along to work with her on school holidays. By virtue of the time that she spends with him, she knows what his needs are better than his mother does: "Resi kauft ihm [her nephew] auch Schnellhefter. Seine Mutter weiß ja gar nicht, was das ist" (77). The disadvantages of being a working mother are expressed here. Resi appears to actually be in a better situation in some respects. She has a man (her boyfriend) and a child (her nephew) sporadically, but not full-time. In the end, she is not entirely responsible for either, but can enjoy spending some time with each of them.

Paragraph eleven springs to an entirely different topic: religion. Here again, gender roles are called into question. Resi is Catholic and the narrator relates what we assume are Resi's beliefs: it is better for a Catholic woman to marry a Protestant man than for the opposite to occur, since it is important that the children learn to pray properly and the responsibility for this usually falls to the mother: "Eine Mutter achtet doch mehr auf so was" (78). All of Resi's sisters married Protestant men: "Da ging es gut. Aber der richtige Glaube ist es nicht" (78). The references to religion come as somewhat of a surprise, for the GDR was officially unsupportive of religion. Then indented, but not entirely separated from the piece on religion, are a few sentences about tonsils. The connection is not clear at first, but soon reveals itself to be "belief." The narrator informs the reader that it is not right to have one's tonsils out; one contracts illnesses as a result of this. Resi's mother would not let anyone take out the children's tonsils, whereas a cure for the shingles is attempted by incantation: "Wenn man Gürtelrose hat, muß man sie besprechen lassen. Aber man muß daran glauben. Wenn ihr was hilft, dann glaubt Resi auch daran" (78). The theme connecting these paragraphs is belief; ironically, both the contradiction and paradoxical similarity between religion and magic come to light. A devoted Catholic family that has faith in magic to cure shingles is curious indeed. Perhaps it indicates that their beliefs are not very deeply rooted.

The theme of sickness carries on into paragraph twelve. Resi, the one unmarried woman in the family, twice takes on the task of caring for a dying relative: "Resi hat schon zweimal jemand in den Tod gepflegt. Erst die Mutter, weil alle Geschwister aus dem Haus waren und sie als einzige unverheiratet. Später die Schwester" (78). Here we are exposed to Resi's grief: "Resi wußte, daß die Schwester Krebs hatte, und sie weinte oft, beim Kaffee Montag um sechzehn

Uhr" (78). She took six weeks off to care for her sister. The husband does not take any responsibility for his dying wife, leaving this care-giving role to the female, Resi: "Der Mann und die Kinder sollten nicht gestört werden. Die mußten doch am nächsten Tag wieder arbeiten" (78). The connection between men and work is emphasised as is the division of gender roles. The man is the breadwinner and the woman, the caregiver. That Resi is the one left to look after her dying relatives shows that she is clearly at the mercy of others. This does not come as a surprise, considering the extent to which she is forced to depend on those around her in order to survive herself. When her sister dies, relatives from West Berlin come to the funeral. They give Resi fifty *Westmark*, with which she visits the intershop where she is subject to poor service: "Als sie dran ist, läßt die Verkäuferin sie erst mal warten" (79). It is likely that Resi looks as poor as she is and the saleswoman treats her as if she does not belong in there, quashing what little dignity, if any, Resi might have had. Nevertheless, Resi proves herself generous buying food and cigarettes in preparation for her girlfriends' visit on the weekend. The final paragraph returns Resi to work on Monday, where she began in paragraph one. This time she brings a chocolate bar along to give to her employer as a gift: "Am nächsten Montag bringt Resi eine Tafel Kinderschokolade mit und schenkt sie. Sie hat so viel davon, und Kinder essen so was gern, sagt sie" (79). This implies that her employer has at least one child. Despite her poverty, when Resi has money, she gives generously. This attribute could be a contributing factor to her poor financial state, since those who always give their money away rarely become wealthy.

In Resi the reader discovers a woman who is simultaneously independent and dependent. She is independent of men, i.e., she does not want or need to get married. She does work, but for

such little pay that she is poor, forcing her to be dependent on a network of family, friends and employers for support in terms of accommodations, meals and clothing, affording her little or no dignity. Her widowed brother-in-law apparently wants to marry her so that she will take care of him, but she is not interested. Resi does typical women's work: housecleaning, babysitting and cooking for her brother-in-law. The other minor female characters have jobs in fields that are traditional for women: the service industry (sister-in-law), textiles (friend), grocery store (friend) and retail sales (intershop woman). Resi herself had studied to be a tailor, a more gender-neutral career, but can no longer do this work because of her poor eyesight. If corrective surgery or eyewear are possible solutions, they are probably beyond her means. Resi proves herself to be a caregiver, thereby fitting the female stereotype. Both men described in the story fill traditional roles as far as is evidenced; especially the widowed brother-in-law would offer no help around the house. Thus, gender roles and their often inherent disproportionate division of labour are portrayed in this story. Some indications are given that motherhood and the working world are difficult to combine successfully.

vii. Analysis of "Trauriger Tag"

Over the course of four pages, the third-person narrator tells of stonemason's wife who combines work and family successfully. Despite being overextended, she manages to perform all of her duties well and does not complain. As in the previous stories, the narrative voice and authorial voice are indistinguishable. The main protagonist helps her husband with his business, by listening to the customers' stories and taking their orders. The opening line stands on its own:

“Ihr Mann macht Grabdenkmäler” (89), the wording suggesting that her husband and his business are the main focus of her life. Owing to their proximity to the cemetery, even when the shop is closed, people simply ring at the apartment, thus home and work are not separate entities for this woman. This young woman’s exceptional way with people has spread by word of mouth; people come from afar to order gravestones from her. Like Erika before her transformation, she has no social life whatsoever, save a visit to the theatre once a year on her birthday: “. . . sie ist eigentlich immer zu Hause. Da muß sie schon Geburtstag haben und ihren Mann bitten, kauf mir nichts, ich wünsch mir nur Theaterkarten. Dann ist sie abends nicht zu Hause” (89). In contrast to Erika, who has Elfriede, this young woman appears to have no friends at all. The main protagonist conforms to her husband’s needs and schedule, appearing to be the embodiment of submission. Once he has gone to work, she gets up, prepares for the day, makes breakfast and lunches for the children and cleans the house before opening the shop at 8 a.m. Clearly, she is performing the double role that many GDR women were subject to, though in this case, since the business is owned by her husband, her financial independence is a question that remains unaddressed. If there are no customers, she gilds engravings, a task for which she has a natural talent, while her husband does all the heavy work, as is typical. As we learned in chapter one, this is one of the reasons why men earned more than women in the GDR: the heavier work was better paid.

The husband is a traditional man, who not only has little to do with the household, the children or their care, but is also very possessive of his wife. The traditional gender roles are pointedly portrayed:

Die schwere Arbeit macht ihr Mann. Er macht nur eine kurze Frühstückspause, ißt kurz zu Mittag, wenn die Kinder schon am Tisch sitzen, und kommt nur für eine halbe Stunde zum Abendbrot. Dann geht er noch mal in die Werkstatt, der Geselle hat Feierabend, und sie muß die Kinder ins Bett bringen. Vorher spielt sie aber noch Mensch-ärger-dich-nicht mit ihnen. Denn Kinder wollen auch was von der Mutter haben. (90)

This young woman makes a point of spending time with her children. It appears, however, that she has no time for herself. Of her relationship to her husband or his to his children the reader learns very little. Though he is otherwise completely consumed with his work, once a week he drives his wife into town. While she carries out the traditionally female task of buying groceries, he keeps an eye on her: "Ihr Mann fährt sie im Auto, damit sie nicht so schwer tragen muß und er sie immer sehen kann, besorgt und eifersüchtig. Außerdem ist sie so schneller wieder im Geschäft" (90). The adjectives used to describe the husband deserve some attention. Firstly, the question arises as to whose choice of words this is. Does the narrator describe him or is this how the protagonist related her husband's behaviour to the narrator? Secondly, what does this say about the husband's character and feelings for his wife? The adjectives and their context suggest a possessive and controlling personality, wanting his wife back in the shop as quickly as possible to serve his own purposes, i.e., keep business going well.

Proving to be autonomous, alongside taking care of the household and children, she helps her husband in his business, but no one helps her: "Sie hat keinen, der ihr hilft. Ihre Arbeit könnte auch kein anderer machen, die Bücher führen und die Steuern abrechnen. Und mit den Leuten sprechen" (91). This is simultaneously the most difficult and important part of her job. As does the opening line of the story, this line, too, stands alone, demanding attention. The narrator now proves to be intimately familiar with our main protagonist's feelings: "Ein anderer

kann sich nicht vorstellen, wie traurig das ist” (91). The young woman hears only sad stories about the dead. Her therapeutic abilities now come to light. The narrator also proves insightful as to the psychological state of the customers who come to choose a gravestone. Those who say nothing are the ones that this young woman worries about the most. She is a caregiver at heart. This is evident in her understanding of the psychology at work and her ability and desire to help: “Die können den Kummer nicht aus sich herauslassen, sie haben ihn in sich begraben. Ganz tief. Sie weiß, wie sie mit ihnen sprechen muß, damit sie zu weinen anfangen. Da ist dann wie eine Erlösung. Sie hat Angst, daß die Stillen sich sonst zu Hause umbringen. Schon öfter hat sie davon gehört. Von Kollegen ihres Mannes” (91). She is a special person who, even without formal training, is able to help customers to grieve, preventing those who are at risk from committing suicide. Another contrast is evident: her husband’s colleagues are not so fortunate to have someone so gifted deal with their clients.

This young woman gives of herself constantly; however, luckily, not all clients are so demanding of her energy. The narrator offers further insight into the young woman’s feelings about her clients’ situations. For example, the death of an elderly person is a natural situation which does not sadden our protagonist terribly; after all, no one lives forever. Schubert exposes a truth that few would admit, with the brutal, yet realistic comment: “Machmal rechneten auch die Kinder damit [with the death of a parent] und mit dem Zimmer, das dann frei wurde” (91). The young woman finds it more sad when one of an older couple passes on. The narrator comments: “Die Frauen kommen dann noch besser zurecht, die alten Männer weniger. Das Einkaufen und Saubermachen. Ihnen redet sie immer zu, bald in ein Altenwohnheim zu gehen” (91-92). It is

unnecessary for Schubert to formulate an entire sentence around *Einkaufen und Saubermachen*. The point speaks for itself. Men of the older generation have been taken care of all of their lives, so when such a man loses his wife, he cannot cope with the daily household tasks that he had never need worry about in the past. For this reason, women are clearly able to function better if they are widowed. At an advanced age, it is difficult for the men to assume this caregiving role, even simply to care for themselves. Another story I shall look at, "Der Schimmel," also addresses this issue.

The final full paragraph of this story tells of the hardest situation that this young woman must deal with, thankfully seldom. Not only does this passage enlighten us about her limitations, it sheds a critical light on her husband. Here we are offered a window not only onto their relationship, but also his personality. The stark contrast between wife and husband is made evident. When someone comes to order a gravestone for a child, she suddenly cannot cope; she does not know how to comfort the customer: ". . . dann weiß sie nicht, was sie sagen soll. Dann fällt ihr nichts zum Trösten ein. Dann möchte sie rauslaufen und ihren Mann aus der Werkstatt holen, der sowieso mit ihr schimpft, weil sie zu lange mit der Kundschaft spricht, sie soll lieber Inschriften vergolden. Dann soll er den Stein aussuchen und die Inschrift besprechen" (92). The narrator is able to convey her personal feelings and show that this woman who seems to be capable of handling anything does have a breaking point. This passage also alludes to the type of criticism she suffers from her husband. He, ironically, attacks the very behaviour that brings him business: the way his wife handles customers. While she is the embodiment of the care-giver, he proves to be the exact opposite. Even the death of a child would not move him. He is insensitive:

“Ihm [the stonemason] sagen sie [the customers] kein wort zuviel. Und wenn, hört er nicht hin” (92). It is his wife’s effort that keeps his business running so well. That he does not acknowledge her contribution to his success is evident in the first paragraph of the story: “Er redet ja nicht, aber seit er sie geheiratet hat, blüht das Geschäft” (89). He is a traditional husband, expecting his wife to take care of the meals, cleaning and children, making no contribution himself and offering no gratitude.

This story looks at the lives of people involved in a necessary trade that many would not normally think about. Although having a family-owned business is atypical to the GDR, Schubert portrays a female protagonist who fills the contemporary GDR model: she does it all. Like the wife of Erika’s boyfriend, she endures *Doppelbelastung*, as far as we know, without complaint. Their partnership seems to work: the business is flourishing and the family is well. Her contribution, though underappreciated by her husband, is significant and must afford her a sense of accomplishment, pride and dignity. The conclusion of the story shows, however, that there is a limit as to how much she can handle emotionally.

viii. Analysis of “Der Schimmel”

The final story that I will consider in this thesis is mainly concerned with the situation of a lonely elderly man. This six-page story does not focus on the issues which I set out to examine in this thesis, but there are some hints to this effect, which I would like to point out here. Schubert depicts this life from a different perspective; in contrast to most of the stories analysed thus far, this one is told by a male first-person narrator. Since the point of view is male, the

authorial and narrative voices are not one and the same in this story. That only he is afforded a voice in the story points to a self-centered character. One gets the impression that Schubert does not dislike this character; however, she portrays him as a rather pathetic figure. His loneliness leads him to talk to and invite a complete stranger into his home, whom he begs to keep in touch. He mentions his disfigured body: "Ich hab mir bloß meine Strickjacke übergezogen. Da sieht man meinen Buckel nicht so" (110). He tells the woman that the expense of shoe soles and lunch and also boredom with the nightshift have caused him to quit his part-time job, so he is no longer a working member of society, a normal situation for someone his age; however, after having worked and contributed to society all his life, he probably feels somewhat empty because he no longer does so. Though he still functions well enough to continue to live at home, his lonely state has likely robbed him of some of his former dignity, evidenced by the way in which he practically pleads with the young woman not to leave at the end of the story, or at least to write to him: "Bleiben Sie doch noch. Schreiben Sie sich meine Adresse auf, damit Sie mir einen Brief schicken können. Und besuchen Sie mich im Sommer" (115).

Some references in this story indicate the typical situation of women in the GDR in the 1970s. A young woman visits a small town on the Baltic Sea during the winter time, looking for summer accommodations. She has been up and down the street ringing every doorbell, but no one answers. The narrator explains: "Alle sind zur Arbeit" (110). All of the women living on that street are working, leaving no *Hausfrauen* to answer the door. The elderly man approaches and invites the young visitor to his apartment for coffee, assuring her that she need not be concerned for her safety: "Vor mir brauchen Sie keine Angst haben. Ich könnte ja Ihr Großvater sein" (110).

He confides in her: "Ich muß mich langsam dran gewöhnen, daß ich alles allein sauberhalte. Meine Frau ist nämlich gestorben" (111). This man is of an older generation; his wife always looked after the household and he is adjusting to having to look after things himself. Pointing to a photo on the wall, he describes his wife as beautiful, but jealous. The reader determines that the visitor is a young woman, since he claims that should his wife still be alive: "Ouh, da hätte ich Sie nicht mitbringen dürfen" (111). He then tells an ironic anecdote: a farmer's wife graciously gave him a place to stay one night when he was returning from a prisoner of war camp in 1947. Adultery is suggested, since she subsequently wrote him a letter with "Nochanmichdenken und Ichsollschreiben" (111). Schubert's contraction of these words adds a humorous touch to the story. His wife tore up the letter before he could read it and, since he had no recollection of her name or location, he was not able to reply. His wife's actions worked in a counterproductive fashion, though. Ironically, he never could forget this woman because his wife constantly reproached him for the incident: "Aber sie [his wife] hielt ihn [the letter] mir so oft vor, nun hab ich die Frau erst recht nicht vergessen" (111). Had she not made such a scene and simply let it pass, the farmer's wife would have been long since forgotten. Through her portrayal of this incident, Schubert succinctly points out the occasional irrationality of human behaviour.

The narrator tells his visitor about other women in his life. After his wife, he speaks of his divorced daughter, who works at the housing office. His advice to her had been not to let her husband off so easily, leading one to questions what the son-in-law might have done. Did he cheat on her, so his wife's decision to leave would merely allow him to pursue the new relationship, or was her father referring to finances, that the husband should be forced to continue

to support wife and children despite their difficulties? The relative ease with which women could walk out on their men in the GDR is suggested here: “. . . sie hat nicht auf mich gehört. Er ist nicht gut zu mir, hat sie gesagt, und die Kinder bring ich alleine durch” (112). This woman works full time and is raising her children alone, a situation delved into much more deeply in “Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen,” but revisited here. Of his son’s wife, the narrator says: “Seine Frau ist sehr sauber” (112). This information is pertinent, since his son rents out summer accommodations, and cleanliness is important to a prospective tenant. The indication is clearly that the woman does the cleaning in that household.

The narrator laments that no one wants to listen to his abundance of advice; however, he then goes on to tell about someone who did, and is therefore much better off. He tells of a nurse who suddenly was not wearing her wedding band one day when she checked in on him. The narrator was wise to the situation, suspecting that the couple had had a problem concerning sex: “In dem Alter liegt das immer im Sexualen” (113). She confided that she had lost her sexual appetite. The nurse had only been working in the men’s ward. He offered a solution: she should work in the women’s ward instead, since after spending the entire day helping elderly gentlemen with their calls of nature, her sexual desire was simply gone. Recently he learned that she and her ex-husband are living together again and are eventually planning to remarry. The nurse is yet another woman whose work had interfered with her personal life, to the extent that she almost lost her husband for good. Luckily, with the help of an objective outsider, she was able to rectify the situation.

It is at this point that one realises just how lonely the elderly gentleman is. He inquires as to whether his visitor is poetically inclined and could write a poem for his son's silver wedding anniversary. A strange request, it appears to be an attempt to maintain a connection to this young woman. The man's connection with death throughout the story is also striking: not only are his wife, the portrait painter and the horse dead, he talks of slaughter methods, since he was a butcher, and soon after tells of two previous visitors who had had fatal accidents in connection with their visit because they were driving too fast. He points out the irony: "Nun sind beide tot, bloß weil sie keine Zeit hatten" (114).

The title of the story, "Der Schimmel," refers to the horse that he and his wife owned, of which he shows the visitor a painting that his wife had had commissioned the Christmas before her death. Not long after his wife was gone, and the old horse had become quite lame, the protagonist had the horse slaughtered by his friend, presumably someone who would do it properly and not cause the animal to suffer. At the end of the story, the elderly man tells his young visitor about his parting with the horse, his lonely state emphasised as he confides his reaction to his friend leading the horse away: "Mir sind solche Tränen, wie Enteneier, aus den Augen gelaufen und auf die Jacke getropft" (115). Early in the story, the reader learns that the man's wife had the painting commissioned because she wanted a remembrance of the horse, since at that point it was already quite old; however, his wife dies first, the horse remaining more as a tribute to her. The horse is mentioned exclusively in connection with the protagonist's wife at the beginning of the story. The horse's advanced age is indicated directly and also indirectly: "Die Kinder, die ihm zu fressen geben, sind jetzt groß" (111). The horse had been with the family

for a long time and the time when the kids who fed him were little is a time long past when his wife was younger and they still had many years ahead of them. The horse's age in effect reflects his own. The other meaning of *Schimmel*, mold, also suggests the aging process and impending decay. That the horse is no longer with him is a sign to him that his days, too, are numbered. The tears he sheds are also likely for his wife, a loss that he had recently suffered and was reminded of at the time of the horse's slaughter. He cries for her, not only that she is no longer with him, but that she would have mourned this occasion together with him, had she still been alive. The other element that should not be forgotten is his role in the death of the horse. Though it had to be done, and was a humane act, he still carries a burden of guilt for having exercised control over the horse's death. No matter how much the act is justified by the circumstances, a person's active role in the death of a cherished pet always carries guilt. The story is titled as such and ends with the death of the horse to symbolise the protagonist's own impending death. Throughout the story, we learn of the death of others connected to him, his lonely state indicating that his end is also approaching. Schubert wants to show, however, that though he will not live much longer, he is still able to help others and wants to maintain ties with the younger generation. The final line sums up his state: he craves human contact and does not want to be forgotten, a major fear of those who face death. His final words to her, a fragment, are: "Und vergessen Sie mich nicht" (115).

In offering a glimpse into the life of a lonely elderly man coming to terms with his impending death, Schubert gives readers a first-person perspective on a facet of life that they are unlikely to have already encountered from this angle, encouraging an understanding of people in

such a situation. At the same time, the emancipation question in the GDR does not go unaddressed. The women, who play minor roles in this story, are artists (painter, poet) or caregivers (wife, nurse, daughter-in-law). Schubert alludes to both traditional and contemporary gender roles in the story, referring to the main protagonist and his wife, and also the nurse, whose work dramatically affected her marriage. Though certainly not constituting the main thrust of this particular story, ample indications are given to the state of emancipation of women in the GDR, echoing similar situations portrayed in other stories in *Lauter Leben* which have already been discussed in the course of this thesis.

ix. Conclusion

The main thrust of this thesis is Helga Schubert's portrayal of the state of emancipation of women in the GDR. The background to this discussion included, in chapter one, examination of the ideological and legislative cornerstones which were to set the conditions for development towards equality between men and women in the GDR. In chapter two I pointed out a trend, established by women writers in the GDR, towards personal writing, in which protagonists became much more realistic in works whose purpose was not to promote the socialist cause, but rather to explore the concept of individuality. Cleverly combining reality and fiction, Schubert draws on her experience as both a woman and a psychologist to portray slices of life in her first published collection of short stories *Lauter Leben*. Her protagonists, though fictional, are remarkably realistic, their situations a reflection of real life in the GDR at the time the stories were written.

Schubert introduces the reader to individuals from varying walks of life, using irony to highlight their imperfections. Grant explored five stories in the collection which exemplify the situation of women in the GDR, showing that although society had measures in place to emancipate women, society did not adapt right away, both genders falling back on traditional patterns in order to cope with the contemporary conflicts arising from these changes in gender roles. In order to complement Grant's work, I explored "Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen" in greater depth and subsequently examined stories in which the emancipation of women was not necessarily the main focus, but was alluded to. In conclusion, I suggest that Helga Schubert's very realistic female characters in *Lauter Leben* display varying degrees of emancipation, in keeping with their individual situations and characters. No cohesive statement on the success or the failure of government legislation promoting emancipation of women can be made, except to say that these women face conflict in the process of attempting to adapt to the new system. Some of her characters make the most of the career options open to them, like Käthe; some suffer the *Doppelbelastung* of work and home, like the stonemason's wife and several minor characters in the other stories. Those women who are independent, in the sense that they do not have an intimate relationship, generally want to have one ("Meine alleinstehenden Freundinnen") but there are exceptions ("Resi"). It is a true mosaic that Schubert constructs, the pieces of which portray individuals who enjoy emancipation to degrees as various as the personalities and situations that define them.

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