

## The *Wende* in the Light of Bert Papenfuß's Poem 'hunger, durst & sucht'

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### Abstract

*This working paper examines the poem 'hunger, durst & sucht' [hunger, thirst & drugs] written by Bert Papenfuß around 1995. My wider research project is the literary response to the Wende (the collapse of the GDR and German reunification) in 1989–90 by the poets of Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin, who were famous for their resistance to the literary and political establishment of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Papenfuß was one of their leading poets pre-Wende and became even more famous after reunification. The paper will ask how Papenfuß responds to German reunification in this poem. The argumentative model that I have chosen involves using an existing, but at best partial interpretation of the poem as both a springboard and a foil. In particular, I argue that Jörg Döring's interpretation can be considered a 'western' reading that fails to take account of the particular intellectual heritage and life experiences of East German subversive poets. I will argue that this poem shows that living conditions for the authors of Prenzlauer Berg in reunited democratic Germany are even worse than they were under the dictatorial GDR regime. It is worthwhile examining this poem in particular because it shows the Wende as a turning point from misery to even greater misery. For the poets of Prenzlauer Berg, the living conditions of a united Germany destroy their writing culture, exclude them from the variety and richness of cultural life and, above all, they take away their pride. This is a perspective which is hardly discussed in secondary literature. Scholars seem to take for granted that the change from a dictatorial regime to a democratic system would automatically improve working conditions for authors. However, my reading of the poem demonstrates that this is not true for the writers of Prenzlauer Berg.*

This working paper will examine Bert Papenfuß's poem 'hunger, durst & sucht', which he wrote around 1995.<sup>1</sup> Papenfuß was one of the leading poets of Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin,

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<sup>1</sup> Bert Papenfuß, 'hunger, durst & sucht' [hunger, thirst and drugs] in Bert Papenfuß, *Berliner Zapfenstreich: Schnelle Eingreifgesänge* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1996), pp. 45–46. The poem is published at the end of the paper with an English translation. All translations in this paper marked by [italics] are by the author. For the translation of 'sucht', the monosyllabic word 'drugs' was used instead of the literal translation 'addiction' as it comes closer to the monosyllabic 'sucht' which, in context with the other monosyllables, should evoke and imitate the sound of a machine gun.

a group which fought against the literary establishment of the GDR.<sup>2</sup> He became even more famous after German reunification and was awarded the *Erich-Fried-Preis* in 1998. Jörg Döring has offered his reading of ‘hunger, durst & sucht’ and was able to draw on a meeting with the author to help him in his interpretation. However, Döring was, as he freely admitted, hampered by his ‘westliches Vorurteil gegenüber der Prenzlauer-Berg-Lyrik’ [*western prejudice towards the poetry of Prenzlauer Berg*].<sup>3</sup> For this reason, he limited his analysis to single aspects of the poem without, in my view, showing any understanding of its conclusion. My hypothesis is that Papenfuß wanted to express through this poem his view that for the writers of Prenzlauer Berg the bad cultural living conditions created by dictatorship and lack of liberty in the GDR deteriorated further in the united Germany through capitalism. This paper will examine whether such a hypothesis holds true. It will use Döring’s reading of the poem, take it further by examining the individual lines in greater depth, and try to understand the poem as a whole. It will show that through the internal refrain, the poem establishes as its theme the ‘reichtum der welt’ [*richness of the world*]. This richness and variety of life found in the socialist GDR was, in Papenfuß’s view, lost in reunited capitalist Germany. Furthermore, the first stanza describes how the *Wende* destroyed the culture of the East Germans. The following stanza shows life as it was before reunification for the writers of the Prenzlauer Berg. The next stanza explains their situation after the *Wende*. In the final one-line stanza the speaker asserts his decision to fight for improvement of this cultural situation. Lastly, the main refrain demonstrates the ‘cultural war’ by which the speaker hopes to effect this improvement. It is particularly important to look at this poem because, if the hypothesis is correct, it could mark a turning point in the reading of the literature of Prenzlauer Berg after the *Wende*. Until now, the *Wende* has been assumed to have brought about an improvement in the living conditions for the writers of Prenzlauer Berg, as censorship was abolished and the writers were liberated from a dictatorial regime. Nevertheless, this paper will come to the conclusion that this improvement is not the case automatically.

The poem has three ten-line stanzas and a final one-line stanza (l. 49). Each ten-line stanza ends with an internal refrain formed by the last two lines. Especially important is the first line of this refrain (line nine of each stanza), as it establishes the poem’s theme as the richness and variety of the world inhabited by the people from Prenzlauer Berg in East Berlin.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Prenzlauer Berg’ functions as both the name of an area in East Berlin and as the name for this particular group of poets who lived there. It has to be stressed that the literary scene of Prenzlauer Berg changed so radically after the *Wende* that one has to speak of two totally different scenes.

<sup>3</sup> Jörg Döring, ‘Großstadtlyrik nach 89: Durs Grünbeins “In Tunneln der U-Bahn” und Bert Papenfuß’ “hunger, durst & sucht”’ in *Text der Stadt—Reden von Berlin: Literatur und Metropole seit 1989*, ed. by Erhard Schütz and Jörg Döring (Berlin: Weidler, 1999), p. 111.

Strophe 1: denn der reichum der welt gehört uns allen schon (l. 9)  
 Strophe 2: denn der reichum der welt gehört uns allen: hassema' fluppe (l. 25)  
 Strophe 3: denn der reichum der welt ist in festen händen schon (l. 41)

*[Stanza 1: for the richness of the world already belongs to us all (l. 9)*  
*Stanza 2: for the richness of the world belongs to us all: got a fag (l. 25)*  
*Stanza 3: for the richness of the world has already been distributed] (l. 41)*

Following a meeting with Papenfuß, Döring wrote:

Zudem weiß ich jetzt, daß in dem Binnenrefrain 'denn der reichum der welt' auch die Anspielung auf einen DDR-Schlager von Holger Biege verborgen ist.<sup>4</sup>

*[In addition I know now that the internal refrain 'for the richness of the world' hints at a GDR-song by Holger Biege.]*

However, Döring arguably reads the refrain with Western blinkers and, for him, 'reichum' means solely 'wealth' and not 'richness' (the German word has both these meanings). He therefore interprets the internal refrain with reference to capitalism:

der Reichtum gehört eben doch nicht allen, und die Aufdringlichkeit des Schnorrers entlarvt die Wohlstandslüge, die der Binnenrefrain der ersten Strophe noch ungestraft aussprechen durfte.<sup>5</sup>

*[the wealth, it turns out, does not belong to everyone after all, and the insistence of a cadger exposes the lie about prosperity, which the internal refrain of the first stanza was allowed to tell with impunity.]*

Döring analyses the poem solely in terms of materialism and concentrates on the meaning of 'reichum' as wealth, ignoring the possibility that richness may refer to the diversity and

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<sup>4</sup> Döring, p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Döring, p. 109.

variety of life. This interpretation seems insufficient as Papenfuß specifically referred to the song ‘Reichtum der Welt’ [*Richness of the World*] by Holger Biege in his meeting with Döring.<sup>6</sup> This is confirmed by Papenfuß himself: ‘in allen drei stropfen geht es um den “reichtum der welt”’ [*all three stanzas deal with the “richness of the world”*].<sup>7</sup> Whereas Brieger’s concern had been with ecological issues, Papenfuß worries about the lack of richness and variety of life in reunited Germany for the poets of Prenzlauer Berg.

Having talked about the internal refrain I will now go on to treat the stanzas. The first stanza describes how the West Germans displaced East German culture during the *Wende*. This stanza is set in ‘mulackritze’ (l. 1), Berlin slang for the ‘Mulackstraße’, a street in Berlin-Mitte.<sup>8</sup> For Döring, ‘Mitte’ is a symbol for ‘zones of transition’ where East and West used to meet.<sup>9</sup> For Papenfuß, however, “mitte” stand sehr schnell nach der wende für kommerzialisierung (treuhand, administration, ausverkauf [der ddr], kommerzkultur)’ [*very soon after the Wende “Mitte” became a symbol for commercialization: treuhand,<sup>10</sup> administration, liquidation [of the GDR], a culture of commerce*].<sup>11</sup> While Döring’s reading places greater emphasis on the fact of transition, then, Papenfuß is arguably more focused on the way in which it took place and its consequences. This is clearly indicated by his reference to ‘saumagen’ [*stuffed pig’s stomach*] (l. 8), the favourite dish of West German chancellor Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of Reunification, and a word that, because not everybody can ‘stomach’ pig’s stomach, connotes a disgusting pleasure at consuming something. ‘Saumagen’ is therefore used in this stanza as a chiffre for the procedure of reunification, while establishing that the speaker in the poem will express his opinions about the way the reunification took place through the metaphor of food. Döring comments on this:

Papenfuß beschreibt nun diese Szenerie der Vermischung, aber alles andere als lustvoll, sondern eher als Zumutung. Die Stimme des Gedichts [...] findet Lust allenfalls daran, den hedonistischen Ankömmlingen (‘rehberger’, V. 4) ein möglichst unbekömmliches Gericht auf den Teller zu wünschen.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For the lyrics of the song, see, for instance, Peter Günther, *Mut zur Wahrheit: ostmusik.de*. Available at: [http://www.ostmusik.de/reichtum\\_der\\_welt.htm](http://www.ostmusik.de/reichtum_der_welt.htm) (accessed 21 September 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 15 June 2006.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Berlin-Mitte’ is the most central borough of Berlin and was part of the former GDR.

<sup>9</sup> Döring, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> From 1990 to 1994 the Treuhand oversaw the privatization of formerly state-run East German companies.

<sup>11</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 29 June 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Döring, p. 108.

[Papenfuß now describes this scenario of integration – not as pleasurable but more as a provocation. In fact, the speaker in the poem [...] seems to wish the hedonistic incomers (‘rehberger’, l. 4) as indigestible a dish as possible.]

Döring is right in thinking that the process of integration was not pleasurable for the East Germans at all. However, he does not analyse the dish. If one examines the individual ingredients of this meal, one finds that it is made up of ‘bordsteinschwalben’, ‘langschweine’, as well as ‘bernhardiner & bernhardinerinnen’ [*tarts, longpigs, monks & nuns*] (ll. 1–2).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, at first glance it contains animals like ‘schwalben’ (swallows), ‘schweine’ (pigs) and ‘bernhardiner’ (St. Bernard dogs). The use of dogs as an ingredient in a dish is sufficient to make one wonder whether Papenfuß is being literal or whether the animals refer to something else. Papenfuß has explained that “‘bernhardinerinnen’ sind nonnen (im gegensatz zu “‘bordsteinschwalben” = nutten)’ [“‘bernhardinerinnen’ are nuns (as opposed to “‘pavement swallows” = tarts)].<sup>14</sup> After this hint it is easy to find out that ‘bernhardiner’ is the Berlin slang word for monks. Furthermore, ‘langschweine’ [longpigs] is the name cannibals give their human food. It is notable that the whole dinner consists of human ingredients and is called ‘westfraß’ [*western grub*] (l. 6). West Germans could be seen as consuming East Germans, taking consumerism to the extreme. This reflects the speaker’s view that West German culture has crossed the line that separates humans from animals and has therefore degenerated or evolved backwards. Through the line ‘wir sind [...] prall vom westfraß’ [*we are [...] plumb full of western grub*] (ll. 5–6) the author of the poem implies that the East Germans had to take over western culture in which, for him, everything seems to be about satisfying physical needs rather than intellectual or spiritual needs. The speaker ignores the fact that West Germany had thriving alternative scenes for decades before the GDR did, and that the new Germany still has them. However, it may well have felt like that to the Prenzlauer Berg poets in the years after 1989. To sum up, through the metaphor of food the speaker indicates that German reunification was not a cultural union, in which the best of each side’s culture was adopted, but an imposition of West German culture, which displaced that of East Germany.

The second stanza is a retrospective view of East German culture as it was in Prenzlauer Berg before the *Wende* and describes how its writers enjoyed their life there. The place and

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<sup>13</sup> The German words are Berlin slang. A literal translation would lose the meaning. For the sake of clarity, a translation closer to the meaning of the line was chosen even though the play on words was lost.

<sup>14</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 27 June 2006.

even the season is indicated by the word ‘helmholtzhitze’ [*heat of helmholtz*] (l. 17): summer in Prenzlauer Berg (which has a square called ‘Helmholtzplatz’). Though it is clear that it is summer, the question is: pre- or post-reunification? Döring assumes that all stanzas take place at the same time and that the ‘Gedichtshandlung muss irgendwann in der Nachwendezeit spielen’ [*the poem must take place somewhere in the time after the Wende*], basing his assumption on the Berlin setting of the first stanza.<sup>15</sup> However, the second stanza must describe a time in the GDR long before German reunification as ‘soziologiestudenten glätten ihre enten’ [*students of sociology are smoothing their duck’s arses*] (ll. 20–21). The ‘duck’s arse’ was a fashionable way to style one’s hair in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in the manner of Elvis Presley. This time period in the GDR is characterized by the words ‘ich unterstell allen alles’ [*I impute anything to anybody*] (l. 24). With this statement the speaker refers to the collaboration of many GDR citizens with its secret service, the *Stasi*. They often spied on their friends, as Sascha Anderson did on his friend Bert Papenfuß. One was forced to ‘impute anything to anybody’, that is, that they might be a collaborator of the *Stasi*. This indicates that the speaker recognizes the more unpleasant aspects of the GDR and does not want to gloss over them. Döring sees the prevailing mood of this stanza as dark because of the presence of words relating to blackness, such as ‘substantia nigra’<sup>16</sup> (l. 19) ‘schwarzer drachenfisch’ [*black weaver fish*] (l. 22) and ‘düsternis’ [*gloominess*] (l. 24).<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding the gritty realism of this description of the GDR, there is a positive aspect as well which Döring does not comment upon. The gloominess is described as ‘frisch’ [*fresh*] (l. 24); this turns ‘gloominess’ into something positive, a salutary obscurity in which the poets of Prenzlauer Berg could easily hide their forbidden activities, for example, poetry readings which took place at church events or in private accommodation.<sup>18</sup> The poets could also disseminate their work by having it published in samizdats.<sup>19</sup> This means that even though the GDR was a totalitarian regime with one of the biggest secret services in the world, they could not control their citizens one hundred percent. This is especially true for the authors of

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<sup>15</sup> Döring, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Nigra’ is the Latin for ‘black’. A part of the brain, the ‘substantia nigra’ produces dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in the prediction of and response to rewards; certain recreational drugs act on or mimic this response system.

<sup>17</sup> Döring, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Though *Stasi* observation was a constant possibility, a right of assembly was generally guaranteed in churches and in private homes in the GDR.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Samizdats’ were a type of publication which, banned by the government, would be produced in secret and distributed in limited quantities in the GDR. The receivers were expected to make additional copies and to distribute them to other people in the manner of a chain letter. This was normally done by typewriter. Samizdats were often used by the authors of Prenzlauer Berg in the 1980s and were a common way for them to distribute their work.

Prenzlauer Berg who were massively supported by the West. Line 18 makes reference to other groups of citizens in Western Europe and the United States that cannot be controlled by their governments: with 'die raute ist die farbe' [*the rhombus is the colour*], Papenfuß alludes to outlaw motorcycle gangs who can be recognized by the rhombus of a special colour that they display on the back of their leather jackets. These gangs are famous for their strong community spirit and for refusing to follow the law of the government. Very proud of their independent life-style, they fascinate many people. Through this allusion, the speaker compares the gangs' community to that of the artists of Prenzlauer Berg in the 1980s that were also proud of their work and their non-conformism. The food metaphor of the first stanza continues in the second one, where the speaker says that one can buy 'bleiche thüringer klöße' [*pale Thuringian dumplings*] (l. 19), a well-known GDR dish. That the meal is 'bleich' [*pale*] expresses the recognition that the culture of the GDR, and especially within Prenzlauer Berg, was far from perfect, with dictatorship, censorship and restricted possibilities of travel to the West. However, East Germans were able to eat their own foods instead of the 'westfraß' they would be forced to eat after the *Wende*. This implies that the culture of the GDR was a legitimate one, much better for East Germans than the one that the West would impose on them, and that East German culture should not have been simply cast aside but improved.

The third stanza describes the consequences for the poets from Prenzlauer Berg as they are forced to live in what they consider to be the culturally degenerate society of former West Germany. The stanza is set at a time long after German reunification; this is expressed by a reference to 'polnische suppe' [*polish soup*] (l. 37), a drug cocktail first found in Germany in 1991 and which became very famous in Berlin around 1995. The speaker continues to use the metaphor of food to describe the cultural situation for the poets from Prenzlauer Berg, now referring to a very special kind of 'food': drugs. According to Döring, this 'Strophe beschreibt nun ein völlig missglücktes Erlebnis mit harten Drogen' [*stanza describes an absolutely failed experience with hard drugs*].<sup>20</sup> I agree with Döring that the speaker's proximity to death is expressed through the word 'blutsturz' [*retching blood*] (l. 37). With this food metaphor of 'polnische suppe', which stands for drugs, the speaker suggests that the richness and variety of life that was present in the GDR has disappeared totally in the united Germany as the only things which are left to consume are drugs. The consequences of this disappearance are so bad, the poem suggests, that they lead to cultural and potentially even physical death. The severity

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<sup>20</sup> Döring, p. 110.

of the cultural situation is underlined through the verse ‘ein trichterbechermann pißt in eine tulpenförmige urne’ [*a funnelbeakerman pisses into a funnel-shaped urn*] (l. 38).<sup>21</sup> Describing a funnelbeakerman urinating into the funnel-shaped urn that gave him his cultural name and symbolizes his art, the speaker evidently wants to express his sense of the former West Germans’ complete loss of respect for culture in general, even for their own. The speaker continues in a more constructive vein when he says that ‘der tiger ist gezähmt | vor mir liegt ein blatt papier’ [*the tiger is tamed | there is a sheet of paper in front of me*] (l. 39–40). Döring argues that the

lyrische[s] Ich könnte jetzt zum Dichter werden, bezeichnenderweise erst, nachdem das Raubtier in ihm gezähmt ist [...]. Bei Papenfuß ist der ‘drang & wucht’-Furor des Großstadttigers eine Rauschpose, die abgelegt werden muß, wenn das Schreiben beginnt.<sup>22</sup>

[*the lyrical subject could now become a poet, significantly only after the beast in him has been tamed [...]. For Papenfuß, the ‘stress & force’ phase of the urban tiger is a drug-pose, which has to be given up before one starts to write.*]

Döring takes the literary phrase ‘der tiger ist gezähmt’ at face value and argues that it has something to do with taking drugs, specifically giving up the habit before one can write. However I would argue that ‘der tiger ist gezähmt’ is a reference to Mao Zedong, who fought against the culture of the United States and called it a ‘paper tiger’. Indeed, Papenfuß confirmed this interpretation: “‘der tiger ist gezähmt’ bezieht sich auf maos ‘papiertiger’” [*‘the tiger has been tamed’ refers to Mao’s ‘paper tiger’*].<sup>23</sup> Significantly, Mao’s fight against Western culture became known as his ‘cultural war’. In Papenfuß’s poem the expression ‘the tiger has been tamed’ is notably not in the future tense but in the present perfect, with the implication that Mao’s ‘cultural war’ has already been won. Therefore, it offers hope by example and implies that this cultural war against the West could be won a second time, in Germany. The weapons necessary to win this war are described in the next line ‘vor mir liegt ein blatt papier’ [*there is a sheet of paper in front of me*] (l. 40); this, according to Papenfuß,

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<sup>21</sup> The Funnelbeaker culture existed from c. 4200 to 2800 BC, not only in the area that would become West Germany but throughout Central Europe. This culture got its name from the beakers with funnel shaped necks which the people called Funnelbeakermen produced at that time.

<sup>22</sup> Döring, p. 110

<sup>23</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 15 August 2006.

is a reference to literature and to poetry in particular. To summarize, the third stanza expresses the view that the consequences of the former West Germans' imposition of their degenerated culture on the poets of Prenzlauer Berg could mean cultural death for these poets and former East Germans generally. However, the poets, through their work, have the ability to fight against this Western cultural takeover.

In the final one-line stanza (l. 49), the speaker is tempted to give up and asks himself whether he should really fight this 'cultural war'. Döring offers two possible interpretations for this line:

Für ihn [den Salzhering] lassen sich zwei Deutungen denken, eine tragische und eine ironische: in der tragischen wird der 'salzhering' [...] als Speisefisch verstanden, eine Art Katermahlzeit des Dichters [...] man denkt an zerknüllte Gedichte im Straßengraben oder gar an den Tod des Autors. Die ironische Lesart versteht Salzhering [...] als Lakritzsorte eines Bonner (damit westlichen) Süßwarenherstellers. [...] Einen Salzhering (also Westfraß) als Belohnung fürs vollbrachte Gedicht.

*[There are two possible meanings for it [the salt herring], a tragic and an ironic one: in the tragic one 'salt herring' is seen as food [...], a kind of last meal for the poet [...] one thinks of crumpled up poems in the ditch or even of the poet's death. The ironic reading interprets salt herring [...] as liquorice from a (Western) manufacturer of confectionery in Bonn. [...]. A salt herring (in other words, Western grub) as a reward for a finished poem.]*

I will return to Döring's notion of a western reward for a completed piece of work, but first it is worth considering the possibility that, in line with the earlier use of the food metaphor, salt herring stands for the culture of the coast, specifically, the culture of a sheltered childhood in a town like Greifswald on the Baltic Sea in East Germany where Holger Biege, the singer of the GDR song 'Reichtum der Welt' and Bert Papenfuß each spent their youth. This interpretation is confirmed by Papenfuß. For him, the movement of the poem goes 'richtung küste (salzhering) [...] [und] das motiv des gedichtes ist (ambivalentes) heimweh' [*towards the coast (salt herring)*] [...] [*and*] *the motif of the poem is (ambivalent) homesickness*].<sup>24</sup> One

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<sup>24</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 29 June 2006.

could argue, then, that ‘salzhering’ symbolizes the protective culture in which parents can solve nearly every problem for their children but only on the condition that the children behave as their parents expect them to, a relationship that can be compared to the one between the cultural rules of the united Germany and the authors of Prenzlauer Berg: as long as the authors write what their editors require, they will receive royalties. However, as soon as they write against the editors’ opinions and wishes, their work will not be published and they will not receive any money to live on. In this case, they will be forced to rely on their partners or on social welfare, and neither of these situations will allow the writers their pride. The temptation for the speaker, then, is to collaborate with the editors of reunited Germany, write what they request and live a comfortable life on royalties, rather than staying true to the speaker’s GDR identity and criticising German reunification, its consequences for the authors of Prenzlauer Berg, and their current living conditions. This temptation is answered by the speaker with ‘krepppapier’ [literally ‘crêpe paper’ but containing a play on the verb ‘krepieren’, ‘to die’] (l. 49). Papenfuß confirms that it is related to death.<sup>25</sup> One could argue that his fight against the cultural establishment with his poems (the ‘papier’ of ‘krepppapier’) has to die; however, the real answer must be that the temptation has to die, as his fight against the cultural establishment is described in the main refrain and ‘papier’ is the speaker’s weapon in this fight. In summary, the final one-line stanza shows that the speaker is tempted to give in and collaborate with the literary establishment in reunited Germany; nevertheless, he does not give in to this temptation but is ready for his ‘cultural war’.

The main refrain describes the speaker’s fight against the cultural consequences for East Germans in reunited Germany. Gerrit-Jan Berendse points out that Papenfuß’s short refrains have the characteristics of a battle song: ‘In den kurzen Refrains erinnert die schnelle Abfolge [...] an [...] MG-Poetik’ [*In the short refrains, the quick sequence is reminiscent of MG-poetics*].<sup>26</sup> This striking refrain consists of short lines of three or four words each, and these words are mainly short nouns. The only two verbs, ‘saufen’ and ‘fressen’, reinforce the themes of consumption and animal behaviour, and they stand in sharp contrast to the key nouns ‘Hunger’ and ‘Durst’. One could argue that Papenfuß uses his refrain as a machine gun and the words as ammunition. The first line of the refrain ‘köter fressen katzen’ [*mutts gobble cats*] (ll. 11, 27, 43) is a summary of the poem. Papenfuß has disclosed that these mutts are a

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., dated 26 June 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Gerrit-Jan Berendse, ‘Der neue Papenfuß oder HipHop am Prenzlauer Berg’, *literatur für lesler*, 22 (1999), 199–208 (p. 208); ‘MG poetics’ is short for ‘machine gun poetics’.

metaphor for the masses, while ‘katzen’ signify individuals.<sup>27</sup> The speaker might be saying that these masses consumed the culture of the GDR, an act which could itself be perceived as cannibalistic. According to Döring, this describes ‘drastisch die Folgen der [kulturellen] Verdrängung’ [*the consequences of the [cultural] suppression drastically*].<sup>28</sup> The weapon in this fight is ‘sturm, drang’ [*storm, stress*] (ll. 14, 30, 46) a reference to the 18th century literary period which is associated with the aestheticization of revolutionary spirit and the self-apotheosis of the poetic genius as *poeta alter deus*. One can therefore interpret this line as emphasizing the role of the writers of literature and poetry in the fight to overthrow the cultural devil of German reunification and win the cultural war. The first line is inverted in the last line of the main refrain ‘wie katzen köter’ [*like cats mutts*] (ll. 16, 32, 48). Döring does not know how to read this, and therefore asks, ‘ist die Inversion nur eine Artikulationsstörung einer [durch Alkohol] schwerer gewordenen Zunge’ [*is the inversion only a sign of a tongue made heavy by alcohol that is having difficulty articulating*]?<sup>29</sup> By no means is this the case; rather, it seems the outcome of the cultural war: now cats gobble mutts. Such an inversion expresses the speaker’s opinion that the former East German culture will survive and triumph over the former West German one. This belief is also underlined by Papenfuß’s statement that “‘sturm, drang & wucht” drive “sucht in die flucht | wie katzen köter”” [*“storm, stress & force” put “drugs to flight | like cats mutts”*].<sup>30</sup> In summary, in the main refrain, the speaker says that literature is so powerful that it could reverse the cultural consequences of the *Wende* and could even make the former East German culture the dominant one which will survive.

To sum up, in ‘hunger, durst & sucht’ the speaker asserts that, for the writers of Prenzlauer Berg, cultural living conditions were better in the GDR than in a reunited Germany. This comes as quite a surprise, since the GDR was a dictatorship and well known for its censorship, while reunited Germany is a democratic country with a free press. Most scholars take it for granted, therefore, that living conditions in reunited Germany must be better. However, cultural living conditions mean, first of all, the possibility of living life with pride. If one considers the reunification and its effect on the poets of Prenzlauer Berg with respect to pride, one will get a different view. The speaker highlights what he sees as the degenerated capitalistic culture of the West Germans and suggests that during the *Wende* they even behaved like cannibals and consumed East German culture. Therefore, West German

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<sup>27</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 29 June 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Döring, pp. 108–09.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> Email correspondence between Papenfuß and the author of this paper, dated 26 June 2006.

culture survived while that of East Germany declined. The authors of Prenzlauer Berg under the GDR were proud of their life in spite of censorship, dictatorship and the shortage of freedom. In the GDR they did not need to care about earning a living and could concentrate on their writing totally, even when their work was not published, as accommodation and basic food were practically free. If somebody ran out of money, there was always a writer who had sold a book to the West and who would be more than happy to share the royalties. The speaker refers to this spirit of generosity: ‘hassema’ fluppe’ [*got a fag*] (l. 25). Döring argues that the person who says this is a ‘Schnorrer’ [*scrounger*].<sup>31</sup> However, there are many examples to be found in novels, short stories and films where sharing a cigarette is a symbol of deep friendship between proud men.<sup>32</sup> In addition, it shows that on the one hand, during the time of the GDR, the writers of Prenzlauer Berg found that money was similarly easy to share, and on the other hand that they were very pleased to help each other in this way. In the united Germany, however, they have to follow the rules of a capitalistic publishing market which takes away their pride. Furthermore, living conditions for the writers are totally different, as the costs of accommodation and basic food are comparatively high. If the poets want to concentrate solely on their writing and earn their living through publication of their work, they have to follow the rules of a capitalistic publishing market: providing whatever the market demands, which means, at least to a degree, writing what readers will want to read. If they fail to do this, they fear, editors will not choose their books to be published, and the authors will be unable to cover their living expenses. The writers feel that they are faced, then, with unpleasant alternatives: catering only to the desires of editors and potential readers in order to be published and receive royalties, or else working as an independent but unpublished author, forced to rely on their partner’s earnings or on social welfare. Nevertheless, the speaker will not abandon his fight for a culture in which the writers of Prenzlauer Berg can be proud again, a determination articulated in the final stanza. At first the speaker is tempted to give in and live a life with a nine-to-five job or to write in a way that will ensure publication and enough money to live on; this would not make his life happier, however. He therefore resists this temptation and decides to fight for his right to write what he likes without being controlled by a capitalistic publication market. Finally, the main refrain articulates the speaker’s cultural war against this capitalistic culture that will only publish poems for which there is a market demand. The speaker knows that the possibilities for poets

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<sup>31</sup> Döring, p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Günther Weisenborn, ‘Zwei Männer’, in *Lebensgut*, ed. by Erich Kirch et al. (Frankfurt/Main: Diesterweg, 1968), p. 193.

are very limited. Nevertheless, he believes in the power of words and will go on writing poems in which he criticizes the cultural situation that the writers of Prenzlauer Berg have had to endure since German reunification. In summary, the socialist living conditions of the GDR gave the writers of Prenzlauer Berg the possibility to concentrate solely on their independent writing, whether or not their work was published. The capitalist living conditions in reunited Germany have taken away this possibility. The poor living conditions for the writers of Prenzlauer Berg in the GDR have thus, Papenfuß argues in his poem, become worse in reunited Germany.

hunger, durst & sucht<sup>33</sup>

- 1<sup>34</sup> in der mulackritze haut man bordsteinschwalben  
2 zusammen mit langschweinen, frischer berberitze  
3 bernhardinern & bernhardinerinnen in mehlschwitze  
4 hedonistische rehberger nuckeln an ihrer lakritze  
5 wir sind feuer & fett, wir machen schlappen wett  
6 die wampe prall vom westfraß & angestaumtem durchfall  
7 mit nix als russinnen im kopf, korinthen in den topf  
8 die galle tropft; saumagen & keine weiteren fragen  
9 denn der reichtum der welt gehört uns allen schon  
10 hunger, durst & sucht sind die fruchtchen der furcht
- 11 köter fressen katzen  
12 votzen klöten, & schnaps  
13 seele auf: sauf
- 14 sturm, drang & wucht  
15 sucht in die flucht  
16 wie katzen köter
- 17 in der helmholtzhitze erst die kante, dann die blöße  
18 die raute ist die farbe, anarchie auch dekomposition  
19 die substantia nigra zickt, bleiche thüringer klöße  
20 gleich um die ecke, schummerige soziologiestudenten  
21 glätten ihre enten & warten auf dem wolkenstillstand  
22 aufm stammtisch aalt sich ein schwarzer drachenfisch  
23 ausm wald der lauten bäume flattern feile schnepfen  
24 hinein in frische düsternis; ich unterstell allen alles  
25 denn der reichtum der welt gehört uns: hassema'fluppe  
26 hunger, durst & sucht sind die fruchtchen der furcht
- 27 köter fressen katzen  
28 votzen klöten, & schnaps  
29 seele auf: sauf
- 30 sturm, drang & wucht  
31 sucht in die flucht  
32 wie katzen köter
- 33 am verkehrsknotenpunkt spitze sitze ich voll zugeotzt  
34 in meinem schweiß & prosperiere abgeklärt vor mich hin  
35 meine augen bluten, die löffel dröhnen von dem gedöns  
36 das auf mich einsabbert, langweile steht aus, unerhört  
37 spuckt aus, & zwar polnische suppe, blutsturz & maulfurz  
38 ein trichterbechermann pißt in die tulpenförmige urne

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<sup>33</sup> The poem has appeared in Papenfuß's collections, *Schnelle Eingreifgesänge*, pp. 45–46, and *SBZ-Land und Leute* (1998), pp.25–26. It has been reproduced and translated with the kind permission of Druckhaus Galrev, [www.galrev.com](http://www.galrev.com), BasisDruck Verlag GmbH and Bert Papenfuß.

<sup>34</sup> The line numbers have been inserted by the author of this paper.

39 die neurotransmitter sind knapp, der tiger ist gezähmt  
40 vor mir liegt ein blatt papier; wir haben wohl ausgeault  
41 denn der reichum der welt ist in festen händen schon  
42 hunger, durst & sucht sind die früchtchen der furcht

43 köter fressen katzen  
44 votzen klöten, & schnaps  
45 seele auf: sauf

46 sturm, drang & wucht  
47 sucht in die flucht  
48 wie katzen köter

49 ein salzhering winkt mir; krepppapier

hunger, thirst & drugs<sup>35</sup>

1 in mulack street they cook tarts  
2 together with longpigs, fresh barberry  
3 monks & nuns in roux  
4 hedonistic rehbergers<sup>36</sup> suck at their liquorice  
5 we are fire & fat, we make up for the setbacks  
6 the potbelly plumb full of western grub & bottled-up diarrhoea  
7 with nothing but Russian girls in mind and currants in the pot  
8 the bile drips; stuffed pig's stomach & no more questions  
9 for the richness of the world already belongs to us all  
10 hunger, thirst & drugs are the fruits of anxiety

11 mutts gobble cats  
12 cunts balls, & schnapps  
13 open soul: drink  
14 storm, stress & force  
15 drugs to flight  
16 like cats mutts

17 in the heat of helmholtz first rat-arsed, then the bareness

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<sup>35</sup> Bert Papenfuß plays with words and uses neologisms as well as Berlin slang, making this poem very difficult to understand even for native speakers of German if they are not from Berlin. Therefore, the translation places most emphasis on understanding the poem while it also preserves as far as possible the sound and feeling of the German version. The monosyllabic word 'drugs' was used instead of the literal translation 'addiction' as it comes closer to the monosyllabic word 'sucht' which should suggest the sound of a machine gun.

<sup>36</sup> The 'Rehberger' were a group of revolutionary labourers in the 19th century who worked in a place called Rehberge in the western part of Berlin.

18 the rhombus is the colour, anarchy also decomposition  
19 the substantia nigra is playing tricks, pale thuringian dumplings  
20 just around the corner, dim students of sociology  
21 are smoothing their duck's arses & waiting for the clouds to call a truce  
22 a black weaver fish lounges on the regulars' table  
23 birds going for a song flutter from the forest of noisy trees  
24 into fresh gloominess; I impute anything to anybody  
25 for the richness of the world belongs to us: got a fag  
26 hunger, thirst & drugs are the fruits of anxiety

27 mutts gobble cats  
28 cunts balls, & schnapps  
29 open soul: drink

30 storm, stress & force  
31 drugs to flight  
32 like cats mutts

33 at the traffic junction called spitze i sit drugged up  
34 in my sweat & prosper serenely to myself  
35 my eyes bleed, my lugholes resound with the fuss  
36 which keeps on slobbering at me, boredom bides its time, outrageously  
37 spits out that polish soup, retching blood & belch  
38 a funnelbeakerman pisses into a funnel-shaped urn  
39 the neurotransmitters are in short supply, the tiger has been tamed  
40 there is a sheet of paper in front of me; we must have fucked up  
41 for the richness of the world has already been distributed  
42 hunger, thirst & drugs are the fruits of anxiety

43 mutts gobble cats  
44 cunts balls, & schnapps  
45 open soul: drink

46 storm, stress & force  
47 drugs to flight  
48 like cats mutts

49 a salt herring is tempting me; black crepe paper

Translated by Karl Christoph Esser