

The division of rita and manfred essay sample



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Set in the period prior to and encompassing the building of the Berlin Wall, *Divided Heaven* tells the story of young Rita's experiences between assimilation with and opposition to life in the GDR. The novel's central conflict, however, revolves around her decision not to follow her lover, Manfred, to the West. As a chemist, Manfred is disappointed by what is not so much an oppressive system as an ineffective one. Rita and Manfred clearly portray rival societies. Rita, the naive member of the younger generation, realizes the flaws of the GDR, but is eager to contribute.

In contrast, Manfred is a cynical drop-out, disillusioned with the working conditions of the GDR, and longs to advance his career. The differences in Rita and Manfred's beliefs, passions, and personalities ultimately lead to their emotional separation. Rita represents the hopeful younger generation at a time of reconstruction in the GDR. Her fondness to the GDR is strengthened as a result of her work in a train-car factory, where she is drawn ever more deeply into the daily struggles of her brigade. Rita develops an optimistic outlook on life in her new role as a productive member of society.

In addition, she is youthful, harboring sentiments comparable to that of a young girl. For example, when Rita first meets Manfred, the narrator states, "... she suddenly felt that all her nineteen years, all her wishes, actions, thoughts, and dreams, had had only one purpose- to prepare her for this moment, for this letter. She felt that she suddenly knew things which she had never learnt. She was certain that nobody before her had ever felt or could ever feel what she now felt. " Many of Rita's thoughts, feelings, and actions can also be explained through her need for self-actualization.

Rita longs to realize her own potential, goals, aspirations, and fulfillment as a complete person. For example, the narrator states, “[Rita] hoped to experience extraordinary things, extraordinary joys and sorrows, extraordinary events; and the whole country was in fact in ferment, but this did not strike her as extraordinary, since she had grown up in the midst of it.” Once again, Rita represents the younger generation, who believe that work will simultaneously bring personal satisfaction, recognition, and benefit the objective progress of society.

This generation argues that human beings create and define themselves through work, producing the world around them by investing their human effort into it. Under Socialism, the products of human labor are brought under the control of the people who produced them. As a result, these products become part of the process of human beings consciously and collectively creating their lives through history. To Rita, work was a means of self-fulfillment. Manfred is presented as the pathological product of a fascist upbringing- he is a man whose egoistic and cynical world view clearly makes him unfit for life in the new society.

Manfred believes that the only way out of the incompetence of political leadership in the GDR is to flee to the West. He believes his own career is more important than the collective well-being. Manfred feels alienated from the East German society, as displayed in a Christmas party scene. At the gathering, Rita appears to enjoy the laughter and mockery of the many young party-goers, unlike Manfred. After some time, Manfred goes with Martin to an adjoining room where Martin informs Manfred that their month-long “ Spinning Jenny” project has been rejected.

Manfred sees this as a sign that nothing will succeed and he will not be needed. In addition, Rita and Manfred's relationship suggests an attempt by the author to portray feminist and gender issues. It is interesting to note that, in this pro-Socialist novel, it is the woman who stays in the East and opts for the values of community and socialism, while the man leaves for the West, preferring individualism, competition, and materialism. Moreover, when Rita enters the train car factory, the male workers are baffled: what can this woman possibly be good for?

Rita then quickly learns to handle screws and drills and proves herself to be a competent coworker. Manfred's mother, Frau Herrfurth, a dependent, non-working housewife who disapproves of employment for women and who nags Rita to vacuum rugs, represents the negative female type. The positive characters in the novel, all committed communists, are, besides the heroine Rita, men. Nevertheless, because Rita is the heroine, because the novel is about her education, and because Manfred leaves for the West, a connection is created in the reader's mind between women and socialism, and between men and capitalism.

Manfred and Rita are divided not only by gender, but by a generation gap held accountable for the former's cynicism and the latter's optimism and idealism. Manfred, unlike Rita, grew up under the reign of Hitler- the so-called " Third Reich" generation. His father was an SA member who opportunistically joined the Communist party after the war and rose to the position of factory director; his mother is a non-working wife who aggressively pushes her husband's career, hates the GDR, and wishes herself in the West.

Rita, the daughter of an artisan who was killed in the war, saw the war only as a child and grew up with her widowed mother. Rita and Manfred's differences are also displayed through the positions taken by Wendland and Manfred in their dispute over their respective philosophies of history. Wendland's believes in the essential goodness of people, while Manfred believes that people are motivated not by morality but by " greed, selfishness, distrust, and envy. " Rita ultimately sides with Wendland, further worsening the rift between her and Manfred.

Because of a lack of father figures in her life, Rita's relationships with Meternagel and Schwarzenbach serve as a kind of paternal influence. As Rita gradually grows apart from Manfred, who lets himself be persuaded by his mother to " go West," she slowly comes to identify more and more with an ideological universe represented- she thinks- by the principles of Meternagel, Wendland, and Schwarzenbach. Early on, Rita realizes that Meternagel's eyes have always provided her with a sense of security and identity.

For example, the narrator describes Rita and Meternagel, "... sometimes, when she felt most desperate, those eyes were what kept her going. " With the political division of Germany and construction of the Berlin Wall as a backdrop, the relationship between Rita and Manfred demonstrates that internal differences estrange lovers more than external ones. Before the actual construction of the Berlin Wall, a metaphorical wall was erected at the beginning of Rita and Manfred's relationship.

This metaphorical wall is symbolized through Rita's decision for the " harder, sterner life" and " the attraction of a great historical movement" in the East,

with its values of community and idealism, while Manfred holds a pessimistic view of man and leaves for the West, where individualism and competition rule and material rewards stimulate productivity. This distinction leads to their unfortunate break-up and Rita's suicide attempt.