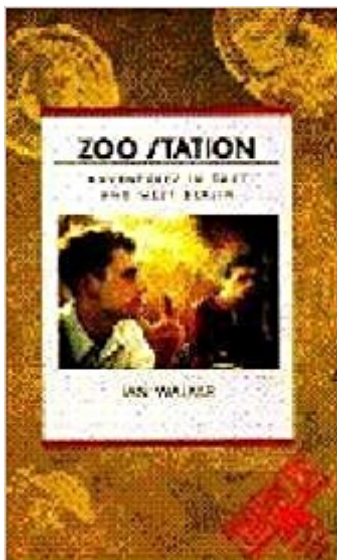


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Zoo Station: Adventures In East And West Berlin



Synopsis

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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This rambling exploration of life on both sides of the cold war's most tangible line of demarcation is an intensely personal account by a former Central American correspondent for the Observer. Walker's friendships with the people he writes about provides an immediacy and an understanding that might otherwise be lacking. Unfortunately, Walker's private and decidedly pro-Communist political leanings are also given free rein, resulting in unabashed attacks on the West and embarrassing apologetics for and homilies on the East. He vividly portrays the seedier side of West Berlin the only side he deals with without elaboration, but a reference to long food lines in East Berlin prompts him to explain that the queues allow a more equitable distribution of scarce resources. When he remarks to a friend that "what the west calls Soviet imperialism is not really comparable to US imperialism," it is clear which he considers the real evil. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

When it comes to drama, tragedy, intrigue, and downright kinkiness, the two Berlins have few urban rivals. The author of this fascinating personal account, a young British journalist with a taste for the marginal, provides the reader with a kaleidoscopic view of the city. Never forgetting that Berlin is an East-West flashpoint where two competing systems are obliged to coexist side by side, Walker shows us the city through the eyes of his numerous contacts, friends, and acquaintances on both sides of the wall. The result is colorful armchair travel writing at its most entertaining. However,

readers in search of more practical information should stick to the standard guides. Ian Wallace, Agriculture Canada Lib., St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Excellent first hand look by a frequent traveler to East Berlin.

Very good read if you are interested in West Berlin during the time of the wall. Very good info regarding traveling between east and west.

This English journalist tells stories from around 1984 from Berlin's two sides. Neither he nor his friends saw the end coming. Published in 1987, in Zoo Station, Ian Walker combines the mood of a novelist with the ambitions of an investigator. In his early thirties then, Walker will soon go off to help the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, so his sympathies can be seen early on as he wanders back and forth at that station and reflects on those who travel across that fortified and symbolic frontier. His insights instruct. About the cold-war image of long lines, he notes: "Access to everything in the west is determined by money. In the east scarcer resources are more equitably distributed but you have to wait a bit longer." This offers a counter-explanation that enabled me to see this image freshly. Not all cared passionately about what we in the West idolize, he explains at the end of his narrative. He reflects on drivers at the nightshift near the Berlin border and barrier, and how the driver asked him about freedom. Walker sifts through vignettes of those on the trams cleaning offices for those who each morning must return to clean offices and do their drudgery in turn. "The freedom to enter polling booths, to inscribe twelve crosses during the course of a voting lifetime?" Democracy in its debased form might be overrated. "East and west, the same kind of people did these things. Dissent was also a kind of a luxury." (319) Either side of the divide, most people had to eke out a living instead. "Big-shots said 'we' and spoke for all their nation. I felt drained and drunk. I wanted to shout things from the rooftops, but the things got so complicated and the words just blew around like dust in my mind." Walker talks to many and reports their conversations adroitly, and in these pages, he allows everyday people to stand for urban life as endured by those outside headlines and spotlights.

"Zoo Station" is important as a document of the young Left in the West in the 1980s, during a time when the United States was funding vicious wars in Central America and the Soviet Union was preparing to collapse. Since the Berlin Wall has fallen, few people have had much good to say

about the governments of the former Eastern Bloc countries, and the media treats the continued existence of a strong communist movement in Eastern Germany as an anachronism. Having read "Zoo Station", I was able to understand why some people regarded East Germany as a pinnacle of socialist achievement, much more preferable to its capitalist twin in the West. It is good travel writing, and is both politically and culturally astute. Walker's life among the Turkish residents of Kreuzberg in Berlin also has helped me understand the predicament of guestworkers in Germany, the country with the highest percentage of resident "foreigners" in Europe. More than anything, "Zoo Station" highlights Walker's skill as a journalist, and it's a shame he never did publish that book on Nicaragua like he said he would.

I first visited Berlin over a quarter of a century ago when, like the author, I was a young man in my 20s. I have lived and studied there. I have crashed out in the tower blocks of the satellite suburbs and walked the sleazy inner-city streets at night. I think I know the place pretty well; Berliner friends tell me I probably know it better than some of the locals! The buzz about the place is alluring and irresistible. Berlin is a city I love dearly. I also think I've read most of whatever is worth reading about the place, in both English and German. Why do I mention all of this? Simply to underline the sheer awfulness of this execrable piece of work. Heavily influenced by 'On the Road', Walker Dean Moriarty's way through a Berlin populated by spongers, drop-outs and weirdos whose lives revolve around dope, booze and 70s soul. Trouble is, he ain't no Kerouac. Of course, part of the city's attraction - as it has been down through the ages - lies in its vibrant social mix. In many ways, the people ARE the city. But really, to read Walker, you'd think they spent half their lives lying in the gutter, stoned and wondering where the next handout was coming from. Walker's book does a disservice to a great and wonderful city. There is no sense of balance or perspective about his work, the 'adventures' of the title become predictable and repetitive and the style suffers from a painful desire to show us all how ultra-hip he is. This is one of those books that you keep reading simply because it's so bad. Like a rabbit transfixed by oncoming headlights, you can't tear yourself away. I wish I could have given it no stars.

i lived in west berlin 1983-1984 and find walker's books one of the best ever written on 80s berlin--at least the 80s berlin i knew, schÖneberg, kreuzberg, the music scene, the squats. a must-read for any current berliner who has any interest in music, arts, history and politics. as for the "execable" review below, it is journalism -- no pretenses to fine art. comparisons to beat writers are absurd. i don't know what part or social sector of berlin that reviewer lived in, but he clearly missed the best

stuff as seen in the book "Zoo Station." Walker never wrote the book on Nicaragua as he sadly died in the early 90s. Ian Walker August 13, 1952 - December 8, 1990 RIP!

Just read while visiting Berlin in 1997. Good historical background of divided city. I enjoyed his perspective of questioning both societies' institutions (he was in his 20's & lived with many other young people who partied & lived a hedonistic poor life in West Berlin.) Excellent background for a 1st time visitor to Berlin. I'd like to find more of author's writing but unable to.

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