Abstract:

“Mr. Gorbachev, Tear Down This Wall!” –Ronald Reagan (1987)
Ryan Bobst, International Affairs and German Senior Seminar, Fall 2006

Communism suffered a constant decline beginning with Poland, then East Germany in 1989, and finally the Soviet Union in 1991. The implementation of Solidarity in Poland, a political party wanting sovereignty from the Soviet Union, led to future separation from the USSR. The application of Glasnost in the Soviet Union, a political policy allowing freedom of speech, permitted non-Communist governments, such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia, to break away from Soviet domination. Gorbachev, the Soviet President, urged Honecker, the East German President, to accept reform and allow certain freedoms in East Germany. After many peaceful demonstrations by the East and West German people, East Germany collapsed thus leading to the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of East and West Germany.

The film Das Versprechen (The Promise) [1995], delineates some of these historical aspects, fictionalized, dramatized and yet realistically portrayed in a modern German movie. The building of the Berlin wall in 1961, the ensuing escape attempts, the tunnels under the Berlin wall, and the later collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 are all highlighted in this movie using a love story plot to symbolize the separation between East and West Germany. The movie illuminates the microcosm of the love between Sophie and Konrad as well as the macrocosm of East and West Germany, the latter having promised their fellow countrymen in the East never to lose hope towards unification.