

ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA

**Clarity and Ambivalence in Oppositional Writing
in the Wake of the Uprising of 17 June 1953
in the German Democratic Republic**

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Abstract of Thesis

A civil Uprising on 17 June 1953 in the German Democratic Republic created a dilemma for a number of writers there. On one hand, they were deeply committed to the principles of socialism, upon which their state was based and which they saw as being put in grave danger by events such as those they experienced on 17 June. On the other hand, they were fiercely critical of the practice of socialism as pursued by the governing party, whose Stalinist methods of governance they believed to be in large part responsible for the civil unrest.

My thesis explores the nature of this dilemma in the case of four writers, Bertolt Brecht, Heiner Müller, Stefan Heym and Erich Loest, and their efforts to resolve it within a repressive state, whose regime vigorously suppressed all signs of criticism or dissent. These writers created major works of fiction, a cycle of poems, a drama and two novels, in which the Uprising of 17 June is the central theme. In addition, each has provided a substantial body of non-fictional texts, largely journalistic and autobiographical, in which the Uprising is extensively contextualised. In bringing together and interrelating the fictional and non-fictional work of each author into my analysis, I have been able to demonstrate that all four held and publicly expressed views that set them in opposition to the regime in the GDR.

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List of Abbreviations

5T	<i>5 Tage im Juni</i>
BBA	Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv
BFA	<i>Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe</i>
BPRS	Bund Proletarisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller
BStU	Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik
D	<i>Durch die Erde ein Riß: Ein Lebenslauf</i>
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund
G	<i>Germania Tod in Berlin</i>
GDR	German Democratic Republic
HO	Handelsorganisation
K	<i>Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen</i>
KgU	Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
LPG	Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft
MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit
N	<i>Nachruf</i>

NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands
OdF	Opfer des Faschismus
RIAS	Radio im amerikanischen Sektor
S	<i>Sommengewitter</i>
SA	Sturmabteilung (der NSDAP)
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands
SS	Schutzstaffel (der NSDAP)
Stasi	Staatssicherheitsdienst
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
VEB	Volkseigener Betrieb

INTRODUCTION

On 17 June 1953, a civil uprising took place in cities and towns throughout the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the culmination of months of growing anger and unhappiness among the population. It ended almost as soon as it had begun, petering out in the afternoon rain on 17 June, but the day became emblematic of the ideological, political and cultural division of Germany and enjoyed an almost mythical status that was to endure up to and beyond the demise of the GDR itself. What made it especially complex was that it provoked an impassioned debate, in which a single set of events and circumstances was invoked in support of ideological views which often stood in diametric opposition to each other. For some, 17 June 1953 exposed the illegitimacy of the GDR regime, revealing not only the courage of a people determined to throw off the yoke of communism, but also the treachery of those who would stand in the people's way. For others, it confirmed their fears that fascist ambition was still very much alive and could only be kept at bay by adherence to the socialism they believed had brought down the Third Reich.

Writers were inevitably drawn into this war of words. Those in the GDR were socialist and generally supported their government's efforts to build and maintain a socialist state, so much so that Walter Ulbricht, General Secretary and leader of the ruling Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), could declare at a Party meeting in July 1953: 'Die Angehörigen der Intelligenz haben in den Tagen der faschistischen Provokation loyal gearbeitet.'¹ For many, Ulbricht's words confirmed the fact of GDR writers' unanimous and unconditional support for their government's harsh suppression of the workers' revolt on 17 June. As a result, GDR writers were often regarded in the West as apologists for a repressive and illegitimate regime, and

¹ Walter Ulbricht's speech at the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, 24-26 July 1953 is reprinted in Elimar Schubbe (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der DDR* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), p. 296.

consequently there has been a tendency to dismiss GDR texts relating to 17 June.²

The situation, however, was more complex. Many GDR writers, particularly among those who had experienced at first hand the undeniable alienation between the people and their state, were deeply dismayed and filled with conflicting emotions which they endeavoured to express in writing immediately after 17 June and in the months and years to come. Among these texts are to be found not only works of considerable literary merit, but also evidence of a consistency and honesty of view, which ran counter to official GDR narratives and which I believe animated a number of GDR writers in the early decades of their state's existence. It is important here to define what is included within this generic term, 'texts'. The relationship between many GDR writers and 17 June is a very complex one indeed: to gain an understanding of this relationship in the case of any particular writer, it is essential to consider everything he (or she) has written or said on the subject. This means we must take into account all texts, not only literary-fictional work, such as novels, poetry and drama, but also diaries and autobiographies, letters, essays, press articles and interview scripts. Only by analysing the totality of a writer's output can we fully appreciate the significance of each individual text. It is my contention that the variety of and in texts relating to 17 June has not been sufficiently acknowledged and, as a result, the complexity of individual writers' views on this topic has tended to be less than fully understood. In short, judgement of the concerns and motivations which 17 June engendered in writers, or at least some writers, has been hampered by an overly narrow critical reception of their work.

We must, of course, treat all texts with caution. Novels, plays and poetry may or may not be intended to represent the author's own opinions. Newspaper articles are usually written with the objective of presenting a point of view, based on facts: whether this is always the journalist's intention, or indeed whether the underlying 'facts' are reliable is often debatable. Letters have addressees, but the writer may have intended a wider readership. Life narratives require similar circumspection. Diaries may be personal and private, or may have been written with a view to later publication.

² See, for example, Hubertus Knabe, *17. Juni: Ein deutscher Aufstand* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2004), p. 252; and Ehrhart Neubert, 'Brot in Freiheit', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 June 2004.

Memoirs and autobiographies are prone to inaccuracy and incompleteness, particularly when written many years after the event. Furthermore, in all such life narrative, there is, unlike historical narrative, an explicit or implicit ego,³ an ego that will be anxious to justify the subject's own perceptions and actions.⁴ We must also remember that the subject in these discourses is the subject of his or her ideological and institutional environment.⁵ This observation is particularly apt in the case of writers in the GDR, where considerable emphasis was placed on the political and social functions of this type of literature, reflecting pressure on the writer to recount personal experience within the accepted socialist interpretation of history and social progress.⁶ Indeed, this last point is true of all texts written by GDR writers. There must always be reservations, when considering work in any genre as the expression of a writer's own inner thoughts and opinions, and particularly so, when the writer is working under difficult conditions in a repressed state. We are therefore more likely to reach a balanced view of a writer when we consider everything from that writer available to us and it seems strange or even perverse that opinions on GDR writers have often been formed without recourse to all of his or her work.

What becomes clear when this totality of texts is included in any critical appraisal, is that there is a considerable divergence of view among GDR writers and their responses to 17 June. It is true that most writers who lived through 17 June supported the regime absolutely, and the greater part of the body of 17 June literature faithfully reflects the official position. However, a significant number of works advance different interpretations. Some of these were written in West Germany, where authors could safely be explicit in their criticism of the SED and rejection of its narrative. Others, however, chose to stay in the GDR and confront what Christian Joppke calls the

³ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 3.

⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Barbara Saunders, *Contemporary German Autobiography: Literary Approaches to the Problem of Identity* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985), p. 33.

‘dilemma of opposition’,⁷ meaning they had to find a way to reconcile their loyalty to the socialist system with their concern over the social, political and cultural malady afflicting the GDR, in an environment where the Party equated any expression of such concern with disloyalty.

In seeking to navigate a route through these hazardous waters, the writer had to find a middle course. Too earnest an *Ergebensheitsadresse* to the Party invited contempt from both sides, East and West; it was seen simply as an instrument of and apology for a repressive regime and neutralized any critical observations the writer may have made. Too vigorous an expression of dissatisfaction with the Party risked the wrath of the censors and subsequent marginalisation. This dilemma, or conflict, was a critical factor within the oppositional strand of GDR literature, perhaps particularly so in literature where 17 June is thematised. The literature cannot be properly assessed without consideration of the dynamic of the conflict within it, and a proper appreciation of the conflict is only realisable through a thorough assessment of all the literature.

There are four writers whose lives and work signally represent this dilemma of opposition. They are Bertolt Brecht, Heiner Müller, Stefan Heym and Erich Loest. Each of the four belong to one of the first two antifascist generations.⁸ Brecht and Heym were born in the Wilhelmine era, grew to maturity in the Weimar Republic and spent the years of the Third Reich in opposition and in exile. Loest and Müller grew up in the Third Reich and served in Hitler’s armies towards the end of the war. It earned them the somewhat unkind soubriquet, ‘Mitläufer’, from Wolfgang Emmerich,⁹ but like great numbers of their contemporaries, they acquired a deep and lasting antifascism. All four were in East Berlin on 17 June. They witnessed the events at first hand and were, by their own admission, profoundly shaken and dismayed by what they saw. Each has written fiction, encompassing novels, dramas and poetry, in which 17 June is a

⁷ Christian Joppke, *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 200.

⁸ Brecht was born in 1898, Heym in 1913, Loest in 1926 and Müller in 1929.

⁹ Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Deutsche Intellektuelle: was nun? Zum Funktionswandel der (ostdeutschen) literarischen Intelligenz zwischen 1945 und 1989’, in *After the GDR: New Perspectives in the Old GDR and the Young Länder*, ed. by Laurence McFalls and Lothar Probst (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 3-27 (p. 9).

predominant theme, and letters, interviews, essays, journalistic texts and autobiographical material, in which 17 June is extensively contextualised and analysed. With two post-*Wende* exceptions, the texts explored in this thesis were written in the GDR, though sizeable parts ran foul of the censor and were, initially at any rate, published only in West Germany.

These four writers and their 17 June-related works are not representative of GDR literature in any broad sense. They are representative only of one strand of the two antifascist generations of writers, a relatively small group, that saw in 17 June the manifestation of profound sociopolitical problems in the GDR and was prepared to use the full scope of its creative talents to express these concerns from within the GDR system. Indeed, beyond these four, few others fit readily into the category. Figures such as Robert Havemann and Walter Janka were of the same generation as Brecht and Heym, and Wolfgang Harich was a contemporary of Loest and Müller; they certainly were oppositional, but they wrote no significant fiction relating to 17 June. Anna Seghers, also of the Wilhelmine generation, did produce work which engaged with 17 June, but like the majority of her contemporaries, she provided scant opposition to the authorities. Others in the GDR wrote critically of 17 June. In Christoph Hein's novella, *Der fremde Freund* (1982), the malignant effects of 17 June on the central character, Claudia, (and, by extension, on GDR society) are sharply drawn.¹⁰ Hein, however, was of a different generation: the old antifascist certainties had been replaced by a more clinical perception of society. Nor were my chosen writers representative of GDR society in general, even, or perhaps particularly, in 1953. In fact, writers and the working-class people at that time felt a sense of alienation from each other and a mutual distrust. An account of the opposition in which these writers engaged is not the same as, or even parallel with, the account of dissent generally in the GDR because writers and people were, on 17 June, in opposition to and not in harmony with each other.

The four writers do, however, represent a strand of oppositional literature. All four were defiant, but in different ways and with different outcomes, and of course they

¹⁰ Christoph Hein, *Der fremde Freund/Drachenblut* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 2002). First published in 1982.

each bring quite distinct creative qualities to their work. The writers were by no means homogeneous, but there are significant linkages. Heym, Loest and particularly the dramatist Müller were profoundly influenced by Brecht's life and work. Heym and Brecht saw the war out in the USA, and Loest and Müller in the German army. There were many points of contact between the lives of Heym and his fellow novelist and journalist, Loest. What links the four most strongly is that they were remarkably similar in ideological stance, and in their reading of the causes of 17 June and proposals for remedy.

It is generally accepted that the fiction produced by these writers relating to 17 June is of a very high quality, even where the ideological content and authors' intent are deemed to be dubious. What appears to be less widely recognised is that the thoughts and feelings of these writers concerning 17 June and GDR society cannot be properly assessed without reference to their wider literary output on the topic. Attempts at interpretation of the material in their autobiographies, letters and journalism throw up many of the same problems encountered in an analysis of the same writers' fictional work. This is unsurprising, since it was usually published (or remained unpublished) under the same conditions. But an analysis of the entire range of each author's work provides other possible windows into the author's mind. In analysing the entirety of the texts in which these selected authors have explored their society in general and 17 June as its weathervane, I will seek to add more clarity and definition to the depth and strength of the inner conflicts that beset a number of the earlier generations of intellectuals and writers in the GDR.

In terms of the organisation and structure of my thesis, Brecht, Müller, Heym and Loest are each accorded a chapter (Chapters 3 to 6 respectively). My thesis explores the dilemma of opposition for these four writers and its genesis and expression in the wake of the Uprising of 17 June 1953. Chapter 2 sets this dilemma and the writers' consequent texts in context. The chapter is in three parts. In the first two parts, I examine the opposing interpretations of 17 June which led to conflict between writers and state, and the cultural conditions in the GDR which militated against any easy resolution of the conflict. Then I review the body of 17 June-related literature and its

reception: this review reveals, I believe, that reception of the literature of 17 June rests on too narrow a base to permit a proper assessment of the oppositional character of a significant body of literature and writers, in whose front line are Brecht, Müller, Heym and Loest. In Chapter 7, I will conclude with some observations on what unites the four writers and what sets them apart from most of their generation and from each other.

THE LITERATURE OF 17 JUNE: TEXTS AND CONTEXTS

In this chapter, I will review the primary contextual factors to be taken into account in the analysis of the work relating to 17 June of my four chosen writers. The first of these is the clash of interpretations of 17 June itself, an ideological confrontation that brought to a head the writers' dilemma of opposition. All attempts to exercise this opposition ran up against the implicit contract that existed between writers and state in the GDR, and I will explore the key factors which governed literary production in and after 1953. The texts I will analyse in this thesis form part of the general body of literature relating to 17 June and I will conclude the chapter with a review of this literature and its reception.

A Clash of Interpretations

There are many accounts of the causes, course of events and consequences of 17 June in the GDR, but they all distil essentially to one of two interpretations, each ideologically informed. From a cultural- or literary-historical viewpoint, what happened was less important than the fact that a number of writers and other artists were caught in the Cold War between opposing interpretations, a situation which resulted in considerable personal dilemma and inner conflict. Writers in this position sought to explain their dilemma and resolve their conflict through their writing, and it is, therefore, essential to understand the nature and significance of the conflicting interpretations.

'Der 17. Juni ist kein einzelner Tag'

In his autobiographical *Erinnern ist Leben*, Bertolt Brecht's colleague, theatre director Manfred Wekwerth noted: 'Eigentlich gibt es den 17. Juni nicht. Der 17. Juni ist kein einzelner Tag, [...] sondern eine Kette von Ereignissen.'¹ He went on to observe that a reduction of the 17 June phenomenon to a single day served only as a peg upon which ideologues of all hues hung simplistic views on the legitimacy of the GDR. His

¹ Manfred Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben: Eine dramatische Autobiographie* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2000), p. 108.

observation is amply borne out by the Western trivialisation of 17 June as a civic holiday, which meant no more to West Germans than a day in the countryside or lazing at home,² and the Eastern dismissal of the day (and the previous one) as days of fascist provocation.³

Wekwerth is right when he observes that 17 June is a chain of events. A concatenation of social, political, economic and cultural factors came together in a civic explosion on the streets of the GDR on 17 June, and this in turn led to a series of consequences that affected every aspect of life there, not only in the immediate aftermath, but for decades to come. But 17 June is more than this. It is iconic, a representation not only of the causes, events and consequences of 17 June but also of the strengths and particularly the weaknesses of a society which caused 17 June to unfold in the way that it did. An assessment of 17 June is therefore an assessment of the evolution and the state of GDR society in the early 1950s.

Sources of Interpretations

We can call upon a variety of sources in assembling the facts of 17 June. Oral accounts are still possible, although numbers of potential narrators are dwindling fast. In any case, the memories of elderly people concerning events that took place more than half a century ago must be treated with caution. Photographic and audiovisual materials are available; they certainly confirm that tanks and large numbers of people were on the streets of the GDR on 17 June, but they cast little light on who was there and why. We therefore have to fall back on the written word in the form of contemporary documents, historical accounts, life-narratives and fictional material. As a vehicle for establishing the facts about 17 June, each of these categories presents intrinsic problems. The latter two are particularly problematic. Life-narratives offer subjective truth, not fact,⁴ and the essence of all fiction is that it is invention. These categories of writing are therefore more properly considered in the context of writers' interpretations of 17 June; at this

² Klaus Harpprecht, 'Ouverture einer europäischen Revolution', *Die Zeit*, 12 June 2003.

³ Ulbricht's description of the Uprising in a speech at a Party conference on 24-26 July 1953, reported in the *Berliner Zeitung*, 31 July 1953, and cited in Schubbe, p. 296.

⁴ Smith and Watson, p. 10.

point I will concentrate on eliciting the facts of 17 June from contemporary documentation and historical accounts. Of course, these also constitute literature, albeit of different genres; even here, one has to be careful to make allowance for the personal and ideological inclinations of the writers concerned.

The most useful contemporary material consists of the records, minutes and resolutions of political and cultural meetings, newspaper reports and transcripts of radio transmissions. Newspaper reports and radio transmissions will often demonstrate a bias quite openly. The newspaper *Neues Deutschland* was subtitled ‘Organ des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands’ and ‘Radio im amerikanischen Sektor’ (RIAS) was controlled by US military personnel. We cannot therefore expect much impartiality here. Nevertheless, these and similar sources are valuable indications of lines of thinking on both sides of the ideological divide.

Material arising from political and cultural meetings is particularly valuable in that it allows us to chart developments in both these fields. Records are available from the archives of the Bundesministerium and from organisations such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, which detail what was being said and written of 17 June in West German political circles. Most of this material is flagrantly propagandistic and sheds little light on developments in intellectual circles in the GDR. Of more relevant import (although, of course, just as propagandistic), are the records of resolutions and speeches emanating from senior echelons of the SED, as well as records of proceedings of cultural bodies such as the Writers’ Union and the Deutsche Akademie der Künste, or Academy.⁵ As one might expect, there is a vast repository of such material and a variety of official and semi-official publications exist, identifying and reproducing the most important documents. Ulrich Dietzel and Gudrun Geißler provide an excellent example of the history of an organisation traced through minutes of meetings and other internal

⁵ The East German Writers’ Union, or Schriftstellerverband, was established in 1950. The adjective ‘deutscher’ was subsequently prefixed, to indicate a pan-German aspiration that was, however, effectively still-born. The organisation changed its name to Schriftstellerverband der DDR in 1973. I use the English terms, Writers’ Union and Academy throughout this thesis.

documents, while Elimar Schubbe's compilation of speeches, reports and resolutions is equally informative about cultural-political history more generally.⁶

In each of these collections, key documents from both the political and the cultural arenas are included and each editorial team provides additional explanatory and interpretive material. It is, of course, in the areas of commentary and interpretation of historical accounts that the difficulties in assembling the facts on 17 June begin to accumulate. The historiography of 17 June is indeed a crowded and contested space. Accounts began to appear within months, but the rate of publication of such texts quickened appreciably after the collapse of the GDR and the reunification of Germany. Access to a mass of new material from GDR government archives and other sources meant that every aspect of GDR life and history, including, of course, 17 June, became the focus of new research. A great many new books and articles appeared, some dealing with 17 June in general terms and others focusing on specific aspects. Examples of the latter approach include Heidi Roth's regional studies⁷ or Karl Wilhelm Fricke's investigations into the role of the GDR judiciary in the events.⁸ This stream of publications turned into a veritable flood of new works in 2003, the fiftieth anniversary of 17 June.⁹

The Eastern View

Historiography relating to 17 June identifies broadly two interpretive categories, which may be termed the Eastern and Western views. In the first category are included those accounts which dismiss the disturbances of 17 June as a Western plot, a 'Tag X' planned and engineered by West German political agencies with US support, whose aim was to destabilise and undermine the GDR political system. Western hooligans and

⁶ Ulrich Dietzel and Gudrun Geißler (eds), *Zwischen Diskussion und Disziplin: Dokumente zur Geschichte der Akademie der Künste (Ost) 1945/1950 bis 1993* (Berlin: Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste, 1997); for Schubbe, see note 1, Chapter 1.

⁷ Heidi Roth, *Der 17. Juni in Sachsen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999) was one of a number of publications by this author during the 1990s, focusing on events on 17 June in Saxony and surrounding areas.

⁸ Karl Wilhelm Fricke, 'Todesstrafe für Magdeburger "Provokateur"'. SED-Rachejustiz nach dem Aufstand des 17. Juni 1953', *Deutschland-Archiv*, 26 (1993), 527-31 is one example.

⁹ In a comprehensive bibliography of 17 June material, published in 2003 by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, a total of 370 German-language texts are listed, of which some 300 deal with the historiography. Of these, some 80 texts appeared prior to 1989. Of the remainder, around 60 texts appeared in 2003 alone.

troublemakers were, according to this account, smuggled into East Berlin, where they incited workers to go on strike, attacked Party functionaries and other citizens going about their lawful business, and set alight or laid waste to GDR kiosks, shops and business premises. Soviet forces are portrayed as a benign, watchful presence. Unsurprisingly, this category includes officially-sanctioned histories of the GDR. In Stefan Doernberg's *Kurze Geschichte der DDR*,¹⁰ published in 1964, the events of 17 June are depicted entirely as the work of Western agents. In a revised official history,¹¹ published in 1978 (and therefore in the post-Ulbricht era), Western agents are still depicted as the primary agitators, but now the account concedes workers' discontent and admits to a degree of Party confusion and disunity.¹²

An interesting recent variant of this interpretation is provided by Hans Bentzien. Bentzien was Minister of Culture in the GDR between 1961 and 1965 and was the last director of the state television authority. His account generally follows the old official line, but he attaches a special responsibility for the upheaval on 17 June to Lavrenti Beria, Stalin's head of secret police in Moscow, who was arrested in the post-Stalin manoeuvrings just after 17 June and executed some months later.¹³ Beria was indeed demonised in SED circles, following Stalin's death and his own arrest,¹⁴ but given the Byzantine nature of Kremlin politics and the continuing paucity of Soviet material relating to this period, it is difficult to see why much credence should be accorded to Bentzien's assertion.

Indeed, there are major difficulties generally with the accounts in this category. By the admission of their own statistics, the forces of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Stasi) rounded up no more than a handful of Western 'ringleaders' out

¹⁰ Stefan Doernberg, *Kurze Geschichte der DDR* (East Berlin: Dietz, 1964).

¹¹ Gerhard Roßmann and others (eds), *Geschichte der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (East Berlin: Dietz, 1978).

¹² See Johannes Pernkopf, *Der 17. Juni in der Literatur der beiden deutschen Staaten* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982), pp. 54-59 for the information on official GDR historiography.

¹³ Hans Bentzien, *Was geschah am 17. Juni? Vorgeschichte Verlauf Hintergründe* (Berlin: Edition Ost-Das Neue Berlin, 2003).

¹⁴ Ulbricht's portrayal of Beria as a 'Totengräber der DDR' at the meeting of the Central Committee of the SED in July 1953 was an early example of the official discourse. See Knabe, p. 71.

of the multitudes allegedly creating havoc in East Berlin on 17 June.¹⁵ Before and immediately after 17 June, Party leaders admitted to many mistakes made at government levels in the Party. Records of these admissions were in the public domain,¹⁶ yet facts such as these were subsequently airbrushed out of historical accounts, since they did not fit in with the official narrative. Nor has anyone ever disputed that the 17 June disturbances occurred throughout the GDR, including towns and cities such as Cottbus and tiny Döbern close to the Polish frontier,¹⁷ and therefore hardly accessible to Western ‘day-trippers’. Yet there is no attempt to explain the source of the disturbances in these places. This is the tip of an iceberg of inconsistencies in a narrative so riddled with blatant distortion or tampering with the facts that, though there may well be elements of truth, it cannot serve as a basis for assembling the facts concerning 17 June.

The Western View

In contrast to this SED-sponsored account, an alternative body of historical literature coalesces around the view that 17 June was an uprising, an *Aufstand* against the government of the GDR. The main point at issue here was the nature of the uprising: was it a popular uprising, a *Volksaufstand*, against an undemocratic and illegitimate regime, or was it a much less subversive protest, an *Arbeiteraufstand*, where workers went on strike in protest against increasingly burdensome working conditions?

Stefan Brant pioneered the *Volksaufstand* interpretation in 1954. In a somewhat discursive and personalised account, with little annotation or further analysis, he seeks to demonstrate that 17 June represented a popular challenge to the GDR state.¹⁸ This theme was further developed after the *Wende* by a number of historians who conceded that the catalyst for the disturbances of 17 June had indeed been worker discontent brought about by government imposition of ever-increasing productivity norms:

¹⁵ Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *17.6.53: Volksaufstand in der DDR: Ursachen–Abläufe–Folgen* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2003), p. 244.

¹⁶ For example, Ulbricht and his deputy Otto Grotewohl admitted to these mistakes at a special Party Conference on the evening of 16 June. The speeches were comprehensively reported in various publications including *Neues Deutschland* on the following day, 17 June.

¹⁷ Kowalczyk, *17.6.53*, pp. 284 and 291.

¹⁸ Stefan Brant, *Der Aufstand: Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Deutung des 17. Juni 1953* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1954). It is interesting to note in passing that Brant is also the Klaus Harpprecht who lamented the Western trivialisation of 17 June. See note 2, p. 7.

however, their opinion was that the seeds of widespread sociopolitical revolt had already taken root and were able to flourish in the social ferment of the time. Around this central view there were nuances of interpretation and emphasis. For Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, 17 June demonstrated beyond all dispute the illegitimacy of a regime, already discredited but propped up for the next thirty-six years only by Soviet military power: 17 June was therefore the beginning of the GDR's long journey to oblivion.¹⁹ Kowalczuk, on the other hand, detects few causal links between 17 June and the overthrow of the regime in 1989. Nevertheless, he asserts that what had transpired was clearly a *Volksaufstand*: given the number of people who participated, the term *Arbeiteraufstand* was patently inadequate.²⁰ For Kowalczuk, the political consequence of 17 June was the establishment by the SED and its Soviet masters of an 'innere Staatsgründung', designed to ensure the GDR would never again be vulnerable to another 17 June, an idea he had already explored in collaboration with Mitter and Wolle.²¹ Knabe is a particularly vigorous exponent of the *Volksaufstand* reading. He claims that a substantial military deployment was required to prevent the collapse of communism in the GDR and he notes the gulf that divided the people from the state's politicians, functionaries and media. Knabe is especially critical of the intellectuals, condemning their lack of support and leadership, although he does concede that at least some of them may have acted out of conviction.²² Unusually among English-language accounts, Gary Bruce insists that 17 June was a popular revolution, and he agrees with Mitter and Wolle that the events were a direct antecedent of those of 1989.²³ A common thread running through these analyses is the expression of regret at the West's refusal to offer any support to the beleaguered people of the GDR and the cynical discarding of the memory of 17 June, once it had served its propagandist purpose.²⁴ A final point should

¹⁹ Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1993).

²⁰ Kowalczuk, *17.6.53*, pp. 103-4.

²¹ Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle (eds), *Der Tag X – 17 Juni 1953: Die 'Innere Staatsgründung' der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/54* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 1996).

²² Knabe, pp. 252-61.

²³ Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany 1945-55* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

²⁴ See, for example, Mitter and Wolle, p. 156; Kowalczuk, *17.6.1953*, pp. 270-71; Knabe, pp. 433-34.

be noted: these accounts generally reject any notion that the presence of Westerners in the GDR on 17 June was a meaningful source of agitation.

The first significant analysis of 17 June as an *Arbeiteraufstand* was Arnulf Baring's balanced and moderately pitched account in 1965.²⁵ Baring asserts that 17 June was a worker protest against the imposition of increased productivity norms, exacerbated by SED incompetence and disunity. By the time Soviet forces appeared on the streets, the protest had passed its peak, rendering Soviet intervention largely redundant. According to Baring, the West's refusal to become involved was a huge disappointment to the GDR's rapidly dwindling middle classes. Karl Wilhelm Fricke adheres generally to this line, highlighting the spontaneity and complete lack of organisation or leadership of the demonstrations.²⁶ Fricke confirms the lack of Western involvement; indeed, he maintains, the West's stance actually emboldened Ulbricht and his Soviet allies, even so far as to build the Berlin Wall in 1961, confident that it would be met with Western compliance.²⁷

As this short selection of historical texts illustrates, much Western analysis of 17 June focuses on its political nature and its links to other major events in GDR history, such as the erection and dismantling of the Wall in 1961 and 1989 respectively, although some have sought to emphasise that important economic factors were also in play.²⁸ Beyond a narrow German authorship, however, texts tend to deal with 17 June within a wider historical and geopolitical context. Mary Fulbrook sees 17 June as a complex and inseparable mixture of political and economic factors.²⁹ Gareth Pritchard tends towards the view that 17 June was an *Arbeiteraufstand*, the final spasm of a traditional German

²⁵ Arnulf Baring, *Der 17. Juni 1953* (Cologne and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1965). An English version, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953*, translated by Gerald Onn was published by Cornell University Press in London in 1972. All citations are from the English version.

²⁶ Karl Wilhelm Fricke, 'Der Arbeiteraufstand: Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Folgen', in *17. Juni 1953: Arbeiteraufstand in der DDR*, ed. by Ilse Spittmann and Karl Wilhelm Fricke (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1982), pp. 5-22.

²⁷ Fricke, in Spittmann and Fricke (eds), p. 19.

²⁸ Dietrich Staritz, *Geschichte der DDR: 1949-1985* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985) and Torsten Diedrich, *Waffen gegen das Volk: Der 17. Juni in der DDR* (Munich: Oldenburg, 2003) dwell at some length on the importance of the economic causes and consequences.

²⁹ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

socialism surrendering to Stalinism.³⁰ Christian F. Ostermann analyses the Uprising through a US lens³¹ and Hope Harrison through a Soviet one.³² They come to broadly the same conclusion: neither the US nor the Soviet Union were interested in a reunification of Germany, certainly not on terms acceptable to the opposing side. Both sides in fact instrumentalised 17 June in their prosecution of the Cold War.

As is the case with the SED version of events, this narrative of revolt, and particularly the more politically-informed popular uprising version, presents some problems. The central plank of the SED's case was that 17 June was engineered by the West. Exponents of 17 June as uprising largely avoided admitting to any Western involvement at all. Yet a variety of contemporary records indicate Western intervention, at some level. Jakob Kaiser, West German Minister for All-German Affairs, made a speech at a special conference on reunification in March 1952. The speech was reported in *Der Spiegel*, who quoted Kaiser as saying 'daß dieser Tag X rascher kommt, als die Skeptiker zu hoffen wagen'. According to the article, Kaiser went further: 'Der Generalstabplan für die administrative Machtübernahme ist so gut wie fertig.'³³ Even if Kaiser had something other than interference in GDR affairs in mind, as Fricke maintains,³⁴ these were febrile, nervous times, and the reaction in the GDR, and the Soviet bloc generally, to such militaristically-couched comments is easily imagined. It is also a matter of public record that, whilst the US-controlled RIAS adopted a generally neutral stance on 16 and 17 June, it nevertheless provided a useful information service to any GDR citizens who wanted to know when and where to assemble, and it transmitted an exhortatory message to the strikers from Ernst Scharnowski, a leading Western trade

³⁰ Gareth Pritchard, *The Making of the GDR 1945-1953: From Antifascism to Stalinism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

³¹ Christian F. Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany, 1953* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001).

³² Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations 1953-61* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

³³ Anon, 'Eine Art Scheinregierung', *Der Spiegel*, 9 July 1952.

<http://wissen.spiegel.de/wissen/dokument/dokument.html?id=219772698top=SPIEGEL>. Accessed on 18 August 2009.

³⁴ See Karl Wilhelm Fricke, 'Die nationale Dimension des 17. Juni 1953', *Aus Politik und Geschichte*, B23 (2003), 5-10 (9).

union official.³⁵ Western troops and police were deployed to minimise tension and agitation at the East-West border.³⁶ How many Westerners actually crossed to the East is not known. There probably were not many and their presence probably represented little more than nuisance value, but it does not seem sensible to pretend they were not there.

As regards the numbers of people on the streets overall and their motives for being there, estimates are equally hazy. We do not know how many were striking workers, how many rebellious citizens and how many children and others simply seeking a temporary diversion from the tedium of everyday life. Baring records that between 300,000 and 372,000 workers across the GDR participated (SED and Bundesministerium estimates respectively), or around 6% of the active workforce,³⁷ but Kowalczyk claims the figure was in excess of one million.³⁸ Even if we accept Kowalczyk's unaudited, unauditable number, and even if we assume they were all politically motivated, they would have accounted for less than 10% of the adult population of the GDR. A tenth of a country's population is certainly not an insignificant number; whether it is sufficient to constitute a national uprising is debatable.

In a sense, any debate on the status of 17 June as counterrevolutionary putsch or popular uprising is a somewhat sterile one. It is likely to be informed more by prejudice than by rational deduction and is unlikely to lead to any definitive conclusion. It is, however, important to appreciate the crucial role played by the opposing interpretations in forming judgements and colouring opinions across the political and cultural spectra in both East and West. To the adherents of each interpretation, anyone who did not share that interpretation in all respects was misguided and the totality of his or her thoughts and actions were consequently to be regarded with suspicion and hostility.

³⁵ Brewster S. Chamberlin and Jürgen Wetzel, 'Der 17. Juni und der RIAS. Aus einem Gespräch mit dem früheren RIAS-Direktor Gordon Ewing', in Spittmann and Fricke (eds), pp. 212-15 (p. 214).

³⁶ Ostermann, pp. 174-75.

³⁷ Baring, p. 52.

³⁸ Kowalczyk, *17.6.1953*, p. 271.

There were a number of people in the GDR who did not accept either interpretation in its entirety, but sought an alternative reading of 17 June, borrowing some and rejecting other elements from the two opposing interpretations. These people paid a price for their attempts to find and promote a middle way. Some were politicians, like Max Fechner, Minister of Justice, and Rudolf Herrnstadt, editor of *Neues Deutschland*; they lost their positions at the top of the Party. Some were intellectual leaders, like Wolfgang Harich and Robert Havemann, professors at the Humboldt University; they lost their freedom. Some were writers, like Bertolt Brecht, Stefan Heym, Heiner Müller and Erich Loest. They too were punished in different ways for their rebelliousness.

The events of 17 June crystallised the insoluble dilemma in which these people found themselves caught. They were committed to a socialist GDR and regarded Western capitalism as a dangerous, fascist-ridden enemy. The events of 17 June confirmed this and demonstrated an urgent need for reform of the Party's ways and reorientation of the masses' mindset. For writers who held these opinions, the dilemma presented particular problems. In a normal democratic society, writers explore and resolve dilemmas through their work. The GDR was not a normal society and writers' capacity to bring literary skills to bear on the issue was rigidly circumscribed.

Writers and Writing in the GDR

The writers of the GDR were as disparate a group of writers as one might expect to find in any society. We cannot expect to encounter a tidy uniformity of views among the GDR's antifascist writers, nor between these and later generations of writers. Yet, the GDR's unique geopolitical position meant that writers there shared a cultural environment that was quite unlike any other. Repugnant as many Western observers may have regarded elements of this environment, GDR writers, in large part, chose to live and work within it. The writer was both product of and agent in the complex and pervasive factors at work here, and to understand the GDR writer, we must explore these factors and assess the extent to which they influenced and informed the writers' work and views generally and with regard to 17 June in particular.

The Antifascist Narrative

After defeat in the Second World War in May 1945, Germany was occupied by the victorious Allies. The Soviet forces occupied the eastern zone (Sowjetische Besatzungszone or SBZ). Under Soviet tutelage, Walter Ulbricht and his Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD) were put in charge of the governance of this zone. Within a year, the Sozialistische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) had been coerced into a merger with the KPD to form the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). In 1949, the Soviets completed the transformation of the SBZ into the (nominally) sovereign state of the GDR with the SED as its governing party.

It was to this zone that many German writers began to return in the months after the end of the war. Emmerich provides an impressive list of arrivals, including cultural icons such as Johannes Becher, Bertolt Brecht and Anna Seghers.³⁹ (Stefan Heym returned some years later in 1952). Most of these writers were socialist, and had been implacably antifascist during the years of the Third Reich. Their hatred of fascism remained undiminished and they returned to the SBZ because, as Emmerich puts it, ‘das Projekt Sozialismus [...] das absolute Gegenteil von “Faschismus” zu sein versprach’.⁴⁰ Some returned reluctantly, being fully aware of Stalin’s excesses, and suspicious of the arch-Stalinist, Ulbricht. Yet the SBZ was their natural home and, as they saw it, Germany’s best hope for a socialist society.

A younger generation of writers, among them Heiner Müller and Erich Loest, were on the threshold of their literary careers as the war ended. They too were to make an important contribution to the body of antifascist literature. They had been born in eastern Germany in the 1920s and, scarcely adult, had been pressed into military service in the final days of the war. They often came from an antifascist background or were converted to antifascism while soldiers or prisoners of war.⁴¹ Some have found it surprising that these writers should have embraced the antifascist creed with the same

³⁹ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR: Erweiterte Neuauflage* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 2000), p. 80.

⁴⁰ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 35.

⁴¹ Emmerich, ‘Deutsche Intellektuelle’, p. 9.

ardour as older communist writers such as Brecht and Becher.⁴² As we shall see, however, these younger writers' commitment to antifascism and socialism was just as passionate as it was among the writers of the previous generation.

Initially, there was an air of optimism among the writers and a belief that there now existed an excellent opportunity to rid Germany of fascism for ever and to create a just, socialist society with a culture drawing on old German values. The Kulturbund was established in July 1945: its manifesto committed it to striving for German unity and drawing upon the cultural heritage of German humanism.⁴³ This organisation, headed by Becher, was of course socialist in its objectives, but it did have non-socialist members and initially provided an impetus across Germany to revitalise German culture.⁴⁴ The first Kulturbund convention in May 1947 and the first German Writers' Union Congress in Berlin in October 1947 welcomed delegates from all over Germany.⁴⁵ In those early days, too, there was a remarkable lack of interference in cultural matters from either the Soviet authorities or the SED. Writers were preoccupied with the evil and horrors of Nazism, but they were relatively free to write in any style they wished. In truth, however, by the end of 1947, the Cold War had already set in, hopes for German reunification had all but disappeared and the commitment to antifascism which had brought the writers to the SBZ in the first place was increasingly instrumentalised by the SED in its efforts to bring culture under its control.

This raises an important question as to the extent to which the GDR writers' perception of antifascism coincided with that of the SED regime. Dan Diner identifies two key elements in the GDR's official antifascism: an insistence on the material preconditions necessary to prevent any return of fascism, especially the dismantling of all capitalist institutions that fostered imperialism, militarism and revanchism, and a steadfast loyalty to the Soviet Union as the saviour of socialism and victor over

⁴² Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 43.

⁴³ The full name of the organisation was Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands. The manifesto is cited in Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR: 1945-1990* (Cologne: Edition Deutschland Archiv, 1995), p. 6.

⁴⁴ Axel Goodbody, Dennis Tate and Ian Wallace, 'The Failed Socialist Experiment: Culture in the GDR', in *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Rob Burns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 147-207 (p. 150).

⁴⁵ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, pp. 15-18.

fascism.⁴⁶ This led, on the one hand, to the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* programme, launched by Ulbricht at the Second SED Party Conference in July 1952 and, on the other, to ‘a philosovietism, that erratic complex which stubbornly denied Stalinist crimes’.⁴⁷ Although the programme introduced a set of economic and social measures inimical to the majority of the people of the GDR, the writers were spared its harshest excesses and there is little evidence that they opposed the government’s actions in the socioeconomic sphere, certainly before 17 June. Their stance on Stalin and Stalinism was more complex. The Party under Ulbricht remained steadfastly Stalinist, even after Stalin’s death in March 1953 and the exposure of his excesses at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow in February 1956. The writers’ attitude to Stalin and Stalinism in the time before his death was, at best, ambivalent. Many were privately uneasy, but they continued to pay him lip service. However, from Stalin’s death in March 1953 onwards, many writers’ views began to diverge from the official Party line.

Party Control

There is no precise date upon which the SED began to impose its political will on cultural activity. It is variously set between 1946 and 1949, but critics agree that, in reality, despite the relative degree of freedom enjoyed initially by writers, the impulse to harness cultural activity to politics was present from the beginning of KPD/SED governance of the GDR.⁴⁸

Party control over every aspect of life in the SBZ/GDR was pervasive. The boundaries between the elements of cultural control are fluid and there is a great deal of overlap, but the main instruments of control can be identified as setting missions and tasks, instituting a range of rewards and privileges, and establishing a system of

⁴⁶ Dan Diner, ‘On the Ideology of Antifascism,’ tr. by Christian Gundermann, *New German Critique*, 67 (1996), 123-32.

⁴⁷ Diner, p. 126.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Alexander Stephan, Sarah Lennox and Frank Lennox, ‘Johannes R. Becher and the Cultural Development of the GDR’, *New German Critique* 2 (1974), 72-89 (78-79); Emmerich, *Kleine Literatur-geschichte*, pp. 73-74; Helen Fehervary, ‘The Literature of the German Democratic Republic’ in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. by Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 393-439 (pp. 397-98).

censorship. Such a regime of artistic repression and proscription led inevitably to oppositional activity in the cultural arena.

The Writers' Tasks

Stalin enjoined writers to be 'engineers of the soul'; they should 'mold human souls on a strictly defined pattern so as to make them fully receptive to the Bolshevik teaching'.⁴⁹ As early as November 1946, the official Party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*, included as part of a report on a cultural conference the message that the writer in the GDR is both master and servant of the people: it is his job to educate the masses.⁵⁰ At a Party Conference in autumn 1948, Ulbricht and his Politbüro colleague, Anton Ackermann, charged the writers with the task of supporting the SED's economic objectives.⁵¹ From very early on, then, the message was clear: culture and literature were to be integral factors in the socialist transformation of society: they were in fact to be hitched to the economic plan.⁵² As yet, however, writers were allowed a reasonable degree of freedom as to how they might go about meeting this requirement. This was to change quite dramatically in early 1951.

The Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in March 1951 has been described as the most crucial event in the history of culture in the GDR.⁵³ As the resolution from the meeting shows, the Party was determined to achieve total control over culture and cultural activity in the GDR.⁵⁴ The resolution marked the launch of an assault on all kinds of formalism in GDR literature: 'Um einen neuen Inhalt zu gestalten, muß man den Formalismus überwinden.' The literary method to be deployed henceforth was mandated: 'Um die Herrschaft des Formalismus in der Kunst zu

⁴⁹ Anne Demaitre, 'The Great Debate on Socialist Realism', *The Modern Language Journal*, 50 (1966), no. 5, 263-68 (265).

⁵⁰ Report cited in Schubbe, p. 67.

⁵¹ See Beate Ihme-Tuchel, 'Die SED und die Schriftsteller 1946 bis 1956', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B13 (2000), 3-15 (6).

⁵² Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 113-15.

⁵³ Schubbe, p. 44.

⁵⁴ 'Entschließung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, aufgenommen auf der V. Tagung vom 15. bis 17. März, 1951', cited in Schubbe, pp. 176-86.

beseitigen, ist es notwendig, eine realistische Kunst zu entwickeln.’ It is not specifically stated here, but it was abundantly clear that the realism intended was Socialist Realism.⁵⁵

The debate surrounding Socialist Realism and Formalism in the early 1950s was of profound significance in the lives and work of many GDR writers. Yet these terms were never explicitly defined in the GDR. Indeed, as Julia Hell points out, each was largely defined *ex negativo* in opposition to the other.⁵⁶ However, Socialist Realism in the GDR was understood as a German variant of a realist style of writing, modelled on the work of nineteenth-century authors such as Balzac and Tolstoy. Realism prescribed the conventions of omniscient narrator and portrayal of characters who were simultaneously unique and representative. The socialist component added ideological principles such as Party hegemony and optimism in victory for the masses in the class struggle. Formalism, by contrast, embraced all styles which clashed with Socialist Realism and applied particularly to stylistic stratagems where narrator omniscience was diluted, including the naturalist style of a Zola, the montage techniques of a Döblin or the streams of consciousness of a Joyce. Formalism was equated with western Modernism, decadent and bourgeois, the ‘ideological weapon of capitalism’.⁵⁷ To ensure that Socialist Realism prevailed, institutions of cultural supervision and control were to be set up: a Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten, and an Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen. The Writers’ Union and other cultural organisations were instructed to provide ‘management and guidance’ for their respective members. The education system was to be overhauled to ensure the correct cultural works would be studied. This was accompanied by the overarching statement that all culture should be geared to the successful completion of the latest economic plan.

The resolution exhorted the Kulturbund to continue to promote a pan-German cultural direction (eschewing, of course, ‘die amerikanische Kulturbarbarei’). In the light of the rest of the resolution, it is hard to believe that anyone could now harbour any

⁵⁵ For example, Ulbricht specifically demanded ‘Kunstwerke im Geiste des sozialistischen Realismus’ in his speech to the Second Party Conference in July 1952. Cited in Schubbe, p. 239.

⁵⁶ Julia Hell, ‘Socialist Realism as Heroic Antifascism’, in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David E. Wellbery and others (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap, 2004), pp. 846-51 (p. 848).

⁵⁷ Ingo R. Stoehr, *German Literature of the Twentieth Century: From Aestheticism to Postmodernism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), p. 257.

lingering hope of a united German cultural space. As David Bathrick maintains, the 1951 resolution was a Cold War statement about the evils of Western cosmopolitanism and imperialism:⁵⁸ it was a statement, therefore, that precluded any possibility of an East/West cultural accommodation. By the early 1950s, writers in the GDR were already constrained as to what they wrote and how they wrote about it.

Rewards and Privileges

If the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee was a hefty stick with which to bend the writers to the Party's will, there was a recognition of the need also for a carrot. This came in the form of an array of perks and privileges. As early as 1949, a system of generous tax concessions for artists and writers was put in place. Otto Grotewohl dedicated his opening speech at the second Kulturbund Congress to an elaboration of the nature of these concessions.⁵⁹ (He was careful to note that the concessions were not to be read as concessions to private business people, although he did not clarify wherein lay the distinction between a self-employed writer and others who earned their money in the private sector.) Other financial rewards and inducements were available. Annual prizes for literature were awarded, ranging from 10,000 to 100,000 marks. For writers who were members of the Writers' Union, work was commissioned; this might have been translation, literary reviews or other cultural work. Writers were paid handsome advances by their publishers, much more so than were their counterparts in West Germany.⁶⁰ The Party negotiated generous *Einzelverträge* with many leading writers, and writers enjoyed the benefit of ration books that allowed them to shop in special *Intelligenzläden*.⁶¹ A series of *Handelsorganisationen* (HOs) operated. These sold food and other consumables not available through the rationing system. Prices were inflated and only highly-paid members of the intelligentsia could shop there.⁶² Scholarships to the Literaturinstitut in Leipzig were available: these enabled young writers to spend two

⁵⁸ David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 90.

⁵⁹ The relevant part of Grotewohl's speech is cited in Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 29.

⁶⁰ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 45-46.

⁶¹ Knabe, p. 252.

⁶² Brant, p. 24.

years there studying literary history and theory, as well as creative writing.⁶³ Amongst others, the young Erich Loest availed himself of this opportunity.

A range of benefits and privileges was therefore available to loyal writers and the writers generally availed themselves of these advantages. John Fuegi tells of Brecht being allowed to transport his typewriter by car to his second home in Buckow. Typewriter, car and second home were all acquired as a result of his status, as was the permission to move the typewriter from one place to another in the first place.⁶⁴ This favoured treatment provoked feelings of deep resentment, not only among the workers, who tended to regard the writers as little more than lackeys of the SED, but also among the lower echelons of functionaries of the SED.⁶⁵

In this way, then, the regime encouraged writers to stay. Some did not: Theodor Plievier left in 1947 and Uwe Johnson in 1959, and of course from the mid-70s onwards, in the wake of Wolf Biermann's expatriation, writers deserted the GDR in droves. Remarkably few, though, chose to leave in the 1950s and 60s. Emmerich identifies only a dozen writers who left the GDR in the course of these decades.⁶⁶ After 1976, however, more than 100 writers left the GDR, including Loest and many younger writers such as Monika Maron.⁶⁷ Not all writers in dispute with the Party left: Stefan Heym and Heiner Müller were among those who stayed.

Censorship

A central feature of totalitarianism is the total claim it makes on culture, in which the regime declares culture to be an ideological weapon, controls all manifestations of cultural life, establishes an all-embracing censorship apparatus, selects one artistic movement as official and denounces all other movements as malignant.⁶⁸ Agreement

⁶³ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 45.

⁶⁴ John Fuegi, *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 539.

⁶⁵ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, pp. 530-42.

⁶⁷ Wolfgang Beutin and others (eds), *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2001), p. 557.

⁶⁸ Matthew Philpotts, *The Margins of Dictatorship: Assent and Dissent in the Work of Günter Eich and Bertolt Brecht* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 23-24. The field of Totalitarianism theory has been the subject of very extensive research. Here Philpotts distils work by a number of previous theorists, in particular, Carl Joachim Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinsky and Ian Kershaw.

that the GDR was, in fact, a totalitarian state may not be universal, but the cultural measures put in place at the Fifth Plenum reveal a totalitarian approach to culture. Socialist Realism was prescribed as the mandatory literary style and war declared on Formalism. Given its determination to effect a total claim on culture in an environment where the stylistic guidelines for literature were vague, the SED put a censorship apparatus in place. Censorship was hardly a new experience in Germany,⁶⁹ but the system developed by the SED was uniquely pervasive.

Although censorship certainly existed in the SBZ, the GDR's distinctive brand of censorship only began to take shape after the Fifth Plenum.⁷⁰ Richard Zipser identifies four levels of censorship in the GDR: self-censorship, editorial censorship, state censorship and Party censorship.⁷¹ Self-censorship, the first level, involved the writer in drawing on his own knowledge and instinct to decide what might be allowable for publication and what not. Editorial censorship was that exercised through the publishing houses. Most publishing houses were directly controlled by the state, but even the few private houses in existence had to follow the general pattern. Each publishing house had a number of *Lektoren*, whose job was to read manuscripts, suggest to the author compromises or revisions in those instances where the book was entering risky ideological territory and pass books to the publishing house's editorial committee or editor-in-chief for resolution of any outstanding issues. Thereafter, every manuscript was passed to the Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen (which became the Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel in 1956), a department under the direct control of the SED Politbüro. At the core of this organisation's work lay the *Druckgenehmigungsverfahren*. Every book published in the GDR required a publishing licence: no book could be published without this licence. After 1965, a sub-department,

⁶⁹ Censorship in Germany was extensively employed since Napoleonic times. See Jörn Leonhard, '... "der heilige Eifer des Bücherkastrierens"? Wandel und Widerspruch politischer Zensur im deutschen Vormärz bis 1848', in *Zensur im modernen deutschen Kulturraum*, ed. by Beate Müller (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2003), pp. 31-45.

⁷⁰ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, (p. 25), includes an excerpt from Ernst Niekisch's memoirs describing his dealings with Russian censorship in the SBZ in 1945.

⁷¹ Richard Zipser (ed.), *Fragebogen: Zensur. Zur Literatur vor und nach dem Ende der DDR* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1995), pp. 16-17.

the Büro für Urheberrechte, was created to control the publication of books outside the GDR (usually in West Germany) by writers living in the GDR.

The final level of censorship in Zipser's analysis was that of Party censorship. Of course, in one sense, the entire apparatus was Party censorship, established and monitored by the Party, for the Party's ends. However, on occasion, a judgement or pronouncement was handed down from very senior levels in the regime at both national and local levels. Joachim Walther identifies a fifth level of censorship, exercised by the Stasi, but the Stasi's involvement in censorship in the first years of the GDR's existence was relatively low-key and only really reached significant proportions from the mid-1960s,⁷² and particularly after Erich Honecker's accession to Party leadership in 1971. It is interesting to note here Zipser's assertion that censorship was employed in the Ulbricht era primarily to impose Socialist Realism, whereas the main purpose in Honecker's time was to bring dissidents into line.⁷³ The Stasi's increasingly intrusive involvement in censorship, as in every other aspect of GDR society, would seem to indicate an intensification of the politicisation of censorship and a decreasing preoccupation with ideological tenets as the GDR state matured. This is consistent with the general erosion of antifascism both as political myth and cultural stimulus.

The SED regime's purpose, then, in using censorship was to extend its absolute power into the cultural arena. In fact, given the importance the Party ascribed to writers and literature, it could not but insist on absolute power. It is rather more difficult to understand why so many writers in the 1950s and 60s complied so meekly. Indeed, widespread deployment of self-censorship made the regime's job of controlling literature easier than it might otherwise have been. Out of 200 to 250 works of contemporary GDR literature submitted annually to the Amt für Literatur, typically, only about six were rejected,⁷⁴ a ringing testimony to the efficiency of the self-censorship process. What applied to literature, applied also to theatre, but with the added complication that the livelihood and welfare of a lot more people than the author were

⁷² Joachim Walther, 'Der fünfte Zensor – das MfS als letzte Instanz', in Beate Müller, pp. 131-47 (pp.132-33).

⁷³ Zipser, p. 15.

⁷⁴ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 53.

involved. Once rehearsed, a theatrical production could not simply be stowed away to await a more favourable climate, so everyone connected to a performance had ‘a strong incentive to participate in the charade of paternalism and pedagogy, to request the authorities’ advice, and to adopt their suggestions’.⁷⁵ Because self-censorship concealed the true extent of cultural repression, because it meant the regime could persist with the fiction of absence of censorship in the GDR and was never vigorously challenged on this point, it was the most insidious of all forms of censorship, described variously as ‘die gefährlichste Stufe’,⁷⁶ and ‘die wichtigste und gleichzeitig tückischste Form von Literaturzensur in der DDR’.⁷⁷

One of the many paradoxes of a partitioned Germany was that censorship and repression on this scale fostered a market in West Germany for oppositional literature from the GDR. Some writers in the GDR produced texts that were openly oppositional and certain to fail the tests of censorship, with the intention of having them published in the West and enhancing their reputations as dissidents.⁷⁸ The existence and tolerance of such practices obfuscates the picture of the GDR as an utterly repressive regime and inevitably calls into question the credibility of such opposition as did exist.

Opposition

The exercise of non-compliance with a government’s wishes and intentions is described by reference to terms such as resistance, dissidence and opposition. The intellectuals of the GDR were widely condemned in the Western press for failing to exercise this non-compliance, for failing, therefore, to provide leadership and moral support to their suppressed countrymen and women. In the context of 17 June, they were charged with refusing to support the Uprising, preferring to portray it in distorted or indeed falsified

⁷⁵ Laura Bradley, ‘GDR Theatre Censorship: A System in Denial’, *German Life and Letters*, 59 (2006), no. 1, 151-62 (158).

⁷⁶ Manfred Jäger, ‘Das Wechselspiel von Selbstzensur und Literaturlenkung in der DDR’, in ‘*Literaturentwicklungsprozesse.*’ *Die Zensur der Literatur in der DDR*, ed. by Ernst Wichner and Herbert Wiesner (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1993), pp. 18-49 (p. 22).

⁷⁷ Zipser, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Zipser, p. 33.

accounts in their literary work.⁷⁹ The situation is rather more complex than this. Writers and other intellectuals in the GDR always engaged in acts of opposition towards the regime, and an understanding of the nature and extent of this is necessary to complete the picture of the environment within which writers experienced and wrote about 17 June.

Efforts to analyse opposition in general and in the GDR in particular have led to many attempts at categorisation. In the 1970s and 1980s, Martin Broszat, Ian Kershaw and others explored the nature of opposition, primarily as a Third Reich phenomenon: Neubert, Knabe, Kowalczyk, and Christoph Kleßmann were among the many to apply and extend this initial research to the specific case of the GDR. As Philpotts demonstrates, there is now a bewildering and inconsistent array of terms and meanings associated with the typology,⁸⁰ and it is necessary at this point to define the concept of opposition as I intend to use it. Philpotts advocates a model, first developed by Kershaw, in which three levels of non-compliance are posited; resistance, opposition and dissent.⁸¹ In this model, resistance represents the most forceful, active, organised or hostile forms of activity. The key ingredient is that this activity is undertaken in order to undermine or overthrow the regime. The second category, that of opposition, includes a wide range of actions and activity carried out by individuals or organisations who do not wish to act against the regime, but may want to change or reform specific elements within the system. The third level, dissent, indicates broad passive discontent, with very little or no specific activity involved.

Of these three categories, it is that of opposition that applies to the literary output of writers who lived through and wrote of 17 June. Resistance did not enter the equation, for very few, if indeed any of these writers were bent on overthrowing the regime, and this included the writers who emigrated to the West. The SED, in its

⁷⁹ Examples of criticism of this nature are legion. For particularly trenchant examples, see Knabe, pp. 252-66, and Peter Bohley, 'Aus der Literatur zum 17. Juni 1953', in *Die DDR im Spiegel ihrer Literatur: Beiträge zu einer historischen Betrachtung der DDR-Literatur*, ed. by Franz Huberth (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2005), pp. 13-27.

⁸⁰ Philpotts, p. 150.

⁸¹ Philpotts, pp. 151-52.

paranoia, may have regarded the actions of some writers as hostile, but in reality, the writers overwhelmingly and repeatedly affirmed their commitment to the socialist state. At the other end of Philpotts's scale, it is very likely that at least some writers would have experienced feelings of discontent, like many others in this society: since it was passive and no specific activity was involved, it is difficult to identify where and to what extent it took place. In any case, it seems that dissent in this sense was a general societal condition, and would have been experienced by writers as members of the broader GDR society and not specifically as writers. However, in writing a novel, poem or drama, in penning a letter or journalistic essay, or in making an entry in a diary or personal journal, a writer is committing an act. If the writer was a GDR writer and the act of writing was intended to question, challenge or criticise any aspect of the GDR system, then it was an act of opposition.

In a regime determined to exert total control over every aspect of culture, almost any literary activity could have been deemed oppositional. According to Helen Fehervary, Anna Seghers's novel, *Die Toten bleiben jung*, described by Emmerich as a model of Socialist Realism, attracted criticism from Ulbricht, no less, for being insufficiently enthusiastic about the Party.⁸² Seghers's novel cannot, by any reasonable measure, be regarded as an oppositional act, since it was not her intention to challenge the state, but rather to eulogise socialism. The concept of intent to question, challenge or criticise is therefore an important and necessary criterion of opposition.

To summarise, then, I define oppositional literature as work in which it was the author's intention, not to undermine or overthrow the system, but rather to urge internal reform as a means of strengthening it. I am therefore privileging text production, the author's intention, over reception, the regime's response. One might have expected a strong correlation between the two, but, in the GDR, the conditions of and relationship between cultural production and reception were complex, nuanced and subject to constant change. Oppositional acts were not equally oppositional: all the circumstances under which individual texts were written and published need to be considered when

⁸² Anna Seghers, *Die Toten bleiben jung* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1949). For remarks, see Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 92; and Helen Fehervary, *Anna Seghers: The Mystic Dimension* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 178.

assessing the oppositional weight of texts, both in absolute terms and relative to each other.

The writer's location must be taken into consideration. An oppositional work may have been written by a writer who lived outside the GDR. There are many instances of GDR writers emigrating to the West and producing literary works, which are critical of the GDR.⁸³ These works are clearly oppositional, insofar as the authors' intention was to criticise aspects of GDR society. However, it was a different sort of opposition, in that the authors made their criticisms from the safety of West Germany. Where the author of an oppositional piece lived in the GDR, it is likely that he or she would have felt compelled to exercise extreme caution, and we must bear this in mind when analysing the work and comparing it to that of others.

The timing of publication of a text provides a further instance of the many influences at work. It was frequently the case that a writer produced a text which he chose not to publish, but to consign to the *Schublade*, where it often remained for years before surfacing.⁸⁴ Brecht is a prime example: many of his essays, journal entries and aphorisms remained unpublished until long after his death. There is clearly some difficulty in assessing the oppositional merits of unpublished work of this nature. Judged in the light of the author's intention, such texts are oppositional, but, at the very least, it must be acknowledged that it is a different order of opposition from that provided in published work.

Of course, consignment of a text to the *Schublade* until the arrival of more felicitous times would indicate an expectation of a change over time in the authorities' tolerance of, and degree of control over, oppositional literature. It is said that the 'exit or voice' option, whereby GDR writers were free to exercise a choice between 'voice' (dissent) and 'exit' (emigration to the other part of Germany), 'forever undermined the consolidation of a "voice" opposition' in the GDR.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, opposition, like censorship, existed as a continuous feature in GDR cultural life. Like censorship, there

⁸³ Gerhard Zwerenz's *Die Liebe der toten Männer* (1959) and Uwe Johnson's *Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953* (1985) are two examples. Zwerenz left the GDR in 1957 and Johnson in 1959.

⁸⁴ Zipser, p. 104.

⁸⁵ Joppke, *East German Dissidents*, p. 185.

were bursts of intensified opposition; indeed there is a certain correlation between the two. Prolonged individual struggles with the authorities took different forms. A book denied a publication licence was often published in the West, although this practice only really took hold in the 1960s. Sometimes the writers sought a small, out-of-the-way publisher in the hope of sneaking past the censorship process.⁸⁶ Probably the best known case of a writer's battle with the authorities was that of Stefan Heym's long struggle to have the novel *5 Tage im Juni* published.⁸⁷ Individual protest also took the form of essays and interviews, again often published in the West, and public speeches, such as Christoph Hein's denunciation of censorship at the Tenth Writers' Union Congress in 1987.⁸⁸ (Public speeches are, of course, by their nature practically impossible to control, unless a climate of extreme repression or terror is maintained. By 1987, such a climate was impossible in the GDR).

Individual shows of defiance were punctuated by periods of very public, generalised opposition. These shared a common format: they were triggered by a political event, pursued with intensity for a short time and brought to a close by renewed repression by the Party. The first wave of opposition peaked just after 17 June, when the intellectuals staged their own '17. Juni der Intelligenz',⁸⁹ exploiting the vulnerability of the SED, weakened by civil unrest. Becher and Brecht orchestrated demands for cultural liberalisation under the auspices of the Kulturbund and the Academy. At the same time, others such as Heym and Loest published a series of articles and essays, which were stridently critical of the government and its agencies. Although some liberalisation seemed initially to be on offer, this period of protest ended with little gain a few months later when Ulbricht regained control of the Party and the cultural agenda.

⁸⁶ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 57.

⁸⁷ Heym's efforts to have this book published are comprehensively described in Herbert Krämer, *Ein dreißigjähriger Krieg gegen ein Buch: Zur Publikations- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von Stefan Heyms Roman über den 17. Juni 1953* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1999).

⁸⁸ Cited in Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 251.

⁸⁹ According to Jürgen Rühle, the term 'der 17. Juni der Intelligenz' was first coined in the West German press: see Jürgen Rühle, 'Der 17. Juni und die Intellektuellen', in Spittmann and Fricke (eds), pp. 156-74 (p. 163).

A second period of oppositional activity was triggered by the denunciation of Stalin and Stalinism at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow in February, 1956. The focal point this time was a group of intellectuals around Harich, with a second group in Leipzig around Gerhard Zwerenz and Loest. Demands were made for Party reform and cultural liberalisation. Again, Ulbricht looked to be vulnerable, but again he recovered, this time because of the fears engendered throughout the Soviet bloc by the Hungarian Uprising in late 1956. Harich and his colleagues were arrested and in 1957 sentenced to lengthy periods of imprisonment. Loest suffered a similar fate, but Zwerenz managed to escape to the West.

Further opposition broke out in the early 1960s. According to some, a period of relaxation in cultural politics followed the construction of the Wall in 1961.⁹⁰ Others doubted this, seeing little more than a hope-fuelled but mistaken perception on the part of some authors that a freer cultural atmosphere lay ahead.⁹¹ In any event, a group around Robert Havemann and Wolf Biermann felt encouraged to call for a different brand of socialism. At the same time, others, such as Heym, Müller and Peter Hacks openly accused the Party of vacillation and indifference.⁹² The Party sought to clamp down on these shows of defiance when new repressive measures were introduced following the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965 (the 'Kahlschlag' Plenum), at which Honecker severely criticised various participants in this oppositional activity.

A similar phase followed Honecker's accession to the leadership in 1971 and his promise of a relaxation of cultural norms in his 'keine Tabus' speech to the Central Committee of the SED in December 1971. Thus encouraged, but also shaken by the ruthless suppression of the 'Prague Spring' by Soviet bloc forces, intellectuals led by Biermann and Havemann again demanded a thorough reform of socialism. They were joined now by Rudolf Bahro, who was working on a critique of 'really-existing' socialism. Heym finally managed to have his novel *5 Tage in Juni* published in 1974 in

⁹⁰ See, for example, Goodbody, Tate and Wallace, p. 167.

⁹¹ See, for example, Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 108.

⁹² J. H. Reid, *Writing Without Taboos: The New East German Literature* (Oxford: Berg, 1990), p. 36.

West Germany. Such a groundswell of opposition became intolerable for the Party leadership. Beginning in 1976, Biermann was expatriated, Havemann put under house arrest, Bahro imprisoned and Heym harried by new censorship laws. In a final act of mass protest, over one hundred intellectuals signed letters of protest at the treatment of Biermann and intellectuals left the GDR in great numbers. Thereafter, organised opposition passed largely from the intellectuals to social groups such as the peace and environment movements which were to dominate dissent in the 1980s.

Although this brief review indicates a fairly constant pattern of repressive official response to outbreaks of literary opposition in the GDR, a question does remain as to whether the response and the opposition were similarly constant in their nature. In fact, the tools of repression employed in the GDR changed over time. In the 1950s and 60s harsh prison sentences, sometimes in Soviet labour camps, were commonplace, but this was no longer politically feasible by the 1970s and 80s, and was replaced by financial penalties or, in extremis, banishment from the GDR.⁹³

Likewise, the nature of cultural opposition underwent change. Opposition in the 1950s consisted in the main of calls for system reform through improved standards of Party leadership. By the 1980s, opposition from the likes of Bahro and Biermann was much more aggressive, demanding radical changes of direction, rather than mild reform. Christoph Hein attacked the *Genehmigungsverfahren* system as ‘überlebt, nutzlos, paradox, menschen-feindlich, volksfeindlich, ungesetzlich und strafbar’ at the Writers’ Union Congress in 1987.⁹⁴ Brecht, Heym, Müller and Loest all chafed against and suffered under censorship in the 1950s and 60s, but they would never have challenged the system in these terms.

Bathrick charts this evolution of opposition in terms of discourse. Opposition in the GDR until the mid-1960s, he maintains, was largely confined to challenging and violating the aesthetic forms prescribed by Socialist Realism. From the mid-1960s until the beginning of the 1980s, oppositional writers began to pose more fundamental

⁹³ It would be wrong to suppose imprisonment as a tool of repression had disappeared entirely. See Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 209.

⁹⁴ Cited in Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 251.

questions about the sociopolitical system, but still within ‘the ever-shifting boundaries of a permissible public voice’. In other words, the language used in oppositional writing up to this point was the language used in official Marxist-Leninist discourse, a fact that set the limits of opposition. In the final decade of the GDR’s existence, however, the writers of the generation born after 1950 wanted to see a much more robust opposition, defining themselves in contrast to previous literary generations and aligning themselves with oppositional writers in other Soviet bloc countries. Such a process would entail the use of a discourse that would itself challenge official narratives.⁹⁵

What may be regarded as oppositional writing in the 1950s, therefore, is not necessarily so in subsequent periods, because either the focus and language of opposition or official perceptions and tolerances (or both) had moved on. This, of course, is particularly the case with literature from the post-*Wende* period, when GDR regime repression and opposition to it disappeared entirely. Texts which would have been considered oppositional in the lifetime of the GDR can obviously no longer be labelled as such: the writer cannot have an intention to challenge the system and the regime cannot respond to any challenge. The inclusion of any post-*Wende* literature in a catalogue of oppositional texts requires particular justification, based on substantiation of the author’s oppositional credentials through its intertextual relationships with earlier texts.

In conclusion, then, oppositional intention remains a valid determinant in identifying appropriate texts, but it is necessary to assess any particular text and its oppositional intent within the wider context of the circumstances of publication, prevailing oppositional norms and official responses.

Problems with Interpretation

Given these conditions of literary production, problems of interpretation are particularly acute. Ideological tendencies must always be taken into consideration, and GDR writers were not unique in this respect. However, they had to work under conditions that did not apply to other writers such as, for example, those in the contemporaneous West

⁹⁵ Bathrick, pp. 225-27.

Germany or even the countries of eastern Europe. Many GDR writers walked a delicate plank of dissension between Party obstructiveness and Western facilitation. Post-*Wende*, they ran a relentless gauntlet of hostile enquiry into their behaviour as writers under the GDR regime. In the light of all these circumstances, it is necessary to ask whether we should approach the interpretation of the literature of GDR writers in a particular way or with particular care.

The answer is, of course, that we should, but equally we must be careful not to ascribe to the GDR-factor literary acts and outcomes that may well have taken place in any circumstances. As we shall see later, ambiguity and opacity in Brecht's poetry and Müller's drama provide a challenge to the interpreter. There is little evidence that, in this particular respect, Brecht and Müller had opposition or censorship avoidance in mind, as opposed to endeavour after literary effect. Other more prosaic difficulties exist. For example, a common feature in GDR literature is the existence of multiple versions of a work. Again, of course, this is not unique to GDR literature, but here the question does arise as to whether the amendments were demanded of the author and, if so, to what extent the meaning of the text has altered. Brecht made alterations to a number of his earlier plays. In 1954, for example, he added a positive, albeit minor character to *Trommeln in der Nacht*, as a concession to Socialist Realism.⁹⁶ Similarly, the first chapter of Hermann Kant's *Das Impressum*, published in 1972, showed changes from that which first appeared in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* in 1969.⁹⁷ (This is a particularly interesting incidence, since it straddles the transfer of leadership of the Party from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971: clearly the new atmosphere of liberalisation under Honecker, which the writers thought they perceived, facilitated the publication of Kant's novel; nevertheless, only after alterations). A variant of the multiple version phenomenon occurs when an essay which had originally appeared in a journal or newspaper, reappeared in a collection, but with changes, as happened with some of Heym's *Berliner Zeitung* essays of June and July 1953 when they were reprinted in subsequent collections of essays, such as *Wege und Umwege*, published in 1980 in West

⁹⁶ Peter Demetz, 'Galileo in East Berlin: Notes on the Drama in the DDR' *The German Quarterly*, 37 (1964), no. 3, 239-45 (240).

⁹⁷ Pernkopf, p. 138.

Germany. We may assume in cases such as this that the changes were made at the author's behest, although, of course, we cannot be conclusively sure that they are in fact changes; the original essays may have been edited by the *Berliner Zeitung*, voluntarily or otherwise, without the author's consent. If so, Heym was simply reverting to what he had intended to say in the first place.

The point at issue here concerns the 'truth' in the texts I explore in this thesis. It is a truth to be assessed in light of the conflicting emotions and reactions generated among the writers by the events of 17 June, the systems of censorship and control prevailing in the GDR, the complex relationships between GDR writers and their readership in both East and West, and the fact that all of these aspects were subject to change over time.

The question of textual truth is given further weight, in that each text analysed in this thesis is a historical text, in the sense that it has, to use White's words, 'as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats'.⁹⁸ Yet the texts are pieces of journalism, essays, works of fiction and life-writing, which all lack, to a lesser or greater extent, the objectivity of narrative as defined by the absence of all reference to the narrator, identified by White as a prerequisite of historical writing.⁹⁹ This selection of texts, all claiming a basis in historical fact, but of different genres and written over a period of many years and decades, raises important questions, regarding textual accuracy and intertextual consistency.

Quite clearly, texts created in the summer of 1953 reflect concerns emanating directly from the events of 17 June. All of the journalistic texts and essays fall into this category, as does Brecht's fictional work, the *Buckower Elegien*. As we shall discover, the *Elegien* pose problems of interpretation particularly associated with lyrical poetry. The journalistic nature of the other texts is not in itself a guarantee of truthfulness; careful textual and contextual analysis is called for. However, the proximity to the shock and trauma induced by the events of 17 June and the general perception that the

⁹⁸ White, p. 14.

⁹⁹ White, p. 3.

authorities' grip on cultural affairs had been loosened reduce the likelihood of hidden meaning in these texts.

Texts written at any time after this are likely to be influenced by other events and may therefore reflect the writer's revised opinions of 17 June itself, or more generally of cultural and sociopolitical circumstances in the GDR. Müller worked on *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1956-71) and Heym on *5 Tage im Juni* (1956-74) in a period that saw the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow in 1956, the Hungarian Uprising later that year, the erection of the Wall in 1961, and the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, all events of profound significance in the *Kulturpolitik* of the GDR. Loest's *Sommengewitter*, published in 2005, provides an extreme instance of such informed retrospection. The implication is not that these later texts are invalid as commentaries on 17 June, simply that the writers' perspectives are different and their interpretations of 17 June possibly influenced by additional information. In this, of course, they are not so different from narratives that are more specifically historical.

The life-writing texts of my chosen writers present somewhat different issues. Loest's autobiography was published in 1981, Heym's in 1988 and Müller's in 1992. The account of 17 June in each of these is therefore from a perspective of three to four decades' distance from the event itself. Quite apart from the problems of memory and self-representation found in all autobiography, the issue of the GDR writer's place in and relationship to Germany, East, West and reunified, emerges again. In the case of Heym and Müller particularly, their autobiographies were published as the GDR was crumbling or had already perished, and both writers were caught in a glare of publicity and scrutiny, under hostile attack from all sides. Even more so than the fictional work of the 1960s and 70s, these texts were the product of an era far distanced from 17 June, not only in time, but in terms of cultural, social and political conditions, and it would be very surprising indeed, if these pressures had not weighed significantly on the autobiographers' discourse.

Deriving a simple truth about my chosen writers' engagement with 17 June is, then, beset with problems. An examination of the relevant texts is essential, of course, but self-contained analysis of individual texts is by itself unlikely to be sufficient and

must be supported by intertextual comparisons between each writer's own texts and between a writer's texts and a variety of external sources. In this thesis, I seek to ground my exploration of each writer's engagement with 17 June in the greatest degree of certainty possible, by drawing upon material, in which the scope for personal interpretation or partiality is minimised, or where the information can be corroborated and verified in alternative sources. From this platform, I proceed to an analysis of each writer's non-fictional texts written in the immediate aftermath of the Uprising and establish intertextual relationships and contiguities between these texts and the writer's later fictional treatment of 17 June. In this process, I use autobiographical material, but, for all the reasons I have outlined, with great caution and largely as supplementary information.

The Literature of 17 June and its Reception

There is a view that the writers of the GDR largely avoided writing about 17 June, and a second somewhat contradictory view that they supinely and routinely churned out literature that buttressed their repressive regime's myths about 17 June. For Wolfgang Emmerich, for example, only a handful of texts deal with 17 June. Beyond Anna Seghers' *Das Vertrauen* and Stephan Hermlin's *Die Kommandeuse*, he finds little of note and Stefan Heym's *5 Tage im Juni* is 'der einzige tiefer schürfende, den Aufstand als *Arbeiteraktion* ernstnehmende literarische Text'.¹⁰⁰ Neubert, by contrast, concedes that many more literary works ('fast hundert Romane, Dramen, Novellen und Gedichte') were produced, but, 'allen Werken ist gemeinsam, daß ihre Deutungsmuster nahe an denen der SED-Propaganda liegen'.¹⁰¹ Neither view is supported by the facts. There is a substantial body of work, which exclusively or partially incorporates 17 June as a theme, or which reflects the writers' issues with 17 June, a body of work that generally condemns the events but is by no means universally supportive of the SED regime.

The body of serious fictional work, in which 17 June features as a theme, amounts to more than fifty works in all, mostly novels, novellas and short stories, but also including drama and poetry, and ranging from Stefan Heym's *5 Tage im Juni*,

¹⁰⁰ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 140.

¹⁰¹ Neubert, 'Brot in Freiheit'.

which is wholly devoted to 17 June to Eric Neutsch's *Spur der Steine*, where the events of 17 June are featured in one page in an 800-page novel.

The works may be categorised in the following manner:¹⁰²

a) Written in the GDR, published in the GDR	31
b) Written in the GDR, suppressed or published (at least initially) in the West	10
c) Written by ex-GDR writers in West Germany, published in the West	8
d) Written by West German writers	3
e) Written post- <i>Wende</i>	5

Despite the different times and places of publication, this work is almost exclusively that of GDR citizens (or ex-citizens at the time of writing). Peter Hutchinson unearthed the West German, Stefan Olivier, whose novel *Jedem das Seine* deals in passing with the events of 17 June and Johannes Haupt found a short story, written by Friedemann Schuster.¹⁰³ The only other Western work of note is Günter Grass' play *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*. A second feature is that the greater part of this work was written between 1953 and 1980, by writers who had experienced 17 June, although Erich Loest's novel, *Sommergewitter*, published in 2005, is a notable exception of a later work by an eye-witness to the events. By 1980, a new generation of writers had moved on from the old antifascist preoccupation and where they did deal with 17 June, their perspective was different to that of the older generations. In Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund* (1982), for example, the events of 17 June are crucial to the teenage development and subsequent perspective of the main character, Claudia, but, as Reid notes, the author is less concerned with political structures than with the psychology and behaviour of people within those structures.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² These statistics should not be taken as definitive, but are intended to be indicative of the overall extent of the canon of fictional work, as well as the proportions written and published in different locations. A list of the works is included as Appendix 1.

¹⁰³ Peter Hutchinson, 'History and Political Literature: the Interpretation of the "Day of German Unity" in the Literature of East and West', *Modern Language Review*, 76 (1981), 367-82; Johannes Haupt, *Der 17. Juni in der Prosaliteratur der DDR bis 1989: Über den Zusammenhang von Politik und Literatur und die Frage nach einem 'Leseland DDR'*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Mannheim, 1991, p. 295.

¹⁰⁴ Reid, p. 123.

As is seen from the statistical table above, over half of all works of fiction with a 17 June theme were written and published in the GDR. We might therefore expect nothing in these works to clash with censorship objectives or to offend official sensitivities, and indeed, they generally followed a standard pattern. 17 June was portrayed as a fascist plot, engineered by Western imperialists and prosecuted by Western thugs. A few workers had unwisely allowed themselves to be ensnared in the activities, but most stood loyally firm, while benign Soviet tanks ensured the survival of the forces of socialism. Werner Reinowski's *Die Versuchung*, Inge von Wangenheim's *Am Morgen ist der Tag ein Kind* and Eric Neutsch's *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* are all examples of works that incorporate these themes.

There would seem to be ample evidence here to support the popular Western view of GDR writers as willing accomplices of the SED regime and traitors to the spirit of defiance demonstrated by the participants in the June Uprising. The picture is, however, not quite as straightforward as the bare statistics seem to indicate. Not all works published in the GDR met with the Party's wholehearted approval. Even a portrayal of the evils of fascism was not a guarantee of Party endorsement. Stephan Hermlin's short story, *Die Kommandeuse*, featured such a portrayal, but was severely criticised, partly on account of a narrative style deemed insufficiently Socialist Realist, but also for focusing too much on the thoughts and motivations of a Nazi and not enough on the virtuous qualities of the antifascists who stood firm on 17 June.¹⁰⁵ Later works such as Hein's *Der fremde Freund* and Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T* (1969), which hardly fit at all into the older patterns of antifascism promoted by the Party, were also seen as problematic by the authorities.

Insofar as these works reveal an intent to criticise or challenge the authorities, they can be regarded as oppositional, as can the literature written and published in West Germany. Certainly, these latter works, written by authors who had emigrated from East to West, were generally critical of the GDR government's handling of 17 June, although

¹⁰⁵ See Paul Gerhard Klussmann, 'Volksaufstand und Literatur. Bert Brecht und der 17. Juni 1953', in *Der Volksaufstand am 17. Juni 1953 – ein gesamtdeutsches Ereignis?* ed. by Silke Flegel, Frank Hoffmann and Evelyn Overhoff (Bochum: Institut für Deutschlandforschung der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2004), pp. 36-56 (p. 52).

it should be noted that, in keeping with their authors' personal stance, they are neither antisocialist nor anti-GDR in tone. Examples of this category of work include Theodor Plievier's *Berlin: Roman*, and Uwe Johnson's *Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953*.¹⁰⁶

More defiant were those writers who lived in the GDR and who produced work considered by the authorities too inflammatory to be granted publication or distribution in the GDR. Some, like Werner Heiduczek's *Tod am Meer* (1977) or Peter Hacks' *Die Sorgen und die Macht* (1959-1963), were initially published or, in the case of drama, staged in the GDR, but had their publication or staging permissions withdrawn on ideological grounds soon thereafter. Others were not granted a publication licence at all and were either shelved for some years, or published in the West in defiance of the GDR authorities. Notable examples of this category of literature are Heiner Müller's play, *Germania Tod in Berlin*, first staged in Munich in 1978 and Stefan Heym's *5 Tage im Juni*, published in West Germany in 1974. Both works appeared in the GDR only months before its demise, in 1988 and 1989 respectively. Not everyone accepted that such works demonstrated unequivocal opposition. Müller's play, for example, was dubbed 'die SED-Legende fürs DDR-Lesebuch'¹⁰⁷ and Heym's novel 'gehört doch der verbindlichen Sprachregelung der DDR über die Ereignisse des 17. Juni'.¹⁰⁸ That such texts were banned in the GDR might be thought sufficient to validate their creators as oppositional writers. If the texts are considered in conjunction with life narrative and journalistic work by the same authors, the case is greatly strengthened.

Like the plays and novels thematising 17 June, much life narrative by GDR authors was written (or in the case of interviews and speeches, transcribed) years after 17 June and therefore reflects more considered, less spontaneous responses to the Uprising. Immediately after 17 June, however, many writers committed their thoughts to print in journal and newspaper articles, letters and similar dispatches.

¹⁰⁶ Theodor Plievier, *Berlin Roman* (Munich: Kurt Desch, 1954); Uwe Johnson, *Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985). Although Johnson wrote his novel between 1953 and 1956, it was published posthumously only in 1985.

¹⁰⁷ Georg Hensel, 'Schlachtszenen aus der DDR', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 April 1978.

¹⁰⁸ Roland H. Wiegenstein, 'Schönfärberei', *Die Zeit*, 15 August 1975.

It is remarkable how much of this material, written by eye-witnesses to 17 June, is in tone critical of the SED and GDR society. Of course, most GDR writers were fully supportive of the Party and most of what appeared in print reproduced the official interpretation of 17 June, castigated the workers for their recklessness, or both. Kuba's frequently-quoted 'Wie ich mich schäme!' is one of many such texts.¹⁰⁹ And in the days following 17 June, the pages of *Neues Deutschland* carried numerous articles, reflecting absolute loyalty to the regime, even from figures who were soon to express less compliant sentiments elsewhere.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, some leading literary figures such as Becher and Seghers kept their own counsel. There is, however a range of material – letters, diary entries, essays, and newspaper articles, produced by writers who had first-hand experience of 17 June, which is distinctly critical in tone. Not all of these were subsequently published, but a collection of fifty-seven articles by forty-one writers are to be found in the Academy archives.¹¹¹ Quite a few were critical. Helmut Hauptmann, who experienced 17 June in Leipzig, called for a more open, honest politics and a clear, understandable dialogue with the people. Erwin Strittmatter described his encounters with workers on the Stalinallee and concluded that government and bureaucrats, press and writers had all failed the people. Even some, like Dieter Noll, who was convinced that the events of 17 June were the result of a fascist plot, wrote of failures and failings in the GDR. At the much more publicly visible tip of this iceberg of critical expression, Brecht wrote a number of letters to newspapers, politicians and associates in both the GDR and West Germany, while he, Müller, Heym, Loest, Wolfgang Harich and Günther Cwojdrak all wrote articles which appeared in papers and literary journals. Where these texts are dealt with at all in the critical literature, it is usually in the context of the '17 June of the intellectuals' and the attempts to loosen cultural restraints. This is, of course, perfectly valid, but the texts also contribute to each individual writer's body of work and

¹⁰⁹ Kurt Barthel (Kuba), 'Wie ich mich schäme!', *Neues Deutschland*, 20 June 1953. This text, in which Kuba takes the people to task for their faithlessness towards their government, is difficult to categorise. It has elements of both an elegiac lament and belligerent journalism.

¹¹⁰ For example, Brecht, Havemann, and Loest all published messages of support for the government in *Neues Deutschland* on the days immediately after 17 June.

¹¹¹ 'Stellungnahme und Berichte zum 17. Juni 1953', Archiv des Schriftstellerverbandes der DDR, Signatur 313, Stiftungsarchiv der Akademie der Künste, Robert-Koch-Platz, Berlin. Henceforth AdK.

help to explain the conflicts with which particular writers had to deal and the compromises they had to make in the aftermath of 17 June. Additionally, they throw further light on these same authors' later works which take 17 June as their theme. The critical literature generally does not engage with these intertextual relationships.

Critical reviews of literature relating to 17 June tend to fall into one of three broad categories. At the most general level, the literature of 17 June is dealt with in the wider context of the history or other aspects of GDR literature and culture. Then come reviews of the cultural politics and literature associated with 17 June and that period generally. Finally, there are critiques of specific texts relating to 17 June.

A feature of historical overviews of GDR literature is that texts relating to 17 June are not accorded much weight. In his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Emmerich, for example, barely touches on non-fictional texts and the few fictional works relating to 17 June are mentioned only in passing. Jäger's *Kultur und Politik in der DDR* and the reviews of cultural topics such as Zipser's *Frageboden: Zensur* or John C. Torpey's survey of opposition mention few specific texts; where they do, it is only by way of illustration of their argument.¹¹² Generally, then, coverage of individual texts on the topic of 17 June in the cultural and literary overviews is thin and particularly so in the case of non-fictional texts. The question of any difficulties writers may have had in coming to terms with 17 June and its implications simply does not arise. The overriding sense one takes away from these overviews is that the cultural or literary historian, unlike his sociopolitical counterpart, does not see 17 June as occupying a position that warrants exceptional attention.

Cultural and literary reviews which deal specifically with 17 June focus on the politics of the period, on texts in which 17 June is the primary or a subsidiary theme or on both aspects together. The year 1953 was an eventful one in the arena of cultural politics, and the flurry of activity, intense for three months and fitful for another three, in which writers, individually and in groups engaged in cultural politics is accounted for in

¹¹² John C. Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism and Dissent: The East German Opposition and its Legacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

general historical reviews of 17 June,¹¹³ and in a number of books and articles which deal with the specific topic of the conduct of the intellectuals on and after 17 June.¹¹⁴ Whilst these accounts of cultural activity are invaluable in helping us to understand the various dynamics that were at work in this sphere in 1953, none make any significant use of individual writers' texts, nor are there serious attempts to explore the internal and external pressures which individual writers may have had to contend with.

These pressures receive more attention in reviews of the literature of 17 June. There are two major overviews and a number of lesser ones. Johannes Pernkopf's dissertation, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der Literatur der beiden deutschen Staaten*, published in 1982, provides a comprehensive review of the fictional literature based on 17 June. His analysis divides into two broad sections. The first, about one third of the entire work, sets the literature in its historical and sociopolitical context. The second part analyses the literature within categories. Texts which share a common interpretation of 17 June (assault on socialism or the GDR, popular uprising, or consequence of conflict between Party and people) are explored as groups. Dramatic works form a category, as do texts in which 17 June serves as departure point for a retrospective on the GDR. Some authors, including Brecht, Heym, Seghers and Hermlin are considered individually.

Pernkopf's review is excellent. His treatment of the opposing interpretations of 17 June and the historical context is even-handed, and, in total, some thirty-five works of fiction are included. However, it is more than a quarter of a century since its publication and it now looks somewhat dated. At the simplest level, it is no longer a compendium of fiction relating to 17 June. Important works of the 1980s, 1990s and the twenty-first century, such as Hein's *Landnahme* (2003) and Loest's *Sommergewitter* (2005) are missing. Equally, the vast repository of archival material, historical research and life narrative work which has become available since the early 1980s permits a much more

¹¹³ See, for example, Knabe, pp. 252-66; Matthias Braun, 'Das große "Ja" und das kleine "Nein"', in *Staatsgründung auf Raten: Auswirkungen des Volksaufstandes 1953 und des Mauerbaus 1961 auf Staat, Militär und Gesellschaft der DDR*, ed. by Torsten Diedrich and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2005), pp. 253-74.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Siegfried Prokop, *Intellektuelle im Krisenjahr 1953: Enquête über die Lage der Intelligenz der DDR: Analyse und Dokumentation* (Skeuditz: Skeuditzer Buchverlag, 2003); and Rühle.

detailed analysis of the writers and their conditions of work than was possible earlier. Two instances serve to illustrate this point. Pernkopf includes a short digression on press articles by Stefan Heym, Wolfgang Harich, Erich Loest and Günther Cwojdrak, written in the immediate aftermath of 17 June, in which they urged a new dialogue between Party and people. He locates this excursus within his analysis of the general sociopolitical background to 17 June. In the light of subsequent autobiographical work in the 1980s and 1990s, it is clear that each of these writers regarded his journalistic work as an important component of his oeuvre. In each case, therefore, the press articles should be treated as an important contribution to the writer's views on 17 June, rather than simply a compilation of interesting historical documents. Similarly, Pernkopf confined himself to an analysis of four of Brecht's twenty-three *Buckower Elegien*. However, the extensive biographical and critical output in the 1980s and 1990s relating to Brecht and his work allows us a much greater insight into Brecht, his concerns over 17 June and his possible motivations in writing the *Elegien*.

More up-to-date than Pernkopf's work is Johannes Haupt's *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der Prosaliteratur der DDR bis 1989*, completed in 1991. This is a large work, with a bibliography to match. Haupt locates and analyses prose literature relating to 17 June within the context of the history, political culture and cultural politics of the GDR. Of the 400 or so pages of text, the first half is taken up with an exploration of the role of literature in the GDR, the writer/reader dynamic, conditions of literary production and distribution, and so on. Thereafter, he reviews the events of 17 June, examines Brecht's role in some detail and critically appraises major texts relating to the Uprising. He looks in detail at individual works by Stefan Heym, Anna Seghers, Stephan Hermlin, Werner Heiduczek and Thomas Brasch, and about a further dozen texts are dealt with together. Despite the size of the work, there are omissions. He concerns himself only with prose, and only with GDR writers. This is, of course, what he set out to do, but even here, the list of texts chosen is less comprehensive than that of Pernkopf. Haupt does consider some non-fictional texts, such as Brecht's letters and journals and Heym's press articles, but he does not evaluate their worth as insights into the authors' possible conflicts or dilemmas. In his own review of the previous research, he is quite dismissive of

Pernkopf's work, which he thinks tries too hard to maintain a balance between the different historical interpretations, but in its leniency towards the Eastern interpretation, loses proper perspective.¹¹⁵ It seems Haupt himself is determined to avoid such a 'mistake'. Generally, the work is a comprehensive journey through the GDR cultural landscape, but, like Pernkopf's, it shows its age. Certainly, Haupt had the benefit of access to important autobiographical work of the 1980s, including texts by Loest and Heym, and some material which became available in the immediate post-*Wende* months. He could not, of course, benefit from the revelations of the 1990s which emerged from academic and press investigations, multiple interviews of writers of the former GDR, the Stefan Heym Archive in Cambridge, which was established in 1992, or Loest's ongoing engagement with 17 June.

Most analyses of literature relating to 17 June are not so comprehensive as these two reviews. Journal articles or chapters within a book with a wider scope seek not to be exhaustive, but to develop particular themes. The West German critic, Heinrich Mohr, wrote extensively in the 1970s and 1980s on the subject. He argued that the body of literature was poor, as measured by the scale and tragedy of 17 June. (Mohr's use of the term 'tragedy' offers a clue to his own ideological stance on the issue.) For him, treatment of the subject was too narrow and simplistically ideological and he regretted the lack of any serious Western work on the topic. He revised some of his opinions in the light of work published in the 1970s, particularly that of Müller, Kurt Bartsch and Thomas Brasch. Since much of this work was not published in the GDR, this would suggest that Mohr saw an inverse relationship between the quality of a work and its chances of publication in the GDR.

Often, the more restricted analyses seek to categorise literature within the main 17 June themes. Thus a work is presented as promoting one or a combination of interpretations: fascist plot, worker discontent, Party failings or struggle to place socialism on a firm footing in the GDR.¹¹⁶ This is, of course, a perfectly valid approach,

¹¹⁵ Haupt, p. 60.

¹¹⁶ This is the approach used by Tessa Hoffmann, 'Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR-Belletristik,' *Deutsche Studien* (1983), 93-108; and Rudolf Wichard, 'Der 17. Juni 1953 im Spiegel der DDR-Literatur', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B20-21 (1983), 3-16.

but it does tend to be based on narrow ranges of the literature (Hoffmann and Wichard each use nine exemplars) and implies a greater degree of uniformity than is actually the case.

Peter Hutchinson provides a valuable English-language review of the literature of 17 June.¹¹⁷ His coverage of works published is reasonably comprehensive, but in an article of such restricted nature and length, comments on individual works are necessarily brief. He notes that, in general, relatively few writers, Eastern or Western, have tackled the topic of 17 June, and he warns against mistaking the literature on 17 June, particularly that created by writers of the ideological left, for historical accounts of the event.

The critical literature dealing with writers' responses to 17 June suffers, then, from two major drawbacks. Firstly, much of it is out-of-date. The second important omission from the critical literature is any significant cognizance of the significance of non-fictional texts concerning 17 June. Analysis of these texts is important because it clarifies and completes our understanding of the authors' engagement with 17 June and the evolution of their thinking. Equally importantly, it throws fresh light on the authors' intentions in their literary texts.

Of course, my thesis is neither an overview nor a critical analysis of all the literature of 17 June. It is rather an exploration of the literary engagement with 17 June of four authors for whom the experience was profoundly shocking and who, for the rest of their lives, struggled to come to terms with the dilemmas it presented them. A search through the critical literature dealing with specific authors and works (and, in particular, those authors and works that are the subject of my thesis), is therefore likely to be more profitable than focusing on the more general critical material. Indeed, the number of such books and articles is considerable, ranging from comprehensive overviews of an author's life and work to in-depth analysis of specific aspects of his life or work. In the case of Brecht and Müller, both internationally-renowned writers, the body of texts is extensive and in several languages. Heym attracts a smaller number of devotees and Loest an even smaller number. Brecht, Müller and Heym have biographies (in Brecht's

¹¹⁷ Hutchinson, 'History and Political Literature'.

case, several). These are, of course, invaluable, but tend to be hagiographical, like Mittenzwei's biography of Brecht and Hutchinson's of Heym, or condemnatory, like Fuegi's relentlessly hostile account of Brecht's life.¹¹⁸

On specific works, there is much valuable material offering fresh insights into the authors and their work. Jan Knopf's pioneering reinterpretations of Brecht's *Buckower Elegien*,¹¹⁹ Genia Schulz' work on Heiner Müller and *Germania Tod in Berlin* in the 1980s,¹²⁰ Herbert Krämer's painstaking tracing of the evolution of Heym's *5 Tage im Juni*¹²¹ and Stefanie Schneider's closely-reasoned analysis of Loest's autobiographical texts¹²² all significantly advance the state of research into the respective writers. Even in this category of single-author or specific work review, however, there is little that examines in depth these writers' engagement with 17 June by reference to the totality of their written material on or concerning the topic. That is a gap I now hope to fill.

¹¹⁸ Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht; oder der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*, 2 vols (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1988 (first publication 1986); Peter Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym: The Perpetual Dissident* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Fuegi, *The Life and Lies of Bertolt Brecht*.

¹¹⁹ Jan Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch: Lyrik, Prosa, Schriften: Eine Ästhetik der Widersprüche* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1996). First published in 1984.

¹²⁰ Genia Schulz, *Heiner Müller* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980).

¹²¹ Krämer, *Ein dreißigjähriger Krieg*.

¹²² Stefanie Schneider, *Geschriebene Selbstbilder: Ein Vergleich von Erich Loests Lebensberichte 'Durch die Erde ein Riß' und 'Der Zorn des Schafes'* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008).

BERTOLT BRECHT

'Wir wollen etwas Reales machen'

Introduction

In 1947, Bertolt Brecht left the USA, his home during the previous six years, and returned to Europe, still unsure as to where he wanted, or would be allowed, to establish a permanent residence. He was assiduously courted in Germany's Soviet-occupied zone (SBZ), for he was a world-class literary figure, and his decision in 1949 to make his home in the SBZ represented a propaganda coup for the authorities there. Seven years later, Brecht was dead. In both East and West, his towering dramatic talents and achievements were acknowledged; as time passed, so also was the quality of his body of lyric work. But in the last years of his life and far beyond, he was castigated in the West as a man who had put his talents at the disposal of an undemocratic regime bent on crushing freedom. In the East, he was treated with suspicion and hostility by the establishment, who felt he was not sufficiently wedded to the cause of socialism. A defining factor in this public image was the part Brecht played in the events of 17 June 1953 in the GDR. From a hotchpotch of facts, rumours and legends, accounts of his rôle were constructed. In these he was lionised or, more frequently, demonised. In press comment at the time, and long after, his actions were condemned, particularly in the West. Later on, biographers generally fell into one of two camps. Some, such as Mittenzwei, were indulgent, eschewing the inconsistencies and difficult questions prompted by Brecht's actions and demeanour. Others, notably Fuegi, were determined to see nothing but greed, vanity and cynicism at every turn.

Adopting unqualified positions often requires inconvenient facts to be overlooked. In Brecht's case, the inconvenient facts were what he actually said and wrote of 17 June. He was a prime example of someone caught in the no-man's-land of Cold War politics, where views that did not precisely chime with either the Western or Eastern interpretations of 17 June tended to be dismissed. Brecht's views were inimical to the

SED regime, because they challenged it to admit its failures and institute reform, but unpopular also with many in the West, because he was a robust defender of the GDR system of beliefs.

The substance of this chapter is an exploration of Brecht's thoughts concerning 17 June and his analysis of its causes and implications, drawing on his own reflections, as expressed in an array of journal entries, letters and other texts, as well as his cycle of lyric poems, the *Buckower Elegien*. It is my view that insufficient attention has been paid to Brecht's assessment of 17 June in his own texts, particularly his non-fictional work. Perhaps this is understandable. What he wrote often seemed more intent on self-justification than the exposition of a consistent set of views. And, of course, his writing was, on occasion, exploited and distorted for political reasons. Most problematic of all, perhaps, was the puzzling selectiveness in what he published and chose not to publish during his lifetime. This reluctance to publish constitutes a major obstacle in our assessment of Brecht as oppositional to the SED regime. Shows of defiance in one's texts are all very well, but if these texts do not see the light of day, as many of Brecht's did not during his lifetime, two questions arise. Why did he create the texts in the first place, if it was not his intention that they should be read? Secondly, can he really be considered oppositional, if he kept his oppositional thoughts well-concealed? An analysis of Brecht's texts *in toto* will provide a better understanding of his views. However, the facts of publication or non-publication of each text are an important consideration in judging the weight and effect of that text in the overall mix.

Brecht's choice in the matter of publication is not the only difficulty in assessing his thoughts and actions concerning 17 June. His public persona is of such high profile and opinions of him and his behaviour so pronounced and varied, that it is necessary first of all to construct as objective an account as possible of his activities in and around 1953, drawn from historical, biographical and critical texts, as well as archival material. In this account, I will endeavour to understand what of Brecht's reported behaviour is verifiable and what is not, to explore how interpretations of his behaviour have been politicized and to separate fact from myth.

Brecht: As Others Saw Him

In Chapter 2, it was noted that the term '17 June' applies not simply to a single day, but rather to a process of causes, events and consequences within GDR society. Nevertheless, Brecht is judged to a great extent by his actions on this single day. It is therefore appropriate to explore his life where it relates to 17 June in three parts: the period leading up to 17 June 1953, the day itself and events afterwards. The greater part of our interest will focus on the year 1953, although we must look beyond this year, backward and forward, to understand the full significance of 17 June for Brecht and Brecht for 17 June.

Brecht in Private

It is with Brecht's public life as a theatre professional, writer and leader of the GDR's cultural elite that I want to engage. His private life has been the subject of much discussion. I do not want to add to or comment on this discussion. However, aspects of his private life had a bearing on his actions and demeanour in 1953, and it will be useful at this point to pick these out.

Brecht's life revolved around the Berliner Ensemble. There was the habitual complex procession of female theatrical colleagues on the threshold of, established in or exiting from a sexual relationship with him. Elisabeth Hauptmann, whom he had first met in 1924, was still on the scene but her relationship with Brecht was now one of commercial and artistic collaboration, and the current favourite was Käthe Reichel, although her position was under threat from Käthe Rüllicke and, from June 1953 onwards, Isot Kilian, estranged wife of Wolfgang Harich and Brecht's 'last love'.¹

In light of this, it is perhaps surprising that Brecht's marriage to Helene (Helli) Weigel endured. He recorded in his *Journale* that he and Weigel had gone to the village of Buckow early in 1952 to inspect 'auf schönem grundstück am wasser des scharmützelsees unter alten großen bäumen ein altes, nicht unedel gebautes häuschen'.²

¹ Usschi Otten, 'Die Krippen sind dieselben, nur die Ochsen haben gewechselt: Bertolt Brecht, Buckow und der 17. Juni', in *Der Bär von Berlin: Jahrbuch des Vereins für die Geschichte Berlins*, ed. by Sibylle Einholz and Jürgen Wetzel (Berlin and Bonn: Westkreuz, 2003), pp. 115-34 (p. 128).

² Entry in *Journale* for 14 February 1952, in Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe* (henceforth *BFA*), ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller, 30 vols (Berlin: Aufbau and Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988-1998), XXVII, 1995, p. 330.

This house was to become their retreat from the stress of life in East Berlin, ‘ordentlich genug, daß ich wieder etwas HORAZ lesen kann’.³ Early in 1953, however, Weigel was seriously considering divorce and moved out of their shared home in the Berlin suburb of Weißensee. In the autumn of 1953, a reconciliation of sorts took place and the Brechts moved into a new home on Chausseestraße, which was to remain Brecht’s Berlin abode for the rest of his life.⁴

Two points of interest emerge here. Firstly, Brecht spent much of his time in the company of a few women, who were not only close professional colleagues, but also usually members of the Party. He was removed from contact with everyday life and people in the GDR. Wrapped up in his work, most of his day-to-day information came from the likes of Hauptmann, Rüllicke and Kilian, all members of the Party, who fed him (wittingly or unwittingly) the Party line.⁵ Others noticed this detachment from normal everyday social intercourse. Ferdinand Reyher, a friend from his time in the USA, visited Brecht but left Berlin earlier than planned, disappointed that Brecht’s circle consisted only of intellectuals and theatre people, with no contact with the workers.⁶ Hermann Henselmann, the leading architect on the Stalinallee project, was also of this view. He recalled a meeting he had had with workers on the Stalinallee on 18 or 19 June 1953. Brecht had been at the meeting, but the workers had completely ignored him and he them.⁷

The second point relates to Brecht’s relationship with Buckow. Alarmed at how old and tired Brecht was looking and convinced that he needed a place of retreat, Käthe Rüllicke had found the house at Buckow for the Brechts.⁸ It became a place of refuge and reflection for Brecht, offering him respite from the frenetic social and political activity of Berlin, where he had to be constantly on his guard and react instantly to events in an often hostile environment. Buckow afforded him the opportunity for more measured and

³ Entry in *Journale* for 15 July 1952, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 332.

⁴ Otten, pp. 120 and 131.

⁵ Otten, p. 121.

⁶ Fuegi, p. 527.

⁷ Susanne von Götz, “‘Ich habe der Arbeiterklasse ins Antlitz geschaut’: Ein Gespräch mit Hermann Henselmann, Architekt der Stalinallee, über Brecht und den 17. Juni 1953”, *Der Tagespiegel*, 17 June 1993.

⁸ Otten, p. 115.

calmer reflection. It is important to bear this in mind when considering his texts, for it was at Buckow that his most reflective texts on 17 June were penned.

The Berliner Ensemble and Cultural Freedom

Brecht's ambitions for the Berliner Ensemble and his efforts to achieve a measure of freedom of artistic expression in the GDR were two sides of the same coin. The Berliner Ensemble needed the secure base of its own home to afford Brecht's ideas an environment where they could flourish and influence cultural development. But cultural development was blocked as long as the existing network of cultural functionaries and institutions remained in charge. Hence, Brecht conducted a long, dual-objective campaign in the GDR, the acquisition of the theatre in the Schiffbauerdamm as permanent home for the Berliner Ensemble and the liberalisation of the GDR's stifling cultural policy.

This campaign set him at odds with the Party from the very outset of his life in the GDR. His relationship with the Party, however, was always an extremely complex one. On the one hand, he was an internationally renowned artist of great propaganda value to the regime. When he first arrived in East Berlin in 1948, he was fêted and wooed;⁹ his production of *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* in January 1949 was pronounced a great success and there was already talk of establishing a theatre company under Brecht's direction.¹⁰ This seemed promising and over the next four years, he was awarded literary prizes (the National Prize for Literature in 1951, the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954), and showered with perks and privileges to an extent that was unusual, even for an intellectual in the GDR.

Yet even as *Mutter Courage* was winning public plaudits, ominous clouds were gathering. Political and cultural power in the Soviet Zone resided with the Ulbricht group, who had seen out the Third Reich years in the Soviet Union. They were deeply suspicious of anyone who, like Brecht, had chosen not to go into exile in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Brecht's literary and dramatic styles ran counter to accepted socialist norms. Friedrich Wolf, himself a leading dramatist, found *Mutter Courage*

⁹ Brecht describes the fuss made of his arrival in an entry in his *Journal* for 22 October 1948, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 279.

¹⁰ Klaus Völker, *Bertolt Brecht: Eine Biographie* (Munich and Vienna: Hauser, 1976), pp. 363-64.

insufficiently Socialist Realist¹¹ and the highly regarded theatre critic, Fritz Erpenbeck, condemned the play's 'volksfremde Dekadenz'.¹² The politicians were equally mistrustful. The Politbüro sanctioned the establishment of the Berliner Ensemble in April 1949; but in a letter to Party functionary, Heinrich Rau, Ulbricht referred to the venture as the 'Helene-Weigel-Ensemble' and made clear that the theatre was to be placed under Helene Weigel's management.¹³

In 1951, at the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, at which the assault on Formalism was launched, Brecht once again found himself both lauded and condemned. He was praised as a poet who had contributed much to alter the awareness of the German people. However, of more import was an attack by Politbüro member Fred Oelßner on Brecht's production of *Die Mutter*. Again, the grounds for the attack were the play's alleged formalism.¹⁴ Oelßner's attack, and indeed the Fifth Plenum generally, represented a significant ratcheting up of the campaign against Brecht, but he was given a reprieve when Hans Rodenberg, another senior Party member, asked that Brecht be given time to find his ideological feet.¹⁵ However, on the very day the Fifth Plenum closed, Brecht opened another controversial production, *Das Verhör des Lukullus*. It was taken off after one performance. Even when it reappeared with numerous changes demanded by the Party and renamed *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*, official reception remained cool and the production was soon closed down.

Brecht, however, eased the pressure on himself by staging the *Herrnburger Bericht* in July 1951, a Cold War-inspired musical, which was, in the words of one Western critic, 'one of the most blatant pieces of propaganda hack-work of their [Brecht and Paul Dessau] careers'.¹⁶ So pleased were the authorities that Brecht was awarded the National Prize for Literature at the end of 1951. The year 1952 passed relatively uneventfully, although strife was never far away as Brecht continually sought to wrest

¹¹ See Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils. A Critical Study of the Man, His Work and His Opinions* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 153.

¹² Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Einige Bemerkungen zu Brechts "Mutter Courage"', *Die Weltbühne*, 2 (1949). Cited in Mittenzwei, II, p. 329.

¹³ Mittenzwei, II, p. 357 and Fuegi, p. 511.

¹⁴ Mittenzwei, II, pp. 421-25.

¹⁵ Esslin, *Brecht*, p. 154.

¹⁶ Esslin, *Brecht*, p. 158.

cultural control away from the institutions set up by the Fifth Plenum to oversee cultural production. Prior to the Second Party Conference in July 1952 (at which the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* was launched), *Neues Deutschland* published a statement signed by Brecht and Hanns Eisler, suggesting that artists be put in charge of cultural centres located in factories and other places of work. Brecht and Eisler volunteered themselves for such a 'kultureller Schwerpunkt' in Berlin.¹⁷

In 1953, however, prospects for Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble worsened considerably. Changing political circumstances in the Soviet bloc and in the Cold War meant that Ulbricht and the Party leadership now felt strong enough to launch a sharp assault on those they regarded as miscreant members of the artistic community.¹⁸ Included in this campaign was a sharper focus on Brecht's unco-operative attitude and attempts in the early months of the year to isolate him were relentless.¹⁹

Danger for Brecht arose from three sources. Firstly, he had, in collaboration with his apprentice, Egon Monk, staged Goethe's *Urfaust*. Its perceived lack of respect for Socialist Realist principles and German classical traditions enraged the Party and a bitter campaign was waged against the play and Brecht himself, particularly in the pages of the press.²⁰ Secondly, a conference was held in Berlin in April 1953 to promote the Stanislavsky approach to theatrical production. This method, named after the early twentieth-century Russian director, was in many respects the antithesis of Brecht's ideas and the conference constituted another angle of attack. The third source of conflict arose from a series of *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften* held on 13 May, 27 May and 10 June 1953. These were meetings in which a sub-group of Academy members and others was established to discuss the merits and demerits of Hanns Eisler's *Johann Faustus*, which had opened in January, and to consider the future of the Academy's house journal *Sinn und Form* and its editor, Peter Huchel. Brecht participated in all three meetings, stoutly

¹⁷ Brecht, 'Kulturelle Betreuung: Vorschläge von Brecht und Eisler für die II. Parteikonferenz der SED', *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, pp. 208-9.

¹⁸ Peter Davies, *Divided Loyalties: East German Writers and the Politics of German Division 1945-53* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2000), p. 221.

¹⁹ Peter Davies and Stephen Parker, 'Brecht, SED Cultural Policy and the Issue of Authority in the Arts: The Struggle for Control of the German Academy of Arts', in *Bertolt Brecht Centenary Essays*, ed. by Steve Giles and Rodney Livingstone (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 181-95 (p. 184).

²⁰ Esslin, *Brecht*, p. 161.

defending Eisler and Huchel, but the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften*, with their healthy majorities of opponents of Brecht added further to the pressure on Brecht.²¹

The combined impact of these attacks constituted ‘a serious threat not only to Brecht but to the Berliner Ensemble’.²² He found this strife and conflict extremely dispiriting. In March 1953, an entry in his *Journale* gloomily reflected on his theatrical progress: ‘unsere aufführungen in berlin haben fast kein echo mehr.’ The press was concerned only with attacking him and the masses were showing little interest in his productions.²³ In April, the SED decided that the Schiffbauerdamm theatre should be made available to the Kasernierte Volkspolizei, a fact Brecht only learned of in early June.²⁴ Yet he refused to give up. On 15 June, he wrote a letter to Otto Grotewohl, Minister-President of the SED, in which he continued to press the Berliner Ensemble’s case for acquiring the Schiffbauerdamm theatre; he took the opportunity to remind Grotewohl that a grant of the theatre would quell rumours in the West ‘über Zwistigkeiten zwischen mir und der Regierung’, and ‘würde meine Verbundenheit mit unserer Republik deutlichst dokumentieren’.²⁵

Nevertheless, it seems clear that, as 1953 progressed, Brecht was losing his battle for both cultural liberalisation and the Schiffbauerdamm theatre. The increasingly menacing attacks in the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften* and in the press had driven Eisler to the point of despair. It was not in Brecht’s nature to despair, as his letter to Grotewohl demonstrates. Yet even as he wrote the letter, the combination of personal and professional difficulties must have weighed heavily on him and his future prospects looked bleak. 17 June arrived just in time.

17 June

Brecht left no personal account of how he spent the day of 17 June, so we have to rely on his biographers, the memoirs of friends and colleagues and archive material. Since he is forever marked by his actions on 17 June, it is imperative that we sift the material

²¹ Davies, p. 221.

²² Esslin, *Brecht*, p. 161.

²³ Entry in *Journale* for 4 March 1953, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 346.

²⁴ Otten, p. 120.

²⁵ Brecht, ‘An Otto Grotewohl, 15. Juni 1953’, *BFA*, XXX, 1998, p. 177.

carefully to construct a picture of his day with which we can be confident. This task is not facilitated by the innumerable inconsistencies between accounts. For example, Wekwerth claims that Brecht spoke to the Berliner Ensemble staff for an hour around 1pm on 17 June: Meredith Heiser-Duron puts the meeting's duration at ten minutes, although she does not disclose the source of this information.²⁶ Erwin Geschonneck recalls running a meeting of Berliner Ensemble staff on 17 June, at which Helene Weigel spoke, but she was in Budapest on that day.²⁷ (It seems Geschonneck may have been confusing the 17 June meeting with a further series of meetings of the same people a week later.) Further inconsistencies arise out of the opposing personal attitudes of the writers or speakers concerned. A notable example is the question as to Brecht's words and actions as the Soviet tanks rolled into the streets of East Berlin. According to Fuegi, Wekwerth stated that Brecht had waved to the tanks when he was on the street. (In fact, Mittenzwei also mentions this incident.)²⁸ However, Wekwerth himself seems to be vaguer about this. In his own memoirs, there is no mention of Brecht waving to the tanks on the streets; rather he expresses scepticism concerning reports that Brecht shouted 'Hurra!' or 'Hoch!' in his office when news of the tanks reached him there, and he repeats his assertion in an interview, although this time, confusingly, he locates Brecht on the street.²⁹ Since this alleged incident was subsequently used to condemn Brecht in the West, it is important to note that there is at least some doubt as to its veracity. There is a further puzzling incidence of inconsistency. On the afternoon of 17 June, Brecht attended an impromptu meeting of the Academy.³⁰ This was an important meeting, noted by Heiser-Duron and Mark W. Clark.³¹ Yet others, such as Mittenzwei, Fuegi, Wekwerth, and Geschonneck fail to mention the meeting. In fact, according to Mittenzwei, Brecht returned home to Weißensee around 2.00 pm with some colleagues to discuss and review the events of the

²⁶ Compare Manfred Wekwerth, Interview in '*Denken heißt verändern...*': *Erinnerungen an Brecht*, ed. by Joachim Lang and Jürgen Hillesheim (Augsburg: Maro, 1998), pp. 159-83 (p. 179), with Meredith A. Heiser-Duron, 'Brecht's Political and Cultural Dilemma in the Summer of 1953', *Communications from the International Brecht Society*, 30 (2001), 47-56 (49).

²⁷ Erwin Geschonneck, Interview in Lang and Hillesheim, pp. 41-56 (p. 52).

²⁸ Fuegi, p. 544 and Mittenzwei, II, p. 497.

²⁹ Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, p. 113, and in Lang and Hillesheim, p. 181.

³⁰ The meeting is minuted in Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 78-79.

³¹ Heiser-Duron, p. 49 and Mark W. Clark, 'Hero or Villain? Bertolt Brecht and the Crisis Surrounding June 1953', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41 (2006), no. 3, 451-75 (466).

day.³² It is strange that Mittenzwei, in particular, should have ignored this crucial event in Brecht's itinerary.

These inconsistencies, whether due to authorial partiality or receding memory, reinforce the fact that Brecht's conduct on and concerning 17 June was at times shrouded in uncertainty and interpretation requires more care than has often been exercised. The inconsistencies are not, however, so irreconcilable that we cannot construct a reasonably accurate account of his movements on 17 June.

Brecht returned from Buckow to his home in Weißensee on the evening of 16 June. Throughout the day, Peter Palitzsch, a stage director at the Berliner Ensemble, had kept him informed by telephone of developments in the city.³³ Brecht invited Rüllicke, Wekwerth and Palitzsch to Weißensee to discuss the events of the day. Wekwerth was astonished to hear Brecht say he would arm the workers, not only to protect themselves from resurgent fascists but also from the government.³⁴ If Brecht did, in fact, venture this suggestion, it indicates how totally he was underestimating the seriousness of the situation. It is inconceivable that he would have proposed arming the workers after he had seen the numbers and events on the streets the following day.

Early on 17 June, Brecht drove with his overnight guests to the Berliner Ensemble rehearsal venue on Reinhardtstraße. At some point during the morning, he wrote a number of letters to leading political and cultural figures in the GDR. He seems to have spoken to Berliner Ensemble staff, urging them to demonstrate support for the government.³⁵ In the first of several attempts on 17 June to galvanise GDR radio, Brecht sent Wekwerth and Elisabeth Hauptmann to offer the services of the Berliner Ensemble to the GDR radio authorities: according to Wekwerth, they were received with derisive laughter and scorn.³⁶

It is generally maintained that Brecht went on to the streets of East Berlin around midday and arrived back in time for a pre-arranged 1pm meeting with the Berliner

³² Mittenzwei, II, p. 499.

³³ Peter Palitzsch, Interview in Lang and Hillesheim, pp. 113-132 (p. 118).

³⁴ Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, p. 110.

³⁵ Mittenzwei, II, pp. 492-93.

³⁶ Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, p. 111.

Ensemble's staff.³⁷ Whether he waved to tanks while he was out is not ultimately of much relevance. Of greater import is whether he went out before or after addressing the meeting: this would almost certainly have had a significant effect on the form and content of his words. Since there are, in any case, no minutes of the meeting that I am aware of, and memories seem to be uncertain, it is probably best not to speculate on what he said.

The next event we can establish with any degree of confidence was an impromptu meeting at the Academy. Brecht attended this meeting with nine others, a mixture of adversaries, including Alexander Abusch, and friends, among them Hanns Eisler and Paul Dessau. There was a proposal to send off a declaration of confidence forthwith to the government. The minutes show that Brecht blocked this proposal on both technical and philosophical grounds.³⁸

The Academy minutes mark the last reliable information we have on Brecht's 17 June. Wekwerth maintains that he and Brecht listened to an evening radio transmission in which the truncated version of Brecht's letter to Ulbricht was read out.³⁹ In the light of other evidence, this seems most unlikely. According to Otten, Käthe Rüllicke returned with Brecht to his house in Weißensee and recalled that he did not think the Party leadership would survive 17 June.⁴⁰ Whether he said this in a mood of despair or hope is not recorded.

A Changed Landscape

Whatever Brecht's frame of mind on the evening of 17 June, it is clear that he quickly realised that the events of the day provided an opportunity to revitalise the twin-track campaign that, just two days earlier, had seemed to have gone badly off-course. He grasped the opportunity with both hands, setting himself the objectives of seeing off the institutions established by the Fifth Plenum in 1951 to control culture, weakening the influence of the powerful cultural elites in the Party and, of course, acquiring the

³⁷ Mittenzwei, II, p. 496-97 and Fuegi, p. 544 are in agreement on this point: however, Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, p.113 and in Lang and Hillesheim, p.179, reverses the order.

³⁸ Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 78-79.

³⁹ Wekwerth, *Erinnern ist Leben*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ Otten, p. 127.

Schiffbauerdamm theatre. Six months later, he seemed to have achieved his ambition in full.

Peter Davies maintains that the general tenor of the third *Mittwoch-Gesellschaft* meeting was noticeably less hostile towards Brecht and his associates than the second, a change of mood which might have been prompted by the New Course.⁴¹ If the New Course weakened the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften*, then 17 June killed them off altogether. There was no longer any question of further meetings. Indeed, following Brecht's block on the 17 June attempt to send a message of loyalty to the government, a different question was posited at the next meeting of the Academy on 18 June: 'Was muß in der Kulturpolitik geändert oder positiv entwickelt werden [...]?'⁴² The focus was now very much on shortcomings in cultural policy.

A special Academy commission was set up to bring forward proposals for reform of cultural policy. Brecht and Becher were the literary representatives.⁴³ It submitted proposals which were refined and signed off at a meeting on 30 June, presented to the government on 2 July and, after initial Party resistance, published in *Neues Deutschland* on 12 July. This marked the beginning of a cultural reform campaign, in which Brecht participated and indeed, in many instances, orchestrated.

While all this activity was taking place in the sphere of cultural policy, Brecht continued to push his case for acquiring the Schiffbauerdamm theatre, albeit in a rather less public manner. As we have seen, he sent a letter on 15 June to Grotewohl, pleading his case.⁴⁴ On 22 July, Grotewohl wrote to Brecht, informing him that the SED had granted provisional approval of his acquisition of the Schiffbauerdamm theatre. Wilhelm Girnus visited Brecht in Buckow on 25 July⁴⁵ and two days later wrote to Ulbricht recommending that, despite Brecht's errant ideas, he should be allowed to acquire the

⁴¹ Davies, pp. 244-45.

⁴² Dietzel and Geißler, p. 80.

⁴³ This was convenient since Becher headed the Kulturbund, thus ensuring a co-ordinated approach between the Academy proposals and a similar document being prepared by the Kulturbund.

⁴⁴ Nothing concerning the theatre appears thereafter in Brecht's letters, journals or *Schriften*.

⁴⁵ Otten, p. 130.

theatre, in view of his international reputation.⁴⁶ Final approval was granted a month later and the Berliner Ensemble moved into its new home on 19 March, 1954.⁴⁷

This was a remarkable achievement. Girnus had been one of Brecht's chief adversaries in the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften* and one of the powerful cultural functionaries Brecht was determined to neutralise. It was said that Ulbricht had asked Girnus to keep an eye on Brecht.⁴⁸ The visit to Buckow and the despatch of the letter took place just as Ulbricht was regaining political control at the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee, and just over a week after the publication of two Brecht poems and a Harich essay, all inflammatory, in the *Berliner Zeitung*.

Girnus later made a stinging attack on Harich's 'scandalous' article, 'der das allgemeine Signal für die Offensive revisionistischer Elemente bei uns gab'.⁴⁹ It is not unreasonable to assume his feelings for Brecht would have been something similar. Yet here we have one enemy, Girnus, pleading Brecht's case to another, Ulbricht, who was minded to be co-operative. With its elements of Brecht as awkward dissenter balanced by his propaganda value, his political sureness of foot and his determination to get his way, the incident is a microcosm of Brecht's life in the GDR.

Public Reactions

We have a reasonably clear picture, then, of how Brecht conducted himself in 1953 generally and in some detail on 17 June itself. We have also seen that particular aspects of this conduct assumed mythical proportions and excited vehement public reactions. In the West, there was a widely-held view that Brecht had been complicit in state repression, propping up an undemocratic regime. In the immediate aftermath of 17 June, his plays were routinely withdrawn from Western theatres.⁵⁰ Peter Suhrkamp wrote to him on 30 June, warning him that the Western boycott of his plays had already begun.⁵¹ Mittenzwei

⁴⁶ Girnus's letter to Ulbricht is cited in Heiser-Duron, p. 53.

⁴⁷ Mittenzwei, II, p. 710.

⁴⁸ Clark, p. 459.

⁴⁹ Wilhelm Girnus, 'Kulturfragen sind Machtfragen', *Sonntag*, 3 (1958). Cited in Spittmann and Fricke, p. 211.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Arno Paul and Martha Humphreys, 'The West German Theatre Miracle: A Structural Analysis', *The Drama Review*, 24 (1980), no. 1, 3-24 (3).

⁵¹ The letter is in the Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv, Berlin (henceforth BBA), Signatur 0787/058-59.

talks of ‘wilde Spekulationen’ and a ‘Hetzfeldzug großen Stils’ waged against Brecht.⁵² Nor was the antipathy short-term. Each time there was a major political event in the Eastern bloc, such as the Hungarian rising of 1956 or the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, renewed efforts were made in West Germany to enforce further boycotts of Brecht’s work.⁵³ In the Bundestag in 1957, the year after Brecht’s death, the West German foreign minister, Heinrich von Brentano, likened Brecht’s poems to the Horst Wessel-Lied (a charge he repeated in 1973). Carola Stern links antipathy towards Brecht directly with the Cold War: ‘Immer, wenn sich der Ost-West Gegensatz verschärfte, wurde in Westdeutschland Brecht-Boykott empfohlen.’⁵⁴

Most of the vitriol directed at Brecht in the years after 1953 emanated from politicians and the political press, but Western intellectuals had their own contributions to offer. A notable example was Günter Grass’s play *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*, first performed at the Schillertheater in West Berlin in January 1966.⁵⁵ The play is set in the Berliner Ensemble rehearsal rooms on 17 June 1953. The Boss is directing a rehearsal of his adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, when striking workers force their way into the theatre and request him to apply his literary and political skills to help them get their message across to Party and public. The Boss prevaricates; at the behest of a functionary, Kosanka, he writes a note of solidarity with the government, in order to preserve his theatre. The Boss seems to grow to regret not supporting the workers and, with an air of resignation, goes off to his country retreat to write poetry.

The Boss’s adaptation of *Coriolanus* reflects his ideological views. Whereas in Shakespeare’s play, Coriolanus was a tragic but noble figure and the plebians coarse and mean, the Boss’s version reverses the characterisations: the workers are noble and their ultimate victory over the exploitative Coriolan is assured. However, when the Boss is confronted by real-life workers, demanding real-life justice, he is unable to translate his fine principles into practice.

⁵² Mittenzwei, II, pp. 495 and 506.

⁵³ Carl Weber, ‘Brecht in Eclipse?’, *The Drama Review*, 24 (1980), no. 1, 115-24 (116).

⁵⁴ Carola Stern, *Männer lieben anders: Helene Weigel und Bertolt Brecht* (Berlin: Rowohlt-Berlin, 2000), p. 180.

⁵⁵ Günter Grass, *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand: Ein deutsches Trauerspiel* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2003). First published by Hermann Luchterhand in 1966.

Grass has always maintained that the play was not an attack on Brecht *per se*, but on Brecht as representative of the failure of GDR intellectuals in 1953, or indeed on the failure of all German intellectuals to oppose the GDR and the Third Reich.⁵⁶ Whilst this may be a valid reading of the play, it is not the only, nor indeed the most obvious one. The Boss in Grass's play seems clearly modelled on Brecht, in which case the play is a direct and personal attack on him. He is the man who, rather than support the workers in their search for justice, prefers instead to exploit them as 'Anschauungsmaterial' and to cave in to Party demands, all in the cause of his own cynical self-interest. This was the general interpretation of the play when it first appeared. Marcel Reich-Ranicki certainly saw it as such:

Kann man nicht den Grass'schen 'Chef' betrachten, ohne an Brecht zu denken?
Nein, man kann es nicht. Denn wenn uns diese Gestalt überhaupt zu interessieren vermag, so vor allem dank Brecht, dank den Anspielungen auf seine Situation in der DDR, auf seine Stücke und Gedichte, auf sein Theater und sein Leben.⁵⁷

Grass himself, in the speech to the Academy in 1964 that was to be the genesis of his play, refers to Brecht's thoughts and actions on 17 June in such a way as to make it quite explicit that the Boss is Brecht and the Boss's actions are Brecht's.⁵⁸ The play was also interpreted in the GDR as an attack on Brecht.⁵⁹ Whatever Grass's intention, then, the play was widely seen as a disparaging and damaging commentary by a Western intellectual on Brecht's behaviour on 17 June.

In the East, reaction was more muted. In the general thaw in relationships between the Party leadership and intellectuals that lasted until the end of 1956, and therefore, until after Brecht's death, the relentless persecution of Brecht pursued prior to

⁵⁶ See Thomas K Brown, 'Die Plebejer und Brecht: an Interview with Günter Grass', *Monatshefte für deutsche Unterricht* 65 (1973), no. 1, 5-13, and Martin Esslin, 'Grass versus Brecht: The Plebians Rehearse the Uprising', *Theatre Australia*, 11 (1979), no. 3, 18-19.

⁵⁷ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Literatur der kleinen Schritte: Deutsche Schriftsteller heute* (Munich: Piper & Co, 1967), p. 175.

⁵⁸ Günter Grass, 'Vor- und Nachgeschichte der Tragödie des Coriolanus von Livius und Plutarch über Shakespeare bis zu Brecht und mir', in *Essays und Reden 1: 1955-1969* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1993), pp. 58-84 (pp. 82-83).

⁵⁹ For example, Abusch refers dismissively to the 'Stück gegen Brecht von Günter Grass', at an Academy meeting of 30 November 1965. See Dietzel and Geißler, p. 280.

17 June eased off. However, the old love-hate relationship endured. He won the Stalin Peace Prize in 1954 but his plays were hardly ever permitted a showing outside the Schiffbauerdamm theatre.⁶⁰

The Eastern and Western views were not, in fact, so very far apart, though they were both grounded in the opposing certainties of the Cold War. Underlying the Western view was the belief that Brecht was not driven by his socialist convictions, but rather by narrow personal interests. The Eastern view was also that the strength of Brecht's socialist ardour was suspect. Both views were informed by the thoughts and words of cultural and political elites on either side of the Cold War divide. It is now time to test the validity of these views against Brecht's own thoughts and words.

Brecht in His Own Words

We now move on from the records, analyses and opinions of others to an examination of Brecht's own thoughts on the subject of 17 June. In one respect, this is reasonably straightforward, because the body of texts in which Brecht engages with 17 June is relatively restricted, no more than a score of individual texts. In other respects, however, interpretation of the texts throws up a number of difficulties and questions. In this section, I will identify the texts and discuss the problems of interpretation, before moving on to an analysis of the texts.

Brecht did not leave behind much 'life writing', that is, work of an autobiographical nature. That is not to say he wrote little non-fiction. Indeed, apart from his dramatic and lyrical work, he created an extensive body of texts; working journals (*Journale*), letters (*Briefe*) and essays (*Schriften*). There is little, however, in these works (including the *Tagebücher* of his youth and early manhood) that represents memoirs, personal recollections, or the accounting of and for one's actions that are commonly found in autobiographical works. Nevertheless, Brecht's thoughts on the critical cultural and political issues of his life are well charted. In the 1930s, for example, he wrote a series of essays which, taken together, provide a comprehensive account of his views on realism,

⁶⁰ Esslin, *Brecht*, p. 170.

Socialist Realism and formalism.⁶¹ Similarly, we can gauge his views on 17 June from a range of texts and essays written in 1953.

The table overleaf displays Brecht's significant texts relating to 17 June. There are nineteen in all, a combination of letters, diary entries, essays and poems, as well as formal minutes noting Brecht's comments. These are not the only texts which touch upon Brecht's thoughts on one aspect or another of 17 June, but they are the texts which, taken together, provide a comprehensive representation of his views on the subject.

⁶¹ These essays are included in *BFA*, XXII, 1993, pp. 400-500.

Key Brecht texts dealing with causes and lessons of 17 June		
Text	Date Written/Published	Main Themes
Letter to Walter Ulbricht	17 June: published (in part) in <i>Neues Deutschland</i> , 21 June	Solidarity with the Party Dialogue with the people
Letter to Otto Grotewohl	17 June	Utilisation of radio/Berliner Ensemble Solidarity with the Party
Letter to Gustav Just	17 June	Utilisation of radio/Berliner Ensemble
Letter to Vladimir Semyonov	17 June	Solidarity with the Soviet Union
Minute of Academy meeting	17 June	Cultural policy reform
‘Dringlichkeit einer großen Aussprache’	21 June: published in <i>Neues Deutschland</i> , 23 June	Dialogue with the people Solidarity with the Party Western provocation Party mistakes
Minutes of Berliner Ensemble meetings of 24-26 June	24-26 June. In Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv	Party mistakes Dialogue with the people Residual fascism Cultural policy reform
‘Zum 17. Juni 1953’	June: published posthumously	Party mistakes Fascist exploitation Soviet Union protection

Key Brecht texts dealing with causes and lessons of 17 June (cont.)		
Text	Date Written/Published	Main Themes
Letter to Peter Suhrkamp	1 July	Western provocation Residual fascism <u>Solidarity with the Party</u>
‘Erklärung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste’	30 June: delivered to Government 2 July: published in <i>Neues Deutschland</i> , 12 July	Cultural policy reform
‘Das Amt für Literatur’	Poem published in <i>Berliner Zeitung</i> , 11	Cultural policy reform
‘Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunstkommission’	Poem published in <i>Berliner Zeitung</i> , 15 July	Cultural policy reform
‘Kulturpolitik und Akademie der Künste’	Published in <i>Neues Deutschland</i> , 13	Cultural policy reform
‘Nicht so gemeint’	Summer 1953, published posthumously	Solidarity with the Party
‘Die Wahrheit einigt’ and letter to Wandel	Mid August	Dialogue with the people
‘der 17. Juni hat die ganze existenz verfremdet’	18 August entry in <i>Journalle</i> : published posthumously	Party and working class: past mistakes and future opportunities
‘Vorwort zu Turandot’	Late summer: published posthumously	Party mistakes Residual fascism
<i>Buckower Elegien</i>	Late summer: published (mostly) posthumously	Party mistakes Dialogue with the people Residual fascism <u>Western provocation</u>
‘das land ist immer noch unheimlich’	7 July 1954 entry in <i>Journalle</i> : published posthumously	Residual fascism

I include the minutes of meetings on 24, 25 and 26 June of Berliner Ensemble staff, convened to discuss 17 June, the minutes of an Academy meeting on 17 June and a note in the Academy records, ‘Vorschläge der DAK an die Regierung’ of 2 July 1953, which was published in *Neues Deutschland* on 12 July 1953 as ‘Erklärung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste’. Brecht was present at both the Berliner Ensemble and Academy meetings and the minutes incorporate his remarks. As a summarised record of what Brecht said, minuted by another person, the accuracy of remarks ascribed to him must be regarded as less reliable than his own texts. Nevertheless, these minutes were recorded at the time and are most likely to have been written without undue authorial bias or construal. Accordingly, they provide valuable signals to Brecht’s thinking in the aftermath of 17 June.

The words of the ‘Erklärung’ are even less those of Brecht. Yet it was Brecht who, along with Becher, worked on the proposals as the special working-party literary representative, and there is fairly common consent that Brecht was by this stage an accepted leader in the Academy and therefore in a position to exercise considerable influence over events there.⁶² Further, as we shall see, many of the proposals and much of the language clearly bear Brecht’s stamp.

I have not taken account of the Berliner Ensemble meeting of 17 June, reported by Fuegi, Mittenzwei, Otten and others.⁶³ No doubt this meeting took place, but no minute seems to have been taken, and we have to rely on the much later recollections of people who were at the time in a state of turmoil. Similarly, there are other Academy documents in which Brecht’s comments are included or in which he is quoted. For example, a minute from a meeting of 5 November 1953 records Brecht’s plea that cultural functionaries be chosen from people who know something about culture. In the same month, in a letter from Rudolf Engel to Culture Minister-elect, Johannes Becher, Brecht’s suggested nominations for these functionary posts are listed.⁶⁴ These are not included here as critical texts, but as supporting documentation.

⁶² See Clark, p. 469.

⁶³ Fuegi, p. 544, Mittenzwei, II, pp. 497-98, Otten, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 96-97.

Problems in Interpretation

It is, I think, a tribute to Brecht's literary and communication skills that we are able to derive so much information from such a restricted body of texts. However, if we posit that he was deeply shocked by 17 June, a contention generally accepted by adherents and adversaries alike, then the table of texts above presents three difficulties: why there are so few texts, why his preoccupation with the topic extended only to a few months and why he published, in an apparently random fashion, some texts but not others.

The paucity of texts can clearly be correlated, to some extent, with the duration of Brecht's apparent preoccupation with the subject and his other activity over this period. As we have seen, he was a very busy man in 1953. His private life, complex in any case, was further complicated by Weigel's decision to move out of the family home and his subsequent negotiations in acquiring a new home on Chausseestraße and persuading her to move there too. At the same time, of course, he had a theatre to run and several productions to keep in progress. What made 1953 exceptionally busy, however, was the need to deal with the increasingly virulent attacks on his own work and that of his colleagues. This entailed not only dealing with the fall-out from the Stanislavsky Conference in March and the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften* in May and June, but also working alone and with others, openly and discreetly, to save his theatre company and to bring about a measure of cultural reform. His writing output suffered as a result. In his *Journale*, for example, there are no entries between his musing on 4 March 1953 on the poor health of theatre in the GDR and his analysis on 20 August 1953 of the events of 17 June,⁶⁵ the longest gap in these journals until entries peter out altogether after July 1954. His *Schriften* reveal something similar; in the *BFA* edition of his work, there are fifty texts for 1953, about one third of the number for 1937.⁶⁶

It is clear, therefore, that Brecht's available time for literary output in 1953 was severely circumscribed. It is more difficult to fathom why all the texts relevant to the phenomenon of 17 June were limited to a six-month period. His preoccupation with 17

⁶⁵ Both entries in *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 346.

⁶⁶ A simple numerical comparison between the entries for 1937 in *BFA*, XXII/1, 1993 and for 1953 in *BFA*, XXIII, 1993.

June seems to have begun only on 17 June itself and to have ended before the end of the year.

Prior to 17 June, he had very little to say about the workers or their plight. In the months after the Second Party Conference in July 1952, at a time when conditions for the workers were worsening considerably, he did not seem to appreciate the difficulties the masses were experiencing. His *Journale* entries note mainly issues of theatrical interest. Indeed, the only entry of even indirect relevance around this time was a note of 28 November 1952 of a discussion with the architect, Hermann Henselmann, on the nature of the decorative sculptures to be erected on the Stalinallee. Brecht's suggestion that, to the figures proposed by Henselmann, should be added one of an *Aktivist* at work carries greater political than social resonance.⁶⁷ That Brecht was aware, however, of the tensions building up between workers and Party, is clear in his poem 'An einen jungen Bauarbeiter der Stalinallee', written in 1952, in which he addresses the construction worker thus:

Dem, der das Kommando gibt, sag:
Kommando muß sein, bei so vielen in so großen Unternehmungen
Mit so wenig Zeit
Aber kommandiere so
Daß ich mich selber mitkommandiere!⁶⁸

Furthermore, there is little evidence that Brecht was greatly concerned about attitudes in GDR society more generally. Of course, he was terrified of another global war and constantly urged politicians to work for peace. And he was terrified of and loathed fascism. Yet we hear little from him on the subject of fascist elements in GDR society prior to 17 June.

How are we to interpret this? His silence on the hardships endured by the workers prior to 17 June would appear to offer further proof in support of the views of those who maintain that, when the events of 17 June did occur, Brecht saw them simply as an opportunity to be exploited for his own ends. He must have been aware of the grim social

⁶⁷ Entry in *Journale* for 28 November 1952, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 339. An *Aktivist* was someone who was exceptionally productive, who regularly and sometimes spectacularly exceeded his productivity target.

⁶⁸ Brecht, 'An einen jungen Bauarbeiter der Stalinallee', *BFA*, XV, 1993, pp. 260-61.

and economic conditions in the GDR and of the constant rumblings of worker discontent which had been gathering in volume for some time. Yet, cocooned as he was in his small, privileged, relatively homogeneous circle, where he would have encountered few workers apart from his own theatre hands, it seems that the plight of the masses resonated little with him. And so, for Brecht, as for most of the political and cultural elites in the land, the events of 17 June came as a bolt from the blue. It was only then that he was forced to think about the social conditions which had led to this. As we shall see, in this thinking, the threat of fascism loomed large, but the socioeconomic conditions experienced by the workers played a relatively muted part. There is, then, little point in claiming for Brecht a deep empathy with the masses: the evidence suggests otherwise. But my contention is not that Brecht was a sainted socialist, rather, that his views, as expressed in his texts, set him in opposition to the SED regime.

As regards the fact that, after 1953, Brecht never again said anything of significance concerning 17 June, there were a number of factors at play here. By the end of 1953, the cultural changes he had striven for were in place. In early 1954, he was preoccupied with establishing the Berliner Ensemble not only in the Schiffbauerdamm but also as a major European theatre company. It is, I think, also important to bear in mind that Brecht's age and ill-health were catching up on him. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that his period of opposition was brief.

The third difficulty concerns Brecht's reasons for publishing some texts and not others. Publication of each of his letters sent to GDR politicians and his Western publisher was of course at least as much within the recipient's control as within Brecht's: the truth of this observation was graphically borne out when Ulbricht had a distorted version of Brecht's letter of 17 June published in *Neues Deutschland*. Of the texts under Brecht's own control, a number were unpublished. Non-publication cannot have been due to fear of punishment by the authorities: the unpublished 'Zum 17. Juni, 1953' offered an analysis that was kinder to the Party than some of the texts that were published, such as his scathing indictment of functionaries in 'Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunstkommission'. Nor can it have been fear of attracting even more Western opprobrium: his

letter to Suhrkamp (in effect a response to his Western critics) is a robust and unapologetic defence of his socialist stance.

All Brecht's 17 June texts convey criticism, more or less explicit, of the Party and its leaders. Those he chose to publish attacked the Party's cultural policies and demanded reform. Those he withheld addressed wider social problems in the GDR, in particular, the issue of residual fascism and the Party's failure properly to deal with this issue. It may be that cultural reform was, in his opinion, of the utmost importance and accordingly required priority. It may be that he felt on safer ground tackling this issue. A question then remains: in light of these facts of publication, to what extent do Brecht's views on 17 June constitute an oppositional stance towards the SED regime? Before addressing this question, I will turn to an evaluation of his views.

Analysis of the texts

On examination, the texts reveal that Brecht's views on 17 June evolved over three stages. The first stage marked his immediate response, while he was still in a state of shock and confusion, brought on by the events unfolding on the streets on 17 June. In the second stage, he began to look more deeply into the causes of 17 June and to identify measures required to redress the problems which had led to the upheaval. Paramount was the need for cultural reform and in this second stage, his analysis of the sociopolitical problems and solutions developed in parallel with his endeavours to secure cultural change. Finally, he entered a period of mature and more profound reflection on the nature of 17 June, its causes and its consequences. Unsurprisingly, his responses gather more weight and cogency as he progresses through the stages.

Initial reactions

Brecht's first reaction on the morning of 17 June was to rush off letters to Ulbricht, Grotewohl, Semyonov (head of the Soviet forces in the GDR) and Gustav Just (then responsible for art and culture in the Central Committee of the SED).⁶⁹ The four letters incorporated three ideas; solidarity with the SED and the Soviet Union in his letters to Ulbricht, Grotewohl and Semyonov; the need for dialogue between the Party and the

⁶⁹ The letters are all included in *BFA*, XXX, 1998, pp. 178-79.

people in the letter to Ulbricht; and, in the letters to Grotewohl and Just, the constructive deployment of the media, and radio in particular, as a communication tool.

The possibilities offered by radio had long excited Brecht. In 1927, he recalled the first time he had heard a radio: ‘Man hatte [...] den Eindruck einer nicht nur modischen, sondern wirklich modernen Angelegenheit’,⁷⁰ and in many subsequent essays, he reiterated his belief in the radio as a powerful ‘Kommunikationsapparat’.⁷¹ His immediate instinct, then, on the morning of 17 June, was to harness the power of this medium to address the nation and restore its confidence in its leaders. He was enraged that the Western radio channel, RIAS, was left unopposed to impart important information to the people, while GDR radio persisted with ‘Operettenmelodien’.⁷² That his repeated attempts to energise the radio authorities and functionaries were fruitless is a stark demonstration of how far ahead of his compatriots Brecht was in his appreciation of the power of modern media.

Brecht’s letter to Ulbricht was his most significant action of the day in terms of its consequences. The letter read:

Die Geschichte wird der revolutionären Ungeduld der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands ihren Respekt zollen.

Die große Aussprache mit den Massen über das Tempo des sozialistischen Aufbaus wird zu einer Sichtung und zu einer Sicherung der sozialistischen Errungenschaften führen.

Es ist mir ein Bedürfnis, Ihnen in diesem Augenblick meine Verbundenheit mit der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands auszudrücken.⁷³

The first paragraph, couched in ideological vocabulary, is little more than a formulaic expression of optimism that the Party would prevail. Nor is there any implicit criticism of the Party in the second sentence. Brecht was simply saying what the Party leadership itself was saying. Indeed, at a Party meeting the previous evening, Wekwerth and Hauptmann would have heard Grotewohl say that it was not the government’s intention,

⁷⁰ Brecht, ‘Radio – eine vorsintflutliche Erfindung?’ *BFA*, XXI, 1992, p. 217.

⁷¹ For example, in ‘Das Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat’, *BFA*, XXI, 1992, pp. 552-57.

⁷² See Wekwerth, in Lang and Hillesheim, p. 182.

⁷³ Brecht, ‘An Walter Ulbricht, Berlin, 17. Juni 1953’, *BFA*, XXX, 1998, p. 178.

‘der ernsthaften Aussprache mit unserem Volk aus dem Wege zu gehen’,⁷⁴ and would have been able to report this back to Brecht.

It was the final sentence that caused the problem. When Ulbricht had an edited version of the letter published in *Neues Deutschland* on 21 June, it was only this final sentence, pledging solidarity with the SED, that was printed. Clearly, Ulbricht sought to gain maximum benefit from a public expression of support by such a cultural superstar. No doubt he felt that the inclusion of the first two sentences would have added little, or, in calling for a ‘große Aussprache’, might even have deflected from the overall effect he, Ulbricht, wished to achieve. In fact, the publication of this foreshortened version of the letter in *Neues Deutschland* whipped up a surge of outrage and antipathy towards Brecht in the West from which he never fully recovered.

It seems strange that Brecht, who rarely did anything rash, should have sent off these letters before he had actually seen and assessed the events on the streets. His precipitous action does appear to be that of someone caught in a flurry of chaos and confusion. Instinctively, he judged from the reports coming in from RIAS and his own colleagues that the GDR state was in danger and the Party needed unconditional loyalty at this hour of need. His own life as a communicator convinced him of the necessity to confront and expose the RIAS propaganda. Beyond this, the letters did not actually say a great deal. It was only later, after he had been on the streets, that reason took over from instinct. It would be perverse, therefore, to judge Brecht’s 17 June demeanour on the basis of one distorted letter rather than on his more deliberate reflections.

A Sociopolitical Analysis

Brecht was furious that his letter and his person had been exploited in this way.⁷⁵ He immediately set about putting the public record straight with a statement, dated 21 June, ‘Dringlichkeit einer großen Aussprache,’ which appeared in *Neues Deutschland* on 23 June. The statement confirmed that Brecht had declared solidarity with the SED on the morning of 17 June. But the turgid aphorisms relating to history, revolutionary impatience and the tempo of socialist development in the original letter were replaced

⁷⁴ Grotewohl’s speech at the *Parteiaktiv* meeting was reproduced in *Neues Deutschland* on 17 June 1953.

⁷⁵ See Clark, p. 467.

with a sharper and altogether more direct language. He conceded the presence of provocateurs, but it was now his view that the workers had demonstrated ‘in berechtigter Unzufriedenheit’, and that ‘die so dringliche große Aussprache über die allseitig gemachten Fehler’⁷⁶ was now an absolute imperative. Whether Brecht knew it or not, this was directly at odds with the narrative Ulbricht was already constructing and it seems surprising that *Neues Deutschland* allowed its publication. Heinrich Mohr suggests a possible explanation: at this time, a deadly power struggle was unfolding in the Politbüro between Ulbricht and Rudolf Herrnstadt. Herrnstadt was not only a member of the Politbüro; he was also editor of *Neues Deutschland*.⁷⁷

This statement marked Brecht’s first considered analysis of the causes of 17 June and the measures now required to restore order and advance the cause of socialism. Here he clearly identified government mistakes as the main cause of the disturbances on 17 June and communication between government and people as the urgent remedy. On the first day of the Berliner Ensemble meeting of 24-26 June, he further explored this failure in communication, identifying it as one of the Party’s gravest mistakes. The GDR was still riddled with fascists and fascism because ‘sie [die Partei] diese Nazi-Elemente in den Menschen und in den Gehirnen nicht wirklich beseitigt hat’ and there was ‘ein Verbot, von der Nazizeit zu sprechen’.⁷⁸ The failure openly to confront past and present fascism was, he maintained, compounded by a lack of discussion on the merits and achievements of socialism. In his short essay, ‘Zum 17. Juni 1953’, he essentially summarises his position to date; the government had failed, fascists were in danger of unleashing another war, and it was necessary to support and encourage the government in its mission to lead.⁷⁹

Brecht’s letter to Peter Suhrkamp, dated 1 July 1953, is an important text. It is, of course, a letter to a Westerner in response to Western charges that he had conspired to suppress democratic calls for freedom. Indeed he may even have hoped that the letter

⁷⁶ Brecht, ‘Dringlichkeit einer großen Aussprache,’ *BFA*, XXI, 1992, p. 250.

⁷⁷ Heinrich Mohr, ‘Der 17. Juni als Thema der Literatur in der DDR,’ in Spittmann and Fricke, pp. 87-111 (p. 109).

⁷⁸ ‘Diskussion des BERLINER ENSEMBLES über die Lage am 24. Juni 1953’, *BBA*, Signatur 1447/001-015.

⁷⁹ Brecht, ‘Zum 17. Juni 1953,’ *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, p. 249.

would find its way into the public domain. Ernst Schumacher recalled that he had discussed with Brecht the letter and the possibility of its publication: ‘mit der Veröffentlichung dieses Briefes wäre den vielen Polemiken, die auf Grund seiner Stellungnahmen im “Neuen Deutschland” gegen ihn vorgebracht wurden, die Spitze genommen’.⁸⁰ Brecht felt any decision to publish the letter must be Suhrkamp’s: ‘aber wenn Sie [Schumacher] mit jemandem darüber ins Gespräch kommen – ich hab’ nichts dagegen, daß Sie das als meine Meinung wiedergeben, im Gegenteil’.⁸¹

The letter was in four parts.⁸² A brief introduction summarised the questions Suhrkamp had put to Brecht and which he would now address. What were his thoughts concerning 17 June and what part did his letter to Ulbricht play in the unfolding of the events of the day? He then submitted his analysis of the events. Firstly, the workers had had legitimate grounds for going onto the streets in protest. The government, through a combination of ruinous measures and ill luck, had so exacerbated the workers’ grim conditions that the real achievements of socialism in the GDR had been obscured. By far the greatest cause of the public chaos on 17 June, however, were the provocative and rabble-rousing activities of fascists, some of whom had crossed over into East Berlin from the West to join forces with ‘den hiesigen, die man seit Jahren nicht mehr in Haufen hatte auftreten sehen *und die doch immer dagewesen waren*’.⁸³ The emphasis is Brecht’s and foregrounds his greatest fear for the GDR, that Germany’s fascist legacy had not yet been eliminated and that while this residual fascism remained, the danger of another world war was ever clear and present. He goes on in his letter to describe the day’s events in terms that are very evocative of past fascist terror: ‘die Rauchwolke des Columbushauses [...] wie an einem vergangenen Unglückstag einmal die Rauchwolke des Reichstagsgebäudes’, ‘Überfälle auf Juden’, and ‘Bücher herausgeworfen und gebrannt’.⁸⁴ In the fourth and final part of the letter, he admitted that the Party had made mistakes, but he nevertheless respected the socialist progress it had achieved: in the light of the dangers to society that

⁸⁰ Ernst Schumacher, ‘In der “Eisernen Villa”’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 15/16 September 2001.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Brecht, ‘An Peter Suhrkamp, 1. Juli 1953’, *BFA*, XXX, 1998, pp. 182-85.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

had manifested themselves on 17 June, only one course of action was open to him: ‘Im Kampf gegen Krieg und Faschismus stand und stehe ich an ihrer [der Partei] Seite.’⁸⁵

It is noticeable that this letter deals with the causes of 17 June but not the lessons to be learned. There is no mention here of the great dialogue that must be initiated between Party and people. That is, of course, because Brecht is addressing the West here and not his own Party and people. It says nothing that conflicts with his other texts, but it is a defiant and unapologetic response to his Western detractors. As in other texts primarily addressed to a Western readership, Brecht is fiercely loyal to Party and government, even if here he grants that mistakes have been made.

This same loyalty to his own state manifested itself in a poem, ‘Nicht so gemeint’, written in the summer of 1953, but published posthumously. The poem reminded Westerners that Brecht’s criticisms were calls for reform within his own society and must never be mistaken for or equated with approval of Western society. The poem was written following very vocal approval in the West for the Academy’s resolution demanding cultural reform in the GDR. But the poem warns that Western approval is tainted with fascism and imperialist motives. Just as the West had sold the working class out, so was it now attempting to do so again with the artists:

Dem Judaskuß für die Arbeiter
Folgt der Judaskuß für die Künstler.⁸⁶

But the Academy and artists in the GDR were not to be fooled:

Selbst die schmalsten Stirnen
In denen der Friede wohnt
Sind den Künsten willkommener als jener Kunstfreund
Der auch Freund der Kriegskunst ist.⁸⁷

As to why Brecht did not publish this text, we can again only speculate. His letter to Suhrkamp demonstrates that he was quite prepared to confront the West and the poem

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Brecht, ‘Nicht so gemeint’, *BFA*, XV, 1993, pp. 270-71.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

would surely have earned him plaudits in the GDR. But at this juncture, Brecht's battle with the Party's cultural functionaries was fully engaged and he may have felt that the appearance of a rebuke to the West would serve only to muddy cultural waters he was determined to keep crystal-clear.

Need for Cultural Reform

The battle with the cultural functionaries began in fact on 17 June itself. If Brecht's actions in sending off letters to Ulbricht or Grotewohl during the morning were uncharacteristically rash, then, by the time he arrived at the impromptu Academy meeting in the afternoon, he seems to have recovered his usual equilibrium in time to block an attempt by Rudolf Engel and Alexander Abusch to send the government a 'Vertrauens-erklärung', in effect a vote of confidence. Brecht objected on two grounds. Firstly, the Academy lacked a quorum. More importantly, it was not its job to rush off public statements before the government had itself assessed the situation. Individuals could of course offer their own personal services (radio work would be particularly useful!), but the Academy's main focus should be a 'Neugestaltung des Kulturlebens', where it would be necessary 'über die in der Kulturpolitik gemachten Fehler eindringlich und offen zu sprechen'.⁸⁸

This was a remarkable turnaround from his despatch earlier in the day of personal messages of loyalty and support to Ulbricht and Grotewohl. We can only speculate on the reasons behind his change of attitude. He had sent off the letters before actually witnessing any of the events: his midday walk around the streets may have altered his opinions. It may also be that he felt more comfortable and less exposed working within the framework of the Academy. (It is also worth noting that Brecht had offered Ulbricht 'Verbundenheit mit der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands' whereas the Academy proposal was a 'Vertrauensklärung zur Regierung'. Brecht was declaring loyalty to the *Party*, an ideological concept; the Academy to the *government*, a collection of failed individuals). In any event, with this move, Brecht launched the post-17 June bid

⁸⁸ 'Aus dem Protokoll der improvisierten erweiterten Präsidiumssitzung', in Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 78-79.

to secure cultural reform, a bid which occupied a great deal of his time over the next six months.

The second day of the series of Berliner Ensemble meetings on 24-26 June was devoted largely to a discussion of cultural issues and the need for reform. Brecht reaffirmed his conviction that artists must be allowed to practise their art free from official intervention. However, there was still a role for the Party: ‘Man kann jetzt nicht eine Republik der Künstler eröffnen, wo jeder machen kann, was er will. Besonders nicht in einem Deutschland, das durch zwei Jahrzehnte Naziherrschaft gegangen ist.’⁸⁹ Here Brecht acknowledges the historic role of the Party: it must lead and the artists must, like everyone else, bow to the Party’s will. In a Germany still, in 1953, riddled with fascism, the Party’s leadership role is all the more crucial. There is, of course, a problem here. As Ihme-Tuchel notes in respect of the Academy’s proposals for cultural freedom, so also did Brecht’s demands run directly counter to recognition of the Party, ‘Vorhut der Arbeiterklasse’, as leader and arbiter in all matters cultural.⁹⁰ It was a conundrum he never really resolved.

The Academy’s ‘Erklärung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste’ was, along with a similar set of proposals from the Kulturbund, the formal expression of proposals for cultural reform from those intellectuals and artists who believed such reform to be necessary. The ‘Erklärung’ was a 10-point resolution submitted to the government on 2 July 1953, based on work done by an eight-man working party set up on 18 June and signed off at a full Academy meeting on 30 June. Brecht’s fingerprints are clearly detectable in the ‘Erklärung’. The working party consisted of four groups, one each for ‘Darstellende Kunst’, ‘Bildende Kunst’, ‘Musik’ and ‘Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege’, this latter being entrusted to Brecht and Becher.⁹¹ There is no specific provision here for radio and the press, but Brecht would clearly have relished extending the scope of ‘Sprachpflege’ to incorporate these. The fifth point in the ‘Erklärung’ reads: ‘Der Rundfunk hat als ein entscheidendes Instrument der öffentlichen Meinungsbildung

⁸⁹ ‘Diskussionen des BERLINER ENSEMBLES über die Lage am 25. Juni 1953’ BBA, Signatur 1447/016-29.

⁹⁰ Ihme-Tuchel, p. 7.

⁹¹ ‘Aus dem Protokoll der Plenarsitzung: 18. Juni 1953’, in Dietzel and Geißler, p. 80.

versagt.’⁹² A similar, if less direct, charge is made against the press: ‘Eine bürokratische, schablonenhafte Sprache lähmt das Interesse der Bevölkerung an den öffentlichen Angelegenheiten.’⁹³ Whilst we cannot attribute these words directly to Brecht, it is inconceivable that he would have agreed to any ‘Erklärung’ that omitted the sentiments.

Apart from these particular instances, there are other indications that Brecht played an important role in the creation of the ‘Erklärung’. At an interim Academy meeting on 26 June, it was Brecht who read out a list of eight preliminary proposals,⁹⁴ and of course, the whole tenor of the document, demanding that responsibility for art must be returned to the artists, corresponds to what Brecht had been vigorously promoting since his return to the GDR (although, of course, he was not alone in wishing to see greater cultural freedom). Furthermore, the Academy minutes of the meeting of 30 June, at which the ‘Erklärung’ was signed off, show that Brecht (and Helene Weigel) contributed prominently to the discussion.⁹⁵

Not all artists or politicians were as enthusiastic as Brecht and his friends. The cultural functionary, Walter Besenbruch, for example, held that the Academy had not proved itself sufficiently sound ideologically to warrant its self-appointment as arbiter of matters cultural.⁹⁶ In the face of such opposition, Brecht was determined to maintain momentum. He published two poems, ‘Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunstkommission’ and ‘Das Amt für Literatur’ in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 11 and 15 July respectively. Sandwiched between the two was Wolfgang Harich’s article, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, which appeared in the same paper on 14 July. In a private conversation between Harich and Brecht at the beginning of July, where they discussed the opportunities thrown up by 17 June, Harich suggested promoting a radically different form of socialist government in the GDR, along Yugoslavian lines. Even at this time, with the government on the ropes, this was dangerous language. Brecht suggested an altogether more circumspect and

⁹² ‘Vorschläge der DAK an die Regierung’, in Dietzel and Geißler, p. 93.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ According to an editorial note in Tom Kuhn and Steve Giles (eds), *Brecht on Art and Politics* (London: Methuen, 2003), p. 335.

⁹⁵ ‘Aus der stenografischen Niederschrift der Plenarsitzung 30. Juni 1953’ in Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 85-92.

⁹⁶ *Mittenzwei*, II, pp. 514-15.

focused approach: ‘Wir wollen etwas Reales machen, wir wollen die dümmsten Bürokraten in der Kulturpolitik stürzen.’⁹⁷

The two poems and article which emanated from this discussion are very illuminating indeed as to the difference in style and approach between Brecht and other dissenters in the GDR. Harich attacks individuals by name, and leading ones at that: Helmut Holtzhauer and Ernst Hoffmann from the Kunstkommission, and even worse, the influential Wilhelm Girnus and Kurt Magritz. The tone and language is strident and aggressive throughout. Harich accuses them in their ‘Hochmut, Ignoranz, Sektierertum, Mangel an Feingefühl, Bürokratismus’ of perpetrating endless ‘Überspitzungen und Dummheiten’.⁹⁸ Brecht replaces such stridency and hostility with biting sarcasm and delicious irony in his account of the conduct of cultural functionaries:

Zollten die höchsten Beamten der Kunstkommission
Dem schönen Brauch, sich einiger Fehler zu zeihen
Ihren Tribut und murmelten, auch sie
Zeigten sich einiger Fehler.⁹⁹

Names are avoided and in any case, no-one is accused of anything. A fine old custom (now at least three weeks old) was being observed: functionaries were murmuring confessionally of mistakes made. Not that specific mistakes were made, you understand, (for that would necessitate corrective action), but mistakes in the abstract, as the custom demands:

Trotz eifrigsten Nachdenkens
Konnten sie sich nicht bestimmter Fehler erinnern, jedoch
Bestanden sie heftig darauf
Fehler gemacht zu haben – wie es der Brauch ist.¹⁰⁰

Brecht’s ‘Nicht feststellbare Fehler’ and Harich’s article were prompted by a meeting on 20 June between Helmut Holtzhauer and Ernst Hoffmann, head of the Kunstkommission

⁹⁷ From an interview with Wolfgang Harich, 1 December 1990, in the Hoover Institution’s East German Oral History Project. Cited in Heiser-Duron, p. 52.

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Harich, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 July 1953.

⁹⁹ Brecht, ‘Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunstkommission’, *BFA*, XV, 1993, p. 268.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

and its department for painting respectively, and some members of the Academy. The meeting, by all accounts a stormy one, was recounted by the theatre manager and director, Wolfgang Langhoff, to the members of the Academy on 26 June and his account eloquently portrayed the Kunstkommission's penchant for equivocation and evasion.¹⁰¹ The second poem, 'Das Amt für Literatur' is an allusion to a censorship stratagem deployed in the GDR, that of withholding paper supplies in cases where a book was deemed unacceptable.¹⁰²

Brecht maintained the momentum with an article, 'Kulturpolitik und Akademie der Künste', which was published in *Neues Deutschland* on 13 August 1953. The article, a response to Besenbruch's rejection of the Academy proposals,¹⁰³ defends the Academy's right to influence cultural policy, in preference to 'die unglückliche Praxis der Kommissionen'.¹⁰⁴ Although Brecht is once again sharply critical of the cultural institutions, this is a very measured article, calling for an inclusive cultural policy.

By now, Brecht would have been acutely aware that Ulbricht had regained political control, but would have been encouraged by the latter's apparent concession to the Academy proposals: 'die Vorschläge der Akademie der Künste verdienen ernste Prüfung und baldige Durchführung'.¹⁰⁵ By the end of 1953, the SED had decided to establish a Ministry of Culture under Becher. The hated Kunstkommission was to be replaced, although the Amt für Literatur carried on until 1956. It suited Brecht to have Becher at the Ministry and, although he would have preferred to see the Amt für Literatur disappear, the death of the Kunstkommission was a triumph. He resolved to hammer a final nail into the coffin. On 12 December, he sent a letter to Ulbricht, urging progress in establishing the Ministry. He added:

¹⁰¹ 'Aus der stenografischen Niederschrift der Plenarsitzung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste, 26. Juni 1953', in Dietzel und Geißler, p. 83.

¹⁰² Brecht, 'Das Amt für Literatur', *BFA*, XV, 1993, pp. 267-68.

¹⁰³ Walter Besenbruch, 'Über berechnete Kritik und über Erscheinungen des Opportunismus in Fragen der Kunst', *Neues Deutschland*, 19 July 1953.

¹⁰⁴ Brecht, 'Kulturpolitik und Akademie der Künste,' *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, pp. 256-60.

¹⁰⁵ From Ulbricht's speech at the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, 24-26 July 1953, cited in Spittmann and Fricke, pp. 210-11.

Der Geist der Administrierung, der unter Holtzhauer und andren auf künstlerischem Gebiet herrschte, hat sehr dazu beigetragen, daß wir bedeutende Künstler bisher nicht für den Marxismus und die DDR gewinnen konnten.¹⁰⁶

Mature Reflection

The final stage in Brecht's journey to understanding 17 June is one of mature reflection, arrived at by late summer 1953. Previous stages were marked by shock and pessimism, but all traces of shock had now disappeared. Pessimism remained but was paralleled by an optimistic strand. It was in this frame of mind that Brecht made his *Journale* entry on 20 August 1953, 'der 17 juni hat die ganze existenz verfremdet'.¹⁰⁷

Brecht's use of the word 'verfremdet' here has been sometimes interpreted in the negative sense of alienation, a sign that the events of 17 June had left him a resigned and disillusioned man. Völker, for example, talks of Brecht finding 17 June 'eine große Ernüchterung, seine ganze Existenz fühlte er "verfremdet"'.¹⁰⁸ And certainly a number of his friends detected a weariness in Brecht after 17 June. His pupil Wera Küchenmeister talked of 'eine große Müdigkeit' and 'eine körperliche und künstlerische Ermüdung und Erschöpfung'.¹⁰⁹ More generally, however, critics have sought to interpret the word in line with his use of 'Verfremdung' and 'Verfremdungseffekt' within his theatrical work. In his seminal essay of 1948, 'Kleines Organon für das Theater', Brecht writes: 'Eine verfremdende Abbildung ist eine solche, die den Gegenstand zwar erkennen, ihn aber doch zugleich fremd erscheinen läßt.'¹¹⁰ Gerold Ducke puts it thus: 'Einen Sachverhalt verfremden [heißt] ihm den Status des historisch Besondern, Auffälligen zu verleihen, ihn aus dem Strom des Alltagsbewusstseins zu reißen, denn was bekannt, gewöhnlich ist, ist meistens nicht erkannt, begriffen.'¹¹¹ John Willett says: 'For Brecht it [the sense of 'Verfremdung'] was a matter rather of perception and understanding or gaining new insights into the world around us by glimpsing it in a differently and previously unfamiliar

¹⁰⁶ Brecht, 'An Walter Ulbricht, 12 Dezember 1953', *BFA*, XXX, 1998, p. 224.

¹⁰⁷ Brecht, entry in *Journale* for 20 August 1953, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 346.

¹⁰⁸ Völker, p. 396.

¹⁰⁹ Wera Küchenmeister, Interview in Lang and Hillesheim, pp. 57-76 (p. 72).

¹¹⁰ Brecht, 'Kleines Organon für das Theater,' *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, p. 81.

¹¹¹ Gerold Ducke, "'Böser Morgen": Brecht nach dem 17. Juni,' *Berliner Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik*, 4 (1977), 30-33 (31).

light.’¹¹² According to Mittenzwei, when Brecht felt ‘die ganze existenz verfremdet’, ‘fühlte er sich veranlaßt, vieles neu zu überdenken’.¹¹³

We may therefore read ‘verfremdet’ as distanced, not in a negative sense, but rather in the sense of being detached or able to view the world in a different light. For Brecht, therefore, 17 June cast everything (‘die ganze existenz’) in a different light. In this more reflective light, he weighs the negative aspects of 17 June against the positive ones. The working class had demonstrated a total helplessness and lack of direction, it had displayed no sense of organisation: its slogans were confused and it had been thoroughly infiltrated by fascism and the class enemy: a class, in short, ‘in ihrem depraviertesten Zustand’.¹¹⁴ The Party had been shaken to its very core by its reception from the masses, ‘nicht in der form der umarmung, sondern in der form des faustschlags’,¹¹⁵ but had shown a firm resolve and leadership in taking the necessary measures to protect the GDR and its socialist inheritance, even if it meant doing so in the face of dissent from its own workers. Out of this very unpromising combination of factors, Brecht saw an opportunity for socialism to advance: the working class had shown itself capable of revolutionary fervour (even if misdirected and exploited on 17 June) and the Party had shown true leadership. Together, Party and working class could ensure victory for socialism over fascism and capitalism. This reflection is, without doubt, Brecht’s most optimistic and positive reading of 17 June.

At around the same time, in late summer 1953, Brecht wrote his ‘Vorwort zu Turandot’. The mood was similarly reflective, but on the whole more pessimistic. Here, he returned to the theme of residual fascism in the GDR and the Party’s fundamental failure to address and resolve this issue. He reflected that great socialist advances had been made, but they had not been accompanied by similar changes in society’s attitudes. He conceded that social and economic conditions in the wake of a cataclysmic defeat and reparations burden made it very difficult to create a proper environment to eradicate fascism. The politicians were inexperienced and the people who might have been leaders

¹¹² John Willett, *Brecht in Context* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 220.

¹¹³ Mittenzwei, II, p. 508.

¹¹⁴ Brecht, entry in *Journale* for 20 August 1953, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 346.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

were either dead or demoralised. In effect, a social and political vacuum had been created: ‘unter neuen Befehlshabern setzte sich also der Naziapparat wieder in Bewegung’.¹¹⁶ It is a bleak message, quite different in tone from his *Journale* reflection of 20 August 1953, and with all the optimism dissipated, and one to which we see Brecht harking back a year later when he enters a note into his *Journale*: ‘das land ist immer noch unheimlich’.¹¹⁷ He had observed three young apprentices whom he had invited to Buckow, and had the dreadful feeling that, ten years ago, these young people would have thrown him without compunction to the Gestapo. In other words, the ice between a socialist GDR and the dark waters of fascism was very thin indeed.

Brecht therefore seems to have settled, once the initial shock and reverberations were past, into a frame of mind at times optimistic, that Party and people would combine forces to ensure victory for socialism, and at times pessimistic, that the people would never be weaned away from their fascist tendencies, indeed that Germany’s unhappy past would endure. In this duel between optimism and pessimism, pessimism may not have been the outright victor, but it was clearly the dominant force.

Buckower Elegien

Around the time Brecht wrote the *Journale* entry for 20 August and the ‘Vorwort zu Turandot’, he also wrote the *Buckower Elegien*. Whereas the two non-fictional texts are indisputably concerned with 17 June, his intention in writing the *Elegien* is much more ambiguous. Indeed, ambiguity is a defining characteristic of the *Buckower Elegien*. In the first instance, there is a question as to whether they are anything more than a heterogeneous collection of unconnected poems or whether they share unitary features of form, content or purpose. In particular, are the *Buckower Elegien* inspired by 17 June? Furthermore, the poems themselves are informed with levels of ambiguity that often render them capable of extraordinarily diverse ranges of interpretation as to their meaning and the poet’s intention. Finally, as so often with Brecht’s texts, there is the puzzle of publication: why did he release for publication some *Elegien*, but not others?

¹¹⁶ Brecht, ‘Vorwort zu Turandot’, *BFA*, XXIV, 1991, p. 410.

¹¹⁷ Brecht, entry in *Journale* for 7 July 1954, *BFA*, XXVII, 1995, p. 350.

A Unitary Cycle of Poems

It is now commonly accepted that there are 23 poems in the *Buckower Elegien* cycle. Other poems written by Brecht around the same time as the *Elegien* are sometimes included in collections: for example, 'Die Kelle', written in summer 1953, was added to the cycle by Elisabeth Hauptmann after Brecht's death. However, Jan Knopf concludes that this and other similar poems cannot be included in the *Buckower Elegien* from either an aesthetic or historical perspective.¹¹⁸

It is clear that Brecht intended the *Buckower Elegien* as a unitary cycle of poems. Indeed, it seems he himself coined the title. The poems were mostly written in July and August 1953 and in his *Journale*, the entry for 20 August reads: 'buckow. TURANDOT. daneben die BUCKOWER ELEGIEN. der 17. Juni hat die ganze existenz verfremdet.' Indeed, this entry not only signals Brecht's intention to compose a cycle of *Elegien*, but serves as an explicit pointer to the connection between the *Buckower Elegien* and 17 June, a point to which I shall return. Towards the end of 1953, he sent Peter Suhrkamp 'vorläufig, zur Privatlektüre ein paar "Buckowlische Elegien"',¹¹⁹ and in early 1954, he published six poems in his *Versuche* series under the title 'Buckower Elegien'. After his death, four collections of poems were found among his personal effects, one bearing the title 'Buckower Elegien'. The four collections were not identical, but were almost so and between them, they included all twenty-three poems in the cycle.

There can be no doubt, then, that Brecht intended the *Buckower Elegien* to be read as a unitary cycle, with a consistency in form and content. In the *Journale* entry of 20 August 1953, Brecht has given us the strongest possible hint that the *Elegien* were written with 17 June in mind, indeed were inspired and informed by 17 June. We might then expect the poems to be closely related to each other and to Brecht's analysis of 17 June. It is therefore quite remarkable to observe how wide is the range of interpretations in the academic literature. Jan Knopf sees a very direct relationship between the *Elegien* and 17 June.¹²⁰ Marion Fuhrmann, Dieter Thiele, Peter Whitaker and Karl Schoeps

¹¹⁸ Jan Knopf, 'Kommentar: Buckower Elegien', *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 446.

¹¹⁹ Brecht, 'An Peter Suhrkamp, Berlin, Ende November 1953,' *BFA*, XXX, 1998, pp. 221-22.

'Buckowlische' is, of course, a wordplay between Buckow and 'bukolisch'.

¹²⁰ Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch*, pp. 191-92.

favour a much wider social, political and historical context, with emphasis on a negative past and its intrusion into the present.¹²¹ Theo Buck, Christiane Bohnert, F. N. Mennemeier and Thiele again see in the *Elegien* an exploration of the gap between what has been achieved in GDR society and what is achievable, as well as a questioning of the contribution of intellectuals in this respect.¹²² Christel Hartinger detects in Brecht's words a reflection not just of his political views but of his wider personal philosophy.¹²³ However, the various interpretations outlined here differ in emphasis, not in substance. As we shall see, there is a commonality and consistency of theme and purpose running through the *Elegien*.

Whereas differences in interpretation of the collection as a whole vary mainly in degree, the differences sharpen considerably when it comes to individual poems. Brecht creates ambiguity at this level by avoiding being explicit as to the point he is making, something he achieves through his choice and use of themes and textual strategies. However, these may contain some clues which, supported by an understanding of his opinions and attitudes at the time, may help to resolve at least some of the ambiguity. The *Buckower Elegien* can be classified in many different ways: the model of thematic categorisation which I posit here is, of course, simply one instance.

¹²¹ Marion Fuhrmann, *Hollywood und Buckow: Politisch-ästhetische Strukturen in den Elegien Brechts* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1985); Dieter Thiele, *Bertolt Brecht: Selbstverständnis, Tui-Kritik und politische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1981); Peter Whitaker, *Brecht's Poetry: A Critical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985); Karl H. Schoeps, 'Brecht in Buckow: The Buckow Elegies', *Germanic Review*, 61 (1986), no. 4, 168-176.

¹²² Theo Buck, 'Leben im Widerspruch: Bertolt Brecht in der DDR,' in *Literatur in der Diktatur: Schreiben im Nationalsozialismus und DDR-Sozialismus*, ed. by Günther Rülther (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1997), pp. 343-355; Christiane Bohnert, 'Poetry, History and Communication', in *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion*, ed. by Siegfried Mews (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 115-38; F. N. Mennemeier, 'Bertolt Brecht als Elegiker', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 23 (1971), no. 1, 59-74.

¹²³ Christel Hartinger, *Bertolt Brecht - das Gedicht nach Krieg und Wiederkehr* (East Berlin: Brecht-Zentrum der DDR, 1982).

Themes and Textual Strategies

<p><u>a) Threat of Fascism</u></p> <p>Gewohnheiten, noch immer Der Einarmige im Gehölz Lebensmittel zum Zweck Der Himmel dieses Sommers Vor acht Jahren</p>	<p><u>b) Dialogue between Party and People</u></p> <p>Die Lösung Die neue Mundart Die Musen Die Wahrheit einigt</p>
<p><u>c) Nature</u></p> <p>Der Blumengarten Der Rauch Bei der Lektüre eines sowjetischen Buches Heißer Tag Laute Tannen Beim Lesen des Horaz</p>	<p><u>d) Building</u></p> <p>Eisen Große Zeit, vertan Bei der Lektüre eines spätgriechischen Dichters</p>
<p><u>e) Movement and Stasis</u></p> <p>Der Radwechsel Das Motto Rudern, Gespräche</p>	<p><u>f) Böser Morgen</u></p> <p>Böser Morgen</p>

In Brecht's analysis of 17 June, two ideas were predominant. Firstly, fascism stubbornly persisted in German society. In the West, it was a natural child of imperialism and in the East, it endured because the people were not ready to embrace socialism. Fascists had exploited the unrest on 17 June and, as long as they remained in society, they constituted a threat to the GDR, and indeed to world peace. Secondly, it was the urgent and vital task

of the Party to conduct a dialogue with the people, confronting the evils of fascism and emphasising the achievements of socialism; it was a dialogue the Party had, up to now, failed to initiate. As the table above shows, a number of the *Elegien* (nine, in fact) address one or other of these issues. As themes, the threat of fascism and the need for a social dialogue are quite literal; there is little ambiguity and only one interpretation is possible.

As we have seen, however, Brecht's analysis of the causes and consequences of 17 June grew more reflective as the summer of 1953 wore on. In his 'Vorwort zu Turandot' and the *Journal* entry for 20 August 1953, his reading of 17 June, and indeed GDR society generally was far-reaching, complex and nuanced. The threat of fascism and the need for dialogue remained, but now he also reflected on the World War II destruction of the fabric of his society and a generation of people, on the somewhat ambivalent position of the Soviet Union as protector and exploiter and on his optimism that the Party and working class would ultimately prevail, despite the pessimistic short-term prognostications. It is, I think, in this more reflective, rather detached spirit that the remaining *Elegien* were written. Themes are introduced through figures of speech and ambiguity arises out of the difficulty of interpreting in each case what the figure of speech stands for, if indeed it stands for anything other than its own literal meaning.

The themes, both literal and figurative, are developed poetically by means of various textual strategies. These encompass the usual range of poetic and linguistic devices; metaphor, symbolism, irony, reflective narrative and use of language, as well as the dream, a device frequently employed in the *Elegien* to introduce a topic or theme. Through a combination of theme and textual strategy, Brecht heightens the sense of ambiguity, but also provides tools for possible interpretations.

The Threat of Fascism

Although each of the five poems in this group has its own particular emphasis, the common theme is that of the threat of fascism, either from the West or, as in 'Der Einarmige im Gehölz', from elements within the GDR's own population:

Schweißtriefend bückt er sich
Nach dem dürren Reisig. Die Stechmücken
Verjagt er durch Kopfschütteln. Zwischen den Knien
Bündelt er mühsam das Brennholz. Ächzend
Richtet er sich auf, streckt die Hand hoch, zu spüren
Ob es regnet. Die Hand hoch
Der gefürchtete S.S. Mann.¹²⁴

He stresses the ordinariness of the situation. A one-armed man, possibly a war victim, is painted in a sympathetic light. He toils in the heat of the day to gather firewood for the family home. It would be sweaty, backbreaking work for any man, doubly so for one with only one arm. He straightens up stiffly and holds his hand out to see if it is raining. Up to this point, the language is simple and everyday, the images are those of an ordinary man at work; any man, anywhere in the GDR. The story is told almost in filmic fashion and the camera has almost panned past the 'Hand hoch,' when suddenly a double-take brings us back to the 'Hand hoch' because something ordinary has taken on a whole new significance: the 'Hand hoch' becomes the Nazi salute. Everything changes and we must go back to the beginning and re-examine the ordinary, because the ordinary may be hiding something dark and sinister. The word 'Brennholz' now assumes a new significance and immediately brings to mind Brecht's letter to Suhrkamp, with its association between the fires of 17 June and the Nazi fires and, elsewhere, his perception of 'Versuche, einen neuen Weltbrand zu entfachen'.¹²⁵

Several critics have commented on the blurring of lines between present and past. Fuhrmann notes that the poem shares with other *Elegien* (indeed mostly in this group) an element of an 'Überblendungsverfahren',¹²⁶ a feeling of the past and present dissolving into each other, a continuum, and Thiele notes that, although the present tense is used throughout, the past is also involved.¹²⁷ In this way, Brecht heightens the sense that the past is still with us, it has never really been consigned to history: fascism has not been eradicated. Whitaker, however, reads this engagement with the past differently.

¹²⁴ Brecht, 'Der Einarmige im Gehölz', *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 410.

¹²⁵ Brecht, 'Zum 17. Juni 1953,' *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, p. 250.

¹²⁶ Fuhrmann, pp. 137-144.

¹²⁷ Thiele, p. 78.

The man may well be a Nazi, but he has been emasculated, stripped of any power or influence in the GDR.¹²⁸ This is to give the poem a GDR *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* gloss, to which I do not think Brecht subscribed. Brecht was acutely conscious of fascism as a dangerous cancer in the GDR body politic. His letter to Suhrkamp on 1 July 1953 and the entry for 7 July 1954 in his *Journale* are two of many references to this anxiety. The theme of this poem is similar: the meaning and warning are just as clear, but expressed in lyrical form.

Dialogue with the People

The poems in this group offer an unambiguous message that the time has come for the Party to abandon its officialese and dismissive attitudes, and to replace them with a proper dialogue with the people. ('Die Musen' is loosely associated with this theme, in that it can be read as a commentary on the breakdown of relationships between poets and the Party, resulting from the latter's misguided cultural policies.) A poem of particular interest is 'Die Wahrheit einigt', which Brecht sent to Paul Wandel 'zu innerem Gebrauch'¹²⁹ and to Grotewohl, asking him to read it out to the Council of Ministers.¹³⁰

Freunde, ich wünschte, ihr wüßtet die Wahrheit und sagtet sie!
Nicht wie fliehende müde Cäsaren: "Morgen kommt Mehl!"
So wie Lenin: Morgen abend
Sind verloren, wenn nicht ...
So wie es im Liedlein heißt:
"Brüder, mit dieser Frage
Will ich gleich beginnen:
Hier aus unsrer schweren Lage
Gibt es kein Entrinnen."
Freunde, ein kräftiges Eingeständnis
Und ein kräftiges WENN NICHT!¹³¹

¹²⁸ Whitaker, p. 207.

¹²⁹ Brecht, 'An Paul Wandel, Buckow, Mitte August 1953,' *BFA*, XXX, p. 191. Wandel was Secretary to the Central Committee of the SED.

¹³⁰ See Knopf, 'Kommentar: Buckower Elegien', *BFA*, XIII, p. 450.

¹³¹ Brecht, 'Die Wahrheit einigt', *BFA*, XIII, p. 315.

Brecht does not specify in the poem which truth he means or whom this truth will unite. His letter to Wandel is however quite specific:

Die Wahrheit, die wir unserer Arbeiterschaft sagen sollten, ist meiner Meinung nach: daß sie in tödlicher Gefahr ist, von einem neu erstärkenden Faschismus in einen neuen Krieg geworfen zu werden; daß sie alles tun muß, die kleinbürgerlichen Schichten unter ihre Führung zu bringen (wir haben unsern eigenen Westen bei uns!)¹³²

This letter is instructive both in what it says and what it omits to say. It is very specific about 'die Wahrheit'. The working class is in mortal danger of being destroyed in another fascist-inspired war; it is imperative the masses realise this and make every effort to bring the middle classes (from whom fascism springs) to heel. It is a 'Wahrheit, die wir [...] sagen sollten'. The task of initiating this dialogue lies not just with politicians but with writers and intellectuals too. Hence, the dialogue will unite Party, intellectuals and the people.

The letter is quite straightforward, and hardly begins to capture the subtlety and complexity of the poem. In fact, the poem is quite a sharp rebuke to the Party. We know that Brecht considered 'eine große Aussprache' between Party and people to be an absolute imperative: this dialogue of truth should both alert the people to the evils of fascism and impress upon them the considerable achievements of socialism. That the Party had not embarked on this dialogue was a mistake. Brecht reiterated this point in his talk to the Berliner Ensemble staff on 24 June and in the 'Vorwort zu Turandot' amongst other occasions. In the letter to Wandel, only the threat of fascism is mentioned and Party mistakes are not specifically alluded to. In the poem, however, there is a picture of a Party of worn-out Stalinist leaders, mouthing dishonest platitudes, found wanting in comparison to the purer ideology of Lenin, who had enjoined his followers to confront the truth. The Party leaders must follow Lenin's example; in driving home the message to the people, they must forsake 'Kaderwelsch' and resort to the clear, simple language of the nursery rhyme to apprise the people of the difficult situation they are in. Two tasks now lie ahead of the Party; 'ein kräftiges Eingeständnis', an admission of

¹³² 'An Paul Wandel'.

mistakes; and ‘ein kräftiges WENN NICHT!’ convincing the people of the catastrophic consequences were fascism to prevail.

Brecht begins the poem by addressing ‘Freunde’; he wants to make it clear he and they are on the same side. Whitaker conjectures that in using the subjunctive here, Brecht is suggesting his friends in the Party are distanced from reality.¹³³ Indeed, Brecht was of this opinion, but the subjunctive also suggests a degree of diffidence or uncertainty that the Party can deliver what the poet hopes for. He does not explain the nature of the ‘Frage’ in the embedded ditty, but Klaus Schuhmann helpfully identifies another poem written by Brecht around this time, in which ‘die Frage’ is articulated:

Wie soll die große Ordnung aufgebaut werden
Ohne die Weisheit der Massen?¹³⁴

In other words, the ultimate victory of socialism cannot be attained until the people are fully engaged and convinced. The poem, then, is a robust exhortation to the Party to concede its mistakes and change direction sharply. That Brecht should have sent such a poem to members of the Politbüro indicates, I think, that in this case, conviction overcame circumspection.

Nature

Nature predominates in ‘Der Blumengarten’. The scene is set in the first stanza:

Am See, tief zwischen Tann und Silberpappel
Beschirmt von Mauer und Gesträuch ein Garten
So weise angelegt mit monatlichen Blumen
Daß er von März bis zum Oktober blüht.¹³⁵

The connotative ‘Mauer’ takes one aback somewhat, but can have had no specific significance in 1953, eight years before *the* Wall. Apart from that, a picture of tranquil, orderly and harmonious nature comes smoothly into focus. As yet, there is no reason to

¹³³ Whitaker, p. 210.

¹³⁴ Brecht, ‘Frage,’ in *BFA*, XV, 1993, p. 262. See Klaus Schuhmann, *Untersuchungen zur Lyrik Brechts: Themen, Formen, Weiterungen* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1973), pp. 113-14.

¹³⁵ Brecht, ‘Der Blumengarten’, in *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 307.

think the poem is anything other than a celebration of nature, recounted in reflective manner. However, in the second stanza there is an abrupt switch of subject-matter, tone, tempo and mood:

Hier, in der Früh, nicht all zu häufig, sitz ich
Und wünsche mir, auch ich mög allezeit
In den verschiedenen Wettern, guten, schlechten
Dies oder jenes Angenehme zeigen.¹³⁶

The focus is no longer on a peaceful garden, but a poetic ‘ich’, who is unhappy that he does not or cannot provide more artistic beauty for our enjoyment. The fractured syntax, negative vocabulary and subjunctive mood, all in sharp contrast to the first stanza, transmit the poet’s hesitancy, discontent and frustration.

It is reasonable to deduce here that Brecht is bemoaning the fact that he, personally or representatively a writer and intellectual, is not serving his society, in bad times as well as good, as his socialist ideology demands. What, though, connects this to the perfect garden of the first stanza? How does the garden relate, if at all, to 17 June or the GDR? The Brechtian garden is frequently interpreted as state or society, but that does not seem to work here, since state and society at this time are far from orderly or tranquil.

Bearing in mind that Brecht was unhappy with the performance of the GDR’s intellectuals in educating the masses, an alternative reading is possible. Brecht does indeed sit in a beautiful garden in Buckow, as a privileged individual in the GDR. The garden now becomes symbolic of the privilege and protection afforded to intellectuals in the GDR. Brecht’s discontent arises from the fact that he feels that he has failed to serve his state and people sufficiently in return for this privilege.

In ‘Der Blumengarten’ then, nature represents society. Everyone has his or her own garden. Brecht, as an intellectual and writer in the GDR, has a particularly pleasant garden. Nature is used here, not to express a political point, but a social or indeed a personal one. In other poems where nature is a theme, Brecht muses on society or on his

¹³⁶ Ibid.

own role within society. 'Der Rauch' reflects on the pointlessness of nature without people to enjoy it, and 'Bei der Lektüre eines sowjetischen Buches' celebrates the deployment of nature to improve society's well-being. 'Laute' is rather more difficult to interpret; nevertheless, the poet states here too that he is happy with man's sovereign role in nature. 'Beim Lesen des Horaz' also uses natural imagery, but the mood is altogether darker and the meaning difficult to fathom. The language is brooding, almost menacing, and I am inclined to favour the interpretation of Schoeps and Knopf, who identify the deluge of black waters with the hordes of Nazism.¹³⁷

Building

The theme of building and builders was, of course, very evocative in the GDR of the 1950s. Ulbricht had launched the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* in 1952, and it was workers on the prestigious Stalinallee building project who instigated the disturbances on 17 June. The theme is predominant or prominent in a number of poems, including 'Eisen':

Im Traum heute nacht
Sah ich einen großen Sturm.
Ins Baugerüst griff er
Den Bauschragen riß er
Den Eisernen, abwärts.
Doch was da aus Holz war
Bog sich und blieb.¹³⁸

It has been suggested that Brecht uses the dream to avoid censorship.¹³⁹ This seems somewhat simplistic: would pleading a dream have pacified the bodyguards of cultural Stalinism? Here, as in 'Heißer Tag', Brecht uses the dream to create a fable, from which we may deduce a moral. The fable is a variant of the Aesopian tale of the oak and the willow and, as in Aesop's tale, we know from the outset that all the objects in the dream stand for something else. Therein lies the ambiguity.

¹³⁷ Schoeps, p. 174; Knopf, *Brecht Handbuch*, p. 199.

¹³⁸ Brecht, 'Eisen', *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 315.

¹³⁹ Whitaker, p. 211.

However, we can take *Bau*, or building, as a starting point. *Bau* is the product of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*, in other words a socialist GDR. As Thiele points out, it is a metaphor Brecht had frequently used elsewhere.¹⁴⁰ We may then deduce that the *Baugerüst* or scaffolding represents the system that supports the state (Party apparatus, government structures, etc.) and the *Bauschragen* or clasp represents that which holds the system together, the Party functionaries. Iron is commonly associated in literary registers with Stalin and Stalinism, and, although Käthe Reichel has stated that Brecht told her that Ulbricht rather than Stalin was meant here the point is relatively immaterial, since Ulbricht was the GDR face of Stalinism.¹⁴¹ Iron also indicates inflexibility, whereas wood, although more prone to decay or breakage, is in some circumstances superior. On this reading, the poem is a warning against the application of inflexible Stalinist policies and suggests the prosecution of more flexible policies and responses by state functionaries as a means of protecting the state from great upheavals such as 17 June.

The other poems where the primary theme is one of building are ‘Große Zeit, vertan’, which laments the fact that cities are built in accordance with statistical planning and not people’s needs; and ‘Bei der Lektüre eines spätgriechischen Dichters’, which reminds us that the Trojans disregarded impending disaster and with misplaced optimism fiddled about with minor repairs to their city’s damaged walls. Whilst the detail of each of these poems can be interpreted in a number of ways, in general terms they are a warning that the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* was far from complete and there were still many attendant dangers.

Movement and Stasis

Movement and stasis provide the theme for some of the most ambiguous poems in the collection, including ‘Der Radwechsel’:

Ich sitze am Straßenhang.
Der Fahrer wechselt das Rad.

¹⁴⁰ Thiele, p. 100.

¹⁴¹ Käthe Reichel, Interview in Lang and Hillesheim, pp. 133-46 (p. 138).

Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich herkomme.
Ich bin nicht gern, wo ich hinfahre.
Warum sehe ich den Radwechsel
Mit Ungeduld?¹⁴²

The poem appears to offer a straightforward narrative. The speaker's journey has been interrupted and a period of enforced idleness ensues. He did not care for his point of departure, nor does he look forward to his destination. One would expect him, therefore, to be content to sit by the roadside indefinitely. He is not, however, content: rather, he is puzzled by his impatience to resume his journey.

In the context of 17 June, the journey could be the transition from a capitalist starting point to a communist destination. The wheel change could represent the change of policy in the New Course (or the 17 June breakdown) and the driver could be Ulbricht or the Party. The poet is anxious that the march to a socialist society is resumed. However, his distaste for his destination point weakens the case somewhat for this reading. The poem is altogether more complex than a simple metaphorical description of the transition to socialism. The word 'ich' appears six times in this very short poem, a frequency that suggests a very personal rather than a general or universal 'ich'. Furthermore, this 'ich' has distanced himself; there is no attempt to engage with the driver or to get involved in the wheel-change process. Again, this would imply a personal disengagement. The second striking feature is the prominent position of 'Ungeduld'. Whitaker points out that impatience is one of the characteristics of revolution¹⁴³ and Brecht, of course, opened his letter of 17 June to Ulbricht with a reference to the SED's revolutionary impatience.¹⁴⁴ The placing of the word at the very end, however, would seem to emphasise that in a poem which thus far is a personal statement, the feeling of impatience is also a personal one.

The metaphorical framework of transition from the old to a new social order is still valid, but is couched now in terms of the poet's own journey. The poet is unhappy with the course of this journey and he is not looking forward to the nature of the socialist

¹⁴² Brecht, 'Der Radwechsel', *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 310.

¹⁴³ Whitaker, p. 203.

¹⁴⁴ *BFA*, XXX, p. 178.

state that the 'driver' is journeying towards. Nevertheless, it is a socialist state of sorts and he is impatient that the New Course (of which, according to Mohr, Brecht was not greatly in favour)¹⁴⁵ or 17 June has disrupted or even endangered progress towards that socialist state.

'Das Motto' can be read in broadly the same light, as an expression of poetic frustration with the lack of progress towards socialism and with Brecht's own powerlessness to engender some forward impetus. 'Rudern, Gespräche', by contrast, paints a picture of total social harmony and co-operation. The two rowers' lack of clothing would indicate that Brecht is describing a classless society of equals, a perfect socialist society. Clearly, the poet is not describing an existing situation, but pointing to what is achievable, given the right conditions and resolve.

These poems of movement then are not so much preoccupied with the political fall-out from 17 June as with GDR society in a wider sense and Brecht's own feelings of frustration and impatience within that society.

'Böser Morgen'

'Böser Morgen' fits into none of the categories so far mentioned; yet it is one of the most intriguing of all the *Elegien*:

Die Silberpappel, eine ortsbekannte Schönheit
Heut eine alte Vettel. Der See
Eine Lache Abwaschwasser, nicht rühren!
Die Fuchsien unter dem Löwenmaul billig und eitel.
Warum?
Heut nacht im Traum sah ich Finger, auf mich deutend
Wie auf einen Aussätzigen. Sie waren zerarbeitet und
Sie waren gebrochen.
Unwissende! schrie ich
Schuldbewußt.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Heinrich Mohr, 'Der 17. Juni als Thema der Literatur in der DDR', in *Die deutsche Teilung im Spiegel der Literatur*, ed. by Karl Lamers (Bonn: Bonn Aktuell, 1980), pp. 43-84 (p. 56).

¹⁴⁶ Brecht, 'Böser Morgen', *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 310.

The poem is in two parts, split by a hinge word, a device Brecht uses elsewhere in the *Elegien* to denote a switch in train of thought (as in, for example, ‘Der Rauch’ or ‘Beim Lesen des Horaz’). The first part of the poem describes a natural scene, no longer beautiful and restful as in ‘Der Blumengarten’, but now turned repulsive. The hinge word ‘Warum?’ introduces the reason for this – a nightmare, in which crippled and worn-out fingers point accusingly at the speaker. He screams at them in self-defence, but in his heart knows that the accusers are not without justification.

Having read the poem through, we realise that nature has not really turned ugly; it is only so in the eyes of the speaker. We are not dealing with a figure of speech here, rather the poet’s state of mind, soured and deeply depressed by the nightmare. The ambiguity here lies in the dream: whose are the fingers, why should the poet be considered a leper and what is meant by ‘Unwissende’ and ‘Schuldbewußt’?

The word ‘zerarbeitet’ indicates the fingers belong to workers. There has been much speculation as to the meaning and significance of ‘gebrochen’; if we regard fingers as synecdoche for workers, then one possibility is that the workers are, after 17 June, broken men. These same workers regard the poet as someone beyond the pale, no longer a fit person to be in their society. Although we can discount Grass’s assertion that Brecht refused to help the workers draft a negotiation document on 17 June, the workers would, nevertheless, have read Brecht’s letter to Ulbricht, doctored for publication in *Neues Deutschland*, in which he, Brecht, seems to declare unequivocal and unconditional support for the SED. Not being party to the full contents of the letter to Ulbricht, the workers were therefore ‘Unwissende’. The workers’ ignorance, however, extends beyond this. We know that Brecht attached some blame to the workers. In his letter of 1 July to Suhrkamp, Brecht claimed to have worked for three decades in the interests of the workers. In the same letter he opined that the workers had forgotten what benefits had already accrued to them in a socialist state. All of this, then, was invested in the word ‘Unwissende’.

However, the final word ‘schuldbewußt’, like ‘Ungeduld’ in ‘Der Radwechsel’ turns the spotlight decisively on the poet himself. It is very unlikely that Brecht is feeling guilty over his failure openly to support the workers on 17 June, as has been

suggested:¹⁴⁷ this would not accord with anything else he has written. It is, I believe, much more likely that the guilt arose out of Brecht's feeling that he had failed to educate the masses or to enthuse them for the great transition to socialism. 'Böser Morgen' then provides an intriguing parallel to 'Der Blumengarten'. Both poems may be read as an expression of Brecht's discontent with his own role as an artist and intellectual. In one poem, this discontent is situated within a beautiful, tranquil nature, in the other within an ugly discordant nature. In both cases, the statement is a very personal one.

Optimism or Pessimism?

Ambiguity then plays a central role in the *Elegien*, an ambiguity created both by Brecht's figurative use of themes and by irony, antithesis, suggestion and other linguistic devices. Yet the ambiguity is a matter of detail, existing within individual poems. There is little ambiguity of intention or purpose in the *Elegien* as a collection. The *Elegien* were inspired by 17 June, but 17 June in the very broadest sense, as the epitomization of GDR society eight years after the end of the Nazi era and four years after the establishment of the socialist state.

One or two of the poems hint at the promise of a society in harmony ('Rudern, Gespräche' and 'Bei der Lektüre eines sowjetischen Buches', for example). Generally, though, the *Elegien* exude a melancholy pessimism. Mittenzwei suggests that Brecht called the compilation *Elegien* as a response to a misplaced optimism being promoted by the press and literary critics.¹⁴⁸ Brecht himself felt little such optimism. Party, intellectuals and people had let slip the opportunity to create a truly democratic socialist society. Brecht was conscious of his own failure to promote this opportunity. The *Buckower Elegien* not only lament the lost opportunity, but insofar as they mourn his own ineffectiveness, they are a deeply personal response to 17 June.

Publication of the Elegien

Only six of the *Elegien* were published in Brecht's lifetime. The poems appeared in *Sinn und Form*, Heft 6 at the end of 1953 and again in 1954 in his *Versuche*, Heft 13.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Fuegi, p. 547.

¹⁴⁸ Mittenzwei, II, p. 530.

The six were: ‘Der Blumengarten’, ‘Gewohnheiten, noch immer’, ‘Rudern, Gespräche’, ‘Der Rauch’, ‘Heißer Tag’ and ‘Bei der Lektüre eines sowjetischen Buches’. The remaining *Elegien* remained unpublished until after Brecht’s death, sometimes on his express orders, and appeared gradually between then and 1980. Two poems upon which Brecht placed a specific embargo were ‘Die neue Mundart’ and ‘Lebensmittel zum Zweck’.¹⁴⁹

Again, we encounter the same puzzle of publication as in the case of Brecht’s non-fictional texts. Knopf’s view is that Brecht published his six *Versuche* poems because they were ‘unverfänglich’.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, this is so: none of the six poems contain criticism of the GDR or the Party. Two reflect badly on the West, one favourably on the Soviet Union and the remaining three can be read not as political but as intensely lyrical poems of nature.

However, this explanation leaves many loose ends. Why did he send ‘Die Wahrheit einigt’ to Wandel and, reputedly, to Grotewohl? Why did he place an embargo on ‘Die neue Mundart’, which was much less inflammatory than ‘Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunst-kommission’ or ‘Lebensmittel zum Zweck’, which was primarily an attack on the West? Indeed, why did he write the *Elegien* at all, if it was not his intention to have them read?

From this confused and confusing pattern of publication, a significant fact emerges. The *Buckower Elegien*, along with the *Journale* entry of 20 August 1953 and the ‘Vorwort zu Turandot’, are Brecht’s most comprehensive, reflective and mature thoughts on 17 June. Yet, as with the *Journale* entry and ‘Vorwort zu Turandot’, he chose not to share some of them with the public.

Conclusion

What, then, are we to make of Brecht’s conduct and demeanour on 17 June? Was he the unprincipled traitor to democracy so often depicted in Western accounts or did he adopt

¹⁴⁹ See Jan Knopf (ed.), *Brecht Handbuch in fünf Banden*, 5 vols (Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2001-3), II, 2001, pp. 439-40.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

an honourable stand in defence of his convictions, in spite of all the attendant difficulties? The truth lies somewhere in between.

Brecht's opposition to the SED regime was never of the self-immolating variety, implicitly demanded in much Western criticism. No-one disputes that he was a committed socialist, whose visceral loathing of fascism, unwavering since the 1930s, reached a new height of intensity in his letter of 1 July 1953 to Peter Suhrkamp. These views led him to work through an ideological train of thought to its logical conclusion.

He saw fascism as a form of capitalism; indeed he had long since virtually equated the two: 'Wie will nun jemand die Wahrheit über den Faschismus sagen, gegen den er ist, wenn er nichts gegen den Kapitalismus sagen will, der ihn hervorbringt?'¹⁵¹ It was the aim of fascist elements from the West to provoke another war on 17 June, and in these efforts, they had a sinister ally in a significant fascist element that remained uneradicated and unchecked in GDR society: 'Mehrere Stunden lang stand Berlin am Rande eines dritten Weltkrieges.'¹⁵²

Only socialism could fend off this danger, in a socialist state where the Party was hegemonic, the Soviet Union stood as guarantor and German (preferably pan-German) socialist cultural and social norms were cultivated. To look for Brechtian opposition to these beliefs is to look in vain and to condemn Brecht for not abandoning these principles on 17 June is to miss the point of his actual opposition.

Brecht's opposition lay, not in opposing the concept of Party hegemony and the Party's mission to bring the people to the promised land of socialism, but in the methods employed by individuals in doing so. He believed in a German way to socialism which was at odds with the methods of Stalin and his disciples in the GDR. These people had, in Brecht's opinion, made two serious mistakes leading up to 17 June. One was to try to impose Soviet Socialist Realist methods on German culture, methods that he felt were fixed in the past and inapplicable to a German socialist world. He says, with not a little irony:

¹⁵¹ Brecht, 'Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit', *BFA*, XXII/1, 1993, p. 78. Brecht wrote this essay in 1935.

¹⁵² Brecht, 'Zum 17. Juni 1953' *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, p. 250.

Wir können nicht verlangen, daß in wenigen Jahren das politische Niveau der Sowjetunion erklimmen wird, jedoch helfen uns die Vorbilder. Freilich bliebe auch die Orientierung nach diesen Vorbildern unfruchtbar, wenn es uns nicht gelänge, sie für die spezifischen Verhältnisse bei uns zu modifizieren.¹⁵³

The second mistake was the failure to lead the people, to educate them in the evils of fascism and the achievements of socialism and indeed to coerce them to embrace socialism.¹⁵⁴

It was on these two failings that most of Brecht's texts in 1953 were focused. Clearly, the SED leadership would not have welcomed criticism in either of these areas. Of course, in the immediate aftermath of 17 June, when the leadership found itself in difficulties, Brecht and others were able to exploit this vulnerability and criticism was both public and fierce.

His opposition to the GDR's cultural prescriptions, there since he arrived in the GDR in 1949, intensified in 1953, before and after 17 June. His opposition was persistent, open and courageous, and to attribute his actions here purely to base financial motives seems to be unsupported by the facts. Brecht was clearly in some personal danger in the first six months of 1953, and had to endure widespread Western opprobrium in the second six months and beyond. Yet, in the exercise of the choice of 'exit or voice', Brecht could never have considered the 'exit' option.

His opposition to the regime's social shortcomings was, however, less open. This, I think, is where Brecht's real inner conflict or dilemma of opposition was located. He knew where the Party had gone wrong, where it had deviated away from the true path of Lenin:

Freunde, ich wünschte, ihr wüsstet die Wahrheit und sagtet sie!
Nicht wie fliehende müde Cäsaren: ...
So wie Lenin...¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Brecht, 'Kulturpolitik und Akademie der Künste', in *BFA*, XXIII, 1993, p. 259.

¹⁵⁴ Brecht goes over this ground both in the meeting with Berliner Ensemble staff on 24 June and in his *Journal* entry of 20 August 1953.

¹⁵⁵ Brecht, 'Die Wahrheit einigt'.

But there was simply no alternative to the Party. To have directed open criticism at Ulbricht and his circle might have been, in Brecht's view, warranted, but it would have been used by the GDR's enemies to subject the Party and the socialist state to criticism. We may not know the extent to which such considerations weighed on his thoughts, but we do know his loyalty to the Party was unconditional: 'Im Kampf gegen Krieg und Faschismus stand und stehe ich an ihrer [der Partei] Seite.'¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Brecht, 'An Peter Suhrkamp'.

HEINER MÜLLER

'Mich interessieren Probleme und Konflikte'

Introduction

As a twenty-four year old writer, Heiner Müller was an eyewitness to the events of 17 June in Berlin, yet the manner of his engagement with 17 June was quite unlike that of most of his literary contemporaries. Unlike Brecht, Heym or Loest, Müller repeatedly professed an almost total indifference to 17 June and its sociopolitical implications. Yet, between 1956 and 1971, he worked on his play, *Germania Tod in Berlin*, a sweeping and powerful critique of the sociopolitical conditions out of which emerged the events, causes and consequences of 17 June. During this period, Müller's relationship with the authorities in the GDR was a complex one. His plays generally focused critically on various aspects of GDR society. As a result of one play, *Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande*, which was first staged in 1961, the authorities imposed serious constraints on Müller's work, severe enough to cause him and his wife, Inge, considerable social and financial hardship.¹ He was frequently taken to task publicly for his literary rebelliousness.² At the same time, he was awarded honours and prizes, including, for example, the *Erich-Weinert-Medaille der FDJ* in 1964.³ This was not an untypical situation for troublesome but gifted artists to encounter in the GDR.

Censorship of Müller's work persisted during the course of the 1960s. For example, his play, *Der Bau*, like *Die Umsiedlerin*, critical of aspects of contemporary GDR society, was published in 1965, but banned from the GDR stage. Partly as a response to his difficulties with the censors, Müller changed his dramatic style and his plays of the 1970s and 80s, allied to a growing public image as a GDR dissident, enhanced his reputation as a dramatist in West Germany. In these years, Müller seemed to transcend the ideological divide, attracting praise and incurring criticism in both East

¹ Jan-Christoph Hauschild, *Heiner Müller oder das Prinzip Zweifel* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), p. 216.

² See Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p.128, for one example of a public scolding by Politbüro member Paul Verner at the Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965.

³ Hauschild, p. 225.

and West in equal measure. In fact, he exploited the ideological divide between the two German states:

Ich wurde in dem anderen [Staat] gespielt und deswegen konnte ich in dem, in dem ich lebe, davon leben, daß ich schreibe und so. Und damit fing es an. Aber auch nur, weil ich in dem anderen gelebt habe. Wenn ich in diesem gelebt hätte, hätte ich davon nicht leben können.⁴

So successfully did he exploit Germany's political partition, that, in addition to securing a favourable reception for his new plays, he became a much sought after *Gesprächspartner* in press and broadcasting circles in the West, holding forth on a variety of cultural and sociopolitical topics. Nevertheless, his status in the West was just as ambivalent as it had been and continued to be in the GDR. He was frequently condemned as a Communist Party apologist, and when *Germania Tod in Berlin* opened in Munich in 1978, it provoked a storm of outrage and abuse.⁵ A few months later, however, the play earned him the prestigious *Theaterpreis der Stadt Mülheim*.

The fall of the GDR in 1989/90 heralded a new stage in Müller's life. He continued to write plays and expound his views through the medium of the interview, but now, of course, in a post-*Wende* environment. Since there was no longer a GDR, Müller, like many other GDR writers, found that the entire dynamic governing his relationship with the public had changed: there was a clear shift in focus occasioned by the change in the GDR's status from existing communist country to past failed state. During this period, in 1992, Müller published his autobiography, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*.⁶ In this autobiography, he looks back over the events and circumstances which determined his approach to his life and work. One such event was, of course, 17 June.

It is not too simplistic then, to regard Müller's life as having progressed through three stages from oppositional to exploitative to explicative. In his oppositional phase, he wrote his most provocative and explicitly critical material on GDR society. In the

⁴ Heiner Müller, *Ich bin ein Neger: Diskussion mit Heiner Müller. Zeichnungen von Eva-Maria Viebeg* (Darmstadt: Georg Büchner Buchhandlung, 1986), p. 42.

⁵ Georg Hensel's furious onslaught in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* of 22 April 1978 was one of a number of critical articles on the play which will be discussed later.

⁶ Heiner Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2003). First published in 1992.

1970s and 80s, his reputation as a censored writer in the GDR ensured his prosperity in Western circles. In the final stage, and in *Krieg ohne Schlacht* in particular, he sets out the motivating factors and determining events in his life and work in the GDR, viewed, of course, from a post-*Wende* perspective.

In this chapter, I will look in detail at *Germania Tod in Berlin*. It is the work which I believe most accurately reflects Müller's views on, and issues with, GDR society in the wake of 17 June, a work which is an outstanding instance of oppositional writing in the GDR. As a prelude, I will explore his non-dramatic texts, particularly as they relate to 17 June. These latter texts are, in my opinion, less valuable as an indication of the extent to which 17 June was a dilemma and an inspiration for Müller. Texts dating from the period itself are slight and few in number, and the later autobiography and interview transcriptions suffer from a number of limitations, although they do provide invaluable insights into Müller's approach to literature and drama.

Müller's Prose

Müller was never comfortable with prose as a literary medium. 'Beim Prosaschreiben ist man ganz allein. Man kann sich nicht verstecken.'⁷ He was of the view that, in prose, the author is exposed, clearly responsible for the content. For a writer in the GDR, holding the views Müller held, this presented problems, 'weil man ja immer anders dachte, als offiziell gedacht werden sollte. Ich war immer anders und hatte immer etwas zu verbergen'.⁸ He was, though, probably less motivated by such circumspection than by his preference for working within the dramatic genre: 'Beim Stückeschreiben hat man immer Masken und Rollen und man kann durch sie sprechen. Deshalb ziehe ich Drama vor – wegen der Masken. Ich kann das eine sagen und ich kann das Gegenteil sagen.'⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that he sought to apply these characteristics of the dramatic genre to all his writing, and his attachment to the dramatic medium is evident in both the content and form of his prose. Indeed, he often seems to visualise his prose as a set of stage directions. One of his earliest recollections was of

⁷ Heiner Müller, 'Mauern: Gespräch mit Sylvère Lotringer', in *Rotwelsch* (Berlin: Merve, 1982), pp. 49-86 (p. 72).

⁸ *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 114. Future references will be designated within the text as (K, page number).

⁹ 'Mauern', p. 72.

the arrest of his father in March, 1933, a traumatic incident that had a deep and lasting effect and one that he was to refer to many times in his life.¹⁰ In one interview he describes how he, just four years old, feigned sleep as the Nazis took his father away, a ‘performance’ he regarded as ‘eigentlich die erste Szene meines Theaters’.¹¹ In ‘Todesanzeige’, a prose piece written in 1975, he describes the moment when he discovered the body of his wife, Inge, after she had committed suicide: ‘Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß ich Theater spielte. Ich sah mich, an den Türrahmen gelehnt, halb gelangweilt halb belustigt einem Mann zusehen.’¹²

Masks and roles, core concepts in drama, are important elements in Müller’s prose. They allow him, the author, to make different, even contradictory statements, to hide in the text, and to disclaim responsibility for it. They also facilitate the introduction into his prose of an element of performance, a fundamental requirement of drama: ‘die Realität eines Theaterstücks ist seine Aufführung’ (K, 181).

Müller, the dramatist, is most comfortable, then, with forms that provide greater role-playing opportunities. When asked why he favoured the interview as a vehicle for expressing his thoughts and opinions, his answer was that it was a more flexible and forgiving form than prose, in fact more like theatre: ‘Man ist ja nicht so sehr in die Pflicht genommen. Man kann am nächsten Tag das Gegenteil sagen [...]. Insofern sind es mehr performances, es hat vielleicht mehr mit Theater zu tun als mit Literatur.’¹³ He had definite opinions on the literary merit of his interviews, and he expressed the view that the recorded, transcribed interview could indeed be regarded as a literary genre in its own right, often reflecting reality more faithfully than traditional literary forms.¹⁴ When he came to publish his autobiography, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, he chose the interview

¹⁰ So important was this incident to Müller that he recounted it in an autobiographical essay ‘Der Vater’, written in 1958. Many critics have commented that Müller’s social detachment and sense of betrayal have their genesis in the incident. See, for example, Norbert Otto Eke, ‘Frühe Biographie/Prägungen’, in *Heiner Müller Handbuch: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, ed. by Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2003), pp. 1-9 (p. 2).

¹¹ ‘Mauern’, p. 68.

¹² Heiner Müller, ‘Todesanzeige’, in *Heiner Müller Material: Texte und Kommentare*, ed. by Frank Hörnigk (Göttingen: Steidl, 1989), pp. 86-89 (p. 86).

¹³ Heiner Müller, ‘Was gebraucht wird: mehr Utopie, mehr Phantasie und mehr Freiräume für Phantasie: Ein Gespräch mit Ulrich Dietzel’, in *Gesammelte Irrtümer: Interviews und Gespräche*, 3 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1986-94), I, 1986, pp. 155-75 (p. 156).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

structure, in which three interviewers (Katja Lange-Müller, Renate Ziemer and Helga Malchow) posed questions to him. As Gerd Gemünden observes, *Krieg ohne Schlacht* adapts ‘dramatic elements in order to transform the autobiography from a narrative into a performance’.¹⁵ These dramatic elements are evident in both form and content.

In style, *Krieg ohne Schlacht* is chatty and informal, full of droll asides and inconsequential digressions, and subject to dramatically delivered exclamations designed to shock or unsettle the reader/listener. Incomplete sentences are commonplace and informality is also to be found in the frequent use of idiomatic expressions such as ‘der dritte Hochzeitstermin stand ins Haus’ (K, 232). Describing his alienation and the hostility he encountered among his contemporaries, Müller remarks drily: ‘Ich konnte sehr gut laufen.’ (K, 27) He frequently dives down little memory lanes, to recount apparently irrelevant tales and he often employs a turn of phrase intended to jar or disconcert the reader: ‘Gott sei Dank kam Hitler’, he exclaims (K, 187). No matter that he is advancing a source of Brecht’s creativity, it is a shocking interjection out of the mouth of an antifascist GDR writer. At one point, he says: ‘Ich konnte nie sagen, ich bin Kommunist. Es war ein Rollenspiel.’ (K, 61) This is an astonishing claim for Müller, a lifelong communist, to make, and one must conclude that another *Rollenspiel* factor is at work here, one of delivering lines for effect.

As with form, so also content draws on characteristics of the dramatic genre. In *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, Müller sets out to create an image of himself as an asocial anti-hero, little caring for and constantly in conflict with the forces of authority and convention, egoistically determined to maintain his artistic standards at any cost to himself or others, cynically appropriating what is of use and discarding what is not. In this characterisation, he portrays himself as an outcast from the very beginning: ‘Ich war völlig isoliert, vor allem in der Schule.’ (K, 27) His relationship with his father was scarred by mutual betrayal, his of his father in the course of the latter’s arrest by the Nazis; his father’s of him, in urging him as a seven-year-old to write an essay, praising Hitler (K, 19 and 24). This sense of betrayal, a leitmotif throughout Müller’s work, left

¹⁵ Gerd Gemünden, ‘The Author as Battlefield: Heiner Müller’s Autobiography *War Without Battle*’, in *Heiner Müller: ConTEXTS and HISTORY*, ed. by Gerhard Fischer (Tübingen: Stauffenberg, 1995), pp. 117-27 (p. 118).

him embittered and vengeful: 'Ich bin überhaupt, glaube ich, ein sehr rachsüchtiger Mensch.' (K, 68)

In the early 1950s, Müller lived a nomadic, practically vagrant life in Berlin. He had what he regarded as a wretched job, reviewing books and writing blurbs, and an attitude to match: 'So viele gute Bücher gab es nicht, und das führte zu diesem aggressiven Ton in meinen Rezensionen und manchmal auch zu Arroganz.' (K, 98) In 1961, when a *de facto Berufsverbot* led to his ostracisation from GDR literary circles, he was defiant: 'Mir machte es nichts aus, asozial zu sein.' (K, 159)

In addition to this sense of personal alienation, Müller professes indifference to politics and society. In the period after the merging of the Communist Party (KPD) and the Socialist Party (SPD) to form the SED, Müller became a member of the SED, but he was unenthusiastic: 'Ich weiß nicht, ob mir das so wichtig war, diese SED-Mitgliedschaft, politisches Engagement überhaupt.' (K, 64) Stalin's death 'spielte für mich eigentlich keine große Rolle' (K, 137), and the events of 17 June were 'einfach interessant, ein Schauspiel' (K, 133). Even as the Wall was coming down in 1989, Müller claimed 'ein gebrochenes oder distanzierendes Verhältnis zur DDR. Die hat mich seit je vor allem als Phänomen interessiert, nicht als Rauschmittel'.¹⁶ It is Müller's contention that all this indifference, detachment and cynicism sprang from the most important motivational force in his life, his desire to create drama and his single-mindedness in treating life with all its experiences and events as material for his plays. His father's sudden and unannounced flight to the West concerned him only as dramatic material: 'Das war für mich alles als Erfahrung interessant, alles war Erfahrung.' (K, 68) He recognises that he stood accused of a lack of moral fibre in delivering an abject public *Selbstkritik* over the writing and staging of *Die Umsiedlerin*, but explains: 'Mir war das Schreiben wichtiger als meine Moral.' (K, 180) He applies the same logic when defending his dealings with the Stasi.¹⁷ He claims he discussed cultural politics with the

¹⁶ Cited in Joachim Fiebach, 'Nach 1989', in Lehmann and Primavesi, pp. 16-23 (p. 16).

¹⁷ In 1993, Dieter Schulze, a former colleague and friend, accused Müller publicly of having worked for the Stasi. Müller admitted to having had contacts with the Stasi, but denied having worked for them. The evidence against him was very thin, a point conceded by Joachim Walther of the then Gauck-Behörde. Schulze retracted his accusations weeks after he had made them. See *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, pp. 429-69; Hauschild, pp. 476-83; Erk Grimm, 'The Backstage Performance', in Fischer, pp. 71-86.

Stasi, with a view to influencing decisions concerning theatre in the GDR: ‘Aber warum sollte ich nicht versuchen, Einfluß zu nehmen, wenn ich dazu die Möglichkeit hatte? Ich habe darin nie ein moralisches Problem gesehen.’¹⁸

If *Krieg ohne Schlacht* is a ‘performance’, then, does that render it unreliable as a testament of Müller’s considered opinions of his own society? There are certainly a number of reasons for treating the text with some circumspection. Müller himself describes *Krieg ohne Schlacht* on the title page as an autobiography, but there is, for example, very little on his marriages and children and, despite his relish in reporting casual sexual conquests,¹⁹ even less on Margarita Broich, with whom he had an important personal and professional relationship that endured through most of the 1980s.²⁰ Equally, there is nothing on the affair Inge conducted with his brother Wolfgang, both before and after the latter had returned from the West to live with the Müllers in the late 1950s. Müller knew of the affair, but, according to Hauschild, did not have the courage to intervene.²¹ The first edition of the book made no reference to Müller’s contacts with the Stasi; it was only after public accusations were levelled at him in 1993, that he addressed the issue in a subsequent edition. That he initially failed to mention dealings with the Stasi is, of course, hardly surprising, but it does serve further to undermine confidence in the text’s completeness and honesty as a record of Müller’s life.

Little inconsistencies within the text and between this and other texts also indicate that Müller is often inclined to sacrifice fact on the altar of performance or effect. Hauschild points to a difference between Müller’s account of his first dealings with Brecht and the same instance as related by Martin Pohl, at the time a Brecht apprentice and a friend of Müller’s. According to Pohl, he had acted as a go-between in delivering a piece of Müller’s work to Brecht: Müller insists that he himself went to see and speak to Brecht.²² It is a small point; perhaps Pohl was mistaken, and, of course, it

¹⁸ Heiner Müller, ‘Es gibt ein Menschenrecht auf Feigheit. Ein Gespräch mit Thomas Assheuer’, in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, III, 1994, pp. 179-195 (p.185).

¹⁹ See, for example, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, pp. 56 and 110.

²⁰ See Hauschild, pp. 380-84.

²¹ Hauschild, p. 130.

²² Hauschild, pp. 93-94.

happened some forty years previously, so memory may well be indistinct, but it is indicative of Müller's constant efforts to show himself, not as he was, but as he wanted to be seen.

Müller seems never to have made up his mind why he moved to East Berlin when his family emigrated to the West in 1951. To Frank Raddatz, he explained his decision to remain in the East thus: 'Mein eigentliches Motiv war, ich hatte eine Freundin, sie war schwanger und konnte nicht weg, und ich wollte bei ihr bleiben. Das also war meine historische Entscheidung für den Sozialismus.'²³ Yet in *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, he paints a rather different picture of his departure from his hometown to Berlin: 'Es war auch eine Flucht vor der Schwangerschaft meiner Freundin in Frankenberg.' (K, 109)

There is a further problem with Müller's autobiography. It was first published nearly forty years after 1953 and it would be surprising if his memory of the events was accurate in every respect. More importantly, the book appeared in 1992, two years after reunification and the demise of the GDR. The dynamic governing GDR writers' relationships with their reading public had completely altered. There was no longer a German socialist state to support or to oppose. In *Krieg ohne Schlacht* (and therefore after 1989), Müller stated: 'Die DDR war ein Staat auf Widerruf, eine Ableitung der Sowjetunion, militärisches Glacis im Westen.' (K, 362) It is inconceivable that he would have expressed these sentiments at any time before November 1989, for, as Hauschild writes, Müller had always been a 'loyaler Dissident', who had never considered deserting socialism or the GDR.²⁴

In light of these considerations, how much store can we set by Müller's autobiography and interviews? Clearly, there must be grave reservations, which may be summarised as falling into three categories. Firstly, he uses masks and roles, particularly in *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, to hide behind and to build up a picture of himself that may be misleading. Secondly, he remained silent on the subject of 17 June for many years: when he did address it, his recollections of his actions and thoughts may

²³ Heiner Müller, *Zur Lage der Nation. Im Interview mit Frank M. Raddatz* (Berlin, Rotbuch, 1990), p. 88.

²⁴ Hauschild, p. 471.

well have been less than totally accurate, or at least influenced with the benefit of hindsight. Indeed, he recognised this himself. In an interview in 1993, when asked about his recollections of 17 June, he replied: ‘Es ist schwierig sich zu erinnern, weil sich das, was man erlebt hat und das, was man später gelesen hat, überschneidet.’²⁵ Finally, *Krieg ohne Schlacht* was written after the *Wende*, in an environment totally contrastive to that when the GDR still existed. At the very least, one must wonder whether Müller’s answers to GDR-related questions in 1992 were what they would have been, had he been asked the same questions at any time up to 1989. As a faithful reflection of his thoughts on GDR society in the early 1950s, then, the texts must be treated with a great deal of circumspection and any judgements must be weighed in the context of these reservations.

This is a commonly-held view. Gemünden points out that there is very little in *Krieg ohne Schlacht* that is confessional, revelatory or justificatory: ‘The text does not want to stir its readers’ emotions, nor suggest the relating of a hitherto hidden truth, nor strive to legitimise or absolve its author.’²⁶ Jonathan Kalb writes of Müller’s early siege-mentality feeding his later self-image as an outcast and ripening into a deeply personal Machiavellianism.²⁷ In contrast to Gemünden, Jost Hermand finds that *Krieg ohne Schlacht* belongs to a group of self-justificatory books written by disillusioned writers of the former GDR, the difference in Müller’s case being that he denies any disillusionment and affects a disengagement, at least at a personal level.²⁸ All three, however, make the same point, that there are too many contradictions and inconsistencies in Müller’s interviews and autobiography to allow us with any confidence to construct from them an accurate portrayal of Müller, and especially Müller in the 1950s.

²⁵ Heiner Müller, ‘Stalingrad war eigentlich das Ende der DDR’, in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, III, 1994, pp. 196-204 (p. 196).

²⁶ Gemünden, pp. 121-22.

²⁷ Jonathan Kalb, *The Theater of Heiner Müller* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 6.

²⁸ Jost Hermand, ‘Diskursive Widersprüche: Fragen an Heiner Müllers “Autobiographie”’, in *Mit den Toten Reden: Fragen an Heiner Müller*, ed. by Jost Hermand and Helen Fehervary (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 95-112 (pp. 95-96).

Müller is hardly unique in presenting difficulties to the reader searching for the truth about a writer's life in his or her autobiography: as we shall see in later chapters, similar, if less acute, issues pertain to the autobiographical texts of Stefan Heym and Erich Loest. Yet Müller's interviews and autobiography are a rich source of insights into his approach to dramatic writing. In these texts, we find which philosophies and beliefs inform his plays and which strategies and techniques he employs to achieve dramatic effect. There is of course a potential inconsistency here. If Müller's interviews and autobiography are unreliable or inadequate guides to the views he held in 1953 on GDR society, why should they be held to be reliable pointers to his dramatic approach in the plays he wrote shortly after this period? The answer is that, if we look beyond his narrow preoccupation with Müller, self-professed cynic and 'clever dog',²⁹ a more consistent and usable picture emerges, in which the outlines of his life-forces, ideological and artistic, become clear. Provocative exclamations to the contrary notwithstanding,³⁰ *Krieg ohne Schlacht* demonstrates what Kalb refers to as a total commitment to socialism and life-long rage at capitalism³¹ that informs all his work. And, although his dramatic work evolved and changed over the years, Müller's essential theatrical beliefs, principles and practices remained intact. Whilst we must treat his self-portrayal in the interviews and autobiography with circumspection, these texts are invaluable companions to any analysis of his drama.

17 June in Müller's Prose

Apart from his dramatic offerings, Müller seems to have had remarkably little to say on the subject of 17 June. There were a few disjointed and not very significant prose pieces in 1953 and then silence for almost forty years.

As we have seen, Müller was a struggling writer in 1953, churning out literary reviews for journals such as *Sonntag*. He also wrote occasional pieces for *Sonntag*. His financial position, precarious anyway, became even more so when Rosemarie, his first wife and at the time the family breadwinner, decided to divorce him in the spring of

²⁹ Hermand, 'Diskursive Widersprüche', p. 106.

³⁰ As, for example, 'Ich konnte nie sagen, ich bin Kommunist', in *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 61.

³¹ Kalb, p. 6.

1953. It is therefore likely that the young Müller had more pressing matters on his mind than politics in the GDR. By his own admission, the death of Stalin in March 1953 and the events of 17 June were of little import to him: ‘Der Tod Stalins spielte für mich eigentlich keine große Rolle’ (K, 137) and ‘den 17. Juni habe ich nur als Beobachter erlebt’ (K, 132) were his subsequent recollections of those days. These comments were not just made for provocative effect; unlike the agitational and very public activity of Brecht, Heym, Loest and others, Müller’s engagement with 17 June was indeed inconsequential.

Only three texts of any note are worthy of mention: indeed they are the only Müller texts of the time that could be said to address any aspect of 17 June. On 28 June 1953, *Sonntag* published a Müller text, entitled ‘Das Loch im Strumpf’.³² It recounts an incident that took place during a lunch break in a Halle factory in 1948. A disgruntled man takes off a sock bought the previous day to demonstrate the dismal quality of goods and life generally in the GDR. He has the unspoken support of his colleagues; only one woman, Luise Ermisch, demurs. She recognises the validity of the man’s complaints, but is convinced (and convinces him) that it is within the power of citizens of the GDR to improve the quality of life in their country. Shortly thereafter, she reads of an organisation in the Soviet Union, dedicated to improving standards of manufacture, and is inspired to establish the first ‘Brigade für ausgezeichnete Qualität in der volkseigenen Industrie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik’, becoming a ‘Heldin der Arbeit’ in the process. Müller’s text is headed by a motto which reads:

‘Nur diejenigen Wettbewerbsformen setzen sich durch, deren Notwendigkeit von den Massen erkannt ist und die aus den Massen selbst kommen [...]’ (Bericht über die ersten Erfahrungen aus dem Tschutkich-Wettbewerb).

Hauschild sees this, written so soon after 17 June, ‘als Fingerzeig an die Adresse der Parteiführung’.³³ This may be so, but the case is hardly compelling. Texts written and published in the GDR so soon after 17 June are inevitably scoured for indications of the

³² Heiner Müller, ‘Das Loch im Strumpf’, *Sonntag*, 28 June 1953.

³³ Hauschild, p. 110.

author's position on 17 June and inferences may be drawn which the evidence does not always support. In fact, as Hauschild himself points out, Müller's text is based on an earlier one included in a book, *Helden der Arbeit*, edited by the loyal Party writer, Karl Grünberg and published in 1951.³⁴ The earlier text incorporated the same motto as did Müller's work. His text was not then particularly original. If it was intended as a commentary on 17 June, its message is oblique and this impression is reinforced somewhat by the fact that Müller reworked this text as a poem, 'L.E. oder das Loch im Strumpf' in 1956, when he would surely have intended no import in relation to 17 June.³⁵

That any expression of criticism in the days after 17 June was viewed with extreme nervousness is amply demonstrated by the fate of Müller's second text. At the behest of *Sonntag*, Müller wrote an essay, 'Das staatliche Rundfunkkomitee...', some time after he had listened to the radio channel *Berlin 1* on 17 July 1953.³⁶ The essay is an extended criticism of the broadcasting approach of the radio authorities in the GDR. Listeners should not be patronised: 'Der Rundfunk sollte wissen, daß unsere Werktätigen nicht, wie das amerikanische Publikum, auf dem geistigen Niveau von Dreizehnjährigen stehen.'³⁷ The content should be much more professionally assembled. To include in a world news bulletin the item 'die Verkäuferin Elisabeth Hoffmann in Halle verdient, durch den neuen Regierungsbeschluß, monatlich 70 Mark mehr' might appear rather parochial.³⁸ And so on. Müller constructs a programme of criticism and suggestions for improvement. The essay was never published. Although the article had been commissioned, circumstances had changed after 17 June: 'Der Wind hatte sich schon wieder gedreht.' (K, 134) In fact, criticism in this article is relatively mild and seems generally well-intentioned. As a text critical of official broadcasting

³⁴ Mutz Hein, 'Luise Ermisch: Früher war sie Näherin', in *Helden der Arbeit*, ed. by Karl Grünberg (East Berlin: Kultur und Fortschritt, 1951), pp. 69-80.

³⁵ The poem was first published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*. Later published in Heiner Müller, *Gedichte* (Berlin: Alexander, 1992).

³⁶ Heiner Müller, 'Das Staatliche Rundfunkkomitee ...', in *Heiner Müller: Werke* (henceforth *Werke*), ed. by Frank Hörnigk with Kristin Schulz and Ludwig Haugk, 9 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1998-2005), VIII, 2005, pp. 518-25.

³⁷ 'Das Staatliche Rundfunkkomitee...', p. 519.

³⁸ 'Das Staatliche Rundfunkkomitee...', p. 521.

policy, it sounds rather lame when set beside Brecht's fury at the incompetence of GDR radio on 17 June and the considerably more robust statement in the Academy proposals of 2 July: 'Der Rundfunk hat [...] versagt.'³⁹

The final Müller text from this period is in the form of a single sentence:

SCHOTTERBEK, als er, an einem Junimorgen 1953 in Berlin, unter den Schlägen seiner Mitgefangenen aufatmend zusammenbrach, hörte aus dem Lärm der Panzerketten, durch die preußisch dicken Mauern seines Gefängnisses gedämpft, den nicht zu vergessenden Klang der Internationale.⁴⁰

Although the first publication of this piece was in 1977 and the first GDR publication in 1989, it was written, according to the editors of Müller's *Werke*, in 1953. An incident in a GDR prison on the morning of 17 June is described. The text is closely related to, indeed is probably the genesis of a scene in *Germania Tod in Berlin*.⁴¹ It is, therefore, a good example of Müller's habitual practice of transposing texts from one work to another.

What motivated Müller to write this text, and why it was not published until 1977, is now difficult to determine. It is similar in form to a number of 'Parabeln' that he wrote and had published in *Sonntag* around this time.⁴² Since the depiction of a communist (as Schotterbek patently was) in a GDR prison would have attracted censorship, it seems very possible that Müller would have had no outlet in 1953 for such a text. The only journal for which he did work at this stage, *Sonntag*, was, as we have seen, extremely circumspect just then in publishing anything with a 17 June connection.

Müller's observations on the events of 17 June at the time, then, were insubstantial, insofar as his prose texts are concerned, and we have to wait a further forty years for him to return to the subject in prose in any appreciable depth. In *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, he recalls his own reactions on 17 June itself. Unsurprisingly, he professes an almost total indifference to the events, beyond their value as a source of dramatic material: 'Es war einfach interessant, ein Schauspiel.' (K 133) We have to look beyond

³⁹ Dietzel and Geißler, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Heiner Müller, 'Schotterbek', in *Werke*, II, 2000, p. 199.

⁴¹ The scene is 'Die Brüder 2'.

⁴² 'Drei Parabeln', in *Werke*, II, p. 22 are examples.

this typical display of insouciance to other texts which reveal a more objective and considered analysis of the causes and effects of the Uprising.

Müller considered that there were serious problems in GDR society, none more so than the infiltration of old fascists into the working class. ‘Eine Art Umschichtung’ had taken place in the GDR.⁴³ The construction sites, once bastions of communism, had been decimated by Nazism and war. They were now riddled with fascism, because the Soviet occupying forces had seen no alternative to sending all but the most criminal of the old Nazis on to the sites, to get the country going again. The disturbances of 17 June originated on the building sites: ‘Der Ausgangspunkt in Berlin war die Stalin-Allee, Bauarbeiter.’ (K 134) Müller clearly believes that the fascist element on the building sites exerted a significant agitational influence. The economic imperative for the workers of having the productivity norm increases revoked had, after all, already been achieved, so the norms were no longer a reason for calling a strike or staging demonstrations: ‘Danach wurde die Normerhöhungen wieder zurückgenommen, noch vor dem 17. Juni. Nach der Zurücknahme kam dann der Aufstand.’ (K 135) He introduces a complicating factor at this point. The construction workers in 1953 enjoyed certain privileges, supplementary wages, special canteens, educational opportunities for their children and so on. The fascists among the workers enjoyed these same privileges. It is unclear what point Müller wants to make here; however, he makes the same point elsewhere, so clearly he attaches a special significance to it.⁴⁴ It may be that he felt a sense of outrage, not only that unreconstructed fascists were among the privileged in the GDR, but that the system had actually facilitated the process.

Indeed, the state itself had undergone a reconstruction similar to that of the workforce: ‘Genauso hat sich der Faschismus im Staatsapparat wiedergefunden.’⁴⁵ Just as old unreconstructed Nazis had replaced communists on the building sites, so also had they done in the state’s civil service. In addition, many functionaries had been promoted to positions far beyond their competence: ‘Der Kulturminister war Konditor von

⁴³ Heiner Müller, ‘Jetzt sind wir nicht mehr glaubwürdig: Gespräch mit Jeanne Ophuls’, in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, III, 1994, p. 81.

⁴⁴ *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 135 and ‘Stalingrad war eigentlich’, p.199.

⁴⁵ ‘Jetzt sind wir’, p. 81.

Beruf.’⁴⁶ Not only were there troublemakers, then, among the workers; there may even have been among the Party elite and there was a lack of leadership in the Party to head off the danger. The causes of the disturbances of 17 June were, therefore, to be found largely in the GDR. The old GDR official narrative, that 17 June had been a Western counterrevolutionary plot had grains of truth but little real substance: ‘Natürlich hat mit Sicherheit auch der Westen mitgemischt, das ist klar, vielleicht nicht so ausschließlich wie Stefan Heym das darstellt.’ (K, 135)

None of these problems, however, would have been insurmountable, had the Party leaders shown leadership and it is this belief that gives rise to the regret that lies at the heart of Müller’s reflections on 17 June. The events actually represented a missed opportunity for the GDR. He first articulates this idea in 1991: ‘da wäre eine Chance gewesen, daraus etwas zu lernen und zu machen’,⁴⁷ and he repeats the assertion later: ‘ein Drehpunkt in der DDR-Geschichte, der 17. Juni als die letzte Chance für eine neue Politik, für eine andre DDR-Geschichte, verpaßt aus Angst vor der Bevölkerung und vor dem übermächtigen westlichen Gegner’ (K, 137). By this, he means that there was an opportunity after 17 June for the GDR to re-invent itself, for the Party to take the lead in establishing a German brand of socialism on German soil that would endure and prosper, but the chance was lost due to Party pusillanimity and over-dependence on Soviet support. By 1993, he had reached the conclusion that, in fact, there never had been a real opportunity for the GDR. Ulbricht was only too conscious that the people would never embrace communism and he needed Soviet backing to stay in power. The Soviets needed a satellite state as buffer against the West, so they kept Ulbricht, their soul mate, in power: ‘Die alternative DDR war immer eine Illusion.’⁴⁸

This, then, was the essence of Müller’s analysis of 17 June in the 1990s. It was, as we shall see, very close to the position he held twenty years earlier, when he completed *Germania Tod in Berlin*.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Müller was making a general point here: in 1953, there was as yet no Culture Ministry in the GDR.

⁴⁷ Heiner Müller, ‘Ich bin kein Held, das ist nicht mein Job: Ein Gespräch mit Rüdiger Schaper und C. Bernd Sucher’, *Sddeutsche Zeitung*, 14/15 September 1991.

⁴⁸ ‘Stalingrad war eigentlich’, p. 198.

Germania Tod in Berlin

When Müller was asked in 1993 why Stefan Heym's *5 Tage im Juni* was the only literary work to address the theme of 17 June, his answer implied that Ulbricht, and by extension the GDR authorities, had stifled all artistic treatment of the subject.⁴⁹ He could have chosen to point out that there was a substantial body of literature incorporating 17 June as a central theme, including his own play, *Germania Tod in Berlin*. Indeed, if one understands 17 June as a term that reflects the stresses and conflicts in early GDR society, then the theme is at the heart of a number of Müller's plays. *Der Lohndrucker* explores the tensions and strains in GDR society generated by the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* programme and the related thorny issue of productivity norms.⁵⁰ And in Müller's later play, *Wolokolamsker Chaussee*, one scene, 'Das Duell', is played out on 17 June itself, depicting a psychological power struggle between two men against the backcloth of the social upheaval of that day.⁵¹

Neither of these plays, however, confronts the issues thrown up by 17 June as directly as does *Germania Tod in Berlin*. The conflicts portrayed in *Der Lohndrucker* played a crucial part in the build-up to the 17 June explosion, but the play is set in 1948/49, and the Uprising plays no explicit part in the play. The *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* scene was written in the late 1980s and staged in the GDR in January 1988. By then, official resistance to oppositional literature in the GDR was already crumbling. Indeed, the GDR itself was crumbling and, as Rainer E. Schmitt contends, 'Das Duell' was a retrospective on a failed state rather than a plea for a reformed society.⁵² Müller worked on *Germania Tod in Berlin* in the years following 17 June and, in the play itself, the final curtain falls a few days after 17 June. It represents Müller's most detailed analysis of the causes and consequences of 17 June and his most trenchant critique of a society and political leadership which could so carelessly ignore the issues exposed by the Uprising.

⁴⁹ 'Stalingrad war eigentlich', pp. 199-200.

⁵⁰ Heiner Müller, *Der Lohndrucker, Philoktet, and Die Schlacht, mit Materialien*, ed. by Reinhard Tschapke (Stuttgart, Düsseldorf and Leipzig: Ernst Klett, 2000).

⁵¹ Heiner Müller, 'Das Duell: Wolokolamsker Chaussee III', in *Werke*, V, 2002, pp. 215-220.

⁵² Rainer E. Schmitt, *Geschichte und Mythisierung: Zu Heiner Müllers Deutschland-Dramatik* (Berlin: Wissenschaft, 1999), p. 243.

Germania Tod in Berlin *within Müller's Dramatic Oeuvre*

Literary critics usually describe Müller's drama as having evolved through three stages: Emmerich termed them 'Produktion-Müller', 'Antiken-Müller' and 'Deutschland-Müller'.⁵³ In the first phase, he wrote a number of plays, 'Produktionsstücke', which explore the conflicts and stresses in GDR society brought about by the drive to establish socialism. These plays include *Der Lohndrucker* (1957/8), set on the Stalinallee construction site and *Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande* (1961), which focuses on the agricultural collectivisation program of the 1950s. These plays were seen by the authorities as too negative and they generally attracted censure. Although Ulbricht publicly praised *Der Lohndrucker* in 1958, after October 1959, it was not staged in the GDR again until 1978.⁵⁴ As we have seen, Müller's attempts to stage *Die Umsiedlerin* earned him a *Berufsverbot* in 1961 and effectively marked the end of this phase of his career.

In the second phase, spanning a period broadly from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, Müller reworked or adapted a number of plays chosen from antiquity, Shakespeare and modern writers, including Brecht. Among these was *Philoktet*, published in 1965 and first staged in Munich in 1968, which he based on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. This play occupies an important place in Müller's work for two reasons. Firstly, it denoted a departure from the realism or Socialist Realism of the earlier 'Produktionsstücke' and a step towards what was to become his distinctive, postmodernist style. Secondly, and to some extent consequently, the play marked his breakthrough as a leading international dramatist.⁵⁵ *Philoktet* was followed by, among others, *Der Horatier*, completed in 1969 but not staged until 1973, and *Macbeth*, completed and staged in 1972.

The final phase in Müller's dramatic output saw him move on from the 'Antikenstücke' to his 'Deutschlandstücke', where he explored German history and its influences

⁵³ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Der Alp der Geschichte: "Preußen" in Heiner Müllers "Leben Gundlings Friedrich von Preußen Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei"', *Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR*, 3 (1982), 115-58 (115).

⁵⁴ See Karl-Heinz J. Schoeps, 'Der Lohndrucker Revisited', in Fischer, pp. 41-53 (p. 43); and Eke, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Stoehr, p. 322.

on and consequences for the socialist GDR state. These plays include *Die Schlacht: Szenen aus Deutschland* (first staged in 1975), *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1978), *Die Hamletmaschine* (1978), *Leben Gundlings Friedrich von Preußen Lessings Schlaf Traum Schrei* (1979) and *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* (1988). Finally, *Germania 3 Gespenster am toten Mann*, completed in 1995, the year of his death, but first staged the following year, belongs to this group of plays.

Although critics generally describe the evolution of Müller's dramatic oeuvre in this way (Moray McGowan, Jonathan Kalb and Genia Schulz are among those who identify the three phases in his work),⁵⁶ it is not possible to compartmentalise Müller's plays into neat pigeonholes of time, form or content. Indeed, Müller himself was not at all happy to see his work thus circumscribed: 'Diese Idee der Periodisierung ist kompletter Unfug.'⁵⁷ There was considerable overlapping between the phases of dramatic output. *Philoktet*, for example, was written between 1958 and 1964, whereas *Der Bau*, a 'Produktionsstück', first appeared in 1965. Moreover, a number of Müller's plays were in gestation for lengthy periods of time, sometimes years. *Germania Tod in Berlin* is a prime example of a play that is difficult to tie exclusively to any particular stage of his work. Started in 1956 and completed in 1971, the play spans all three stages of Müller's dramatic output. There are characteristics of form and content in the play that borrow heavily from his earlier 'Produktionsstücke', but its formal use of montage and fragmentation marks it clearly as a 'Deutschlandstück'. These terms are useful in identifying different features and characteristics in the play, but the play's overriding feature is Müller's trademark preoccupation with German history and GDR society, in which the duality of present and past is reflected in dualities of continuity and disjunction, unity and division, harmony and discordance, matches and mismatches.

⁵⁶ Moray McGowan, 'Marxist-Postmodernist-German: History and Dramatic Form in the Work of Heiner Müller', in *Socialism and the Literary Imagination: Essays on East German Writers*, ed. by Martin Kane (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berg, 1991), pp. 125-46 (p. 126); Kalb, p. 10; Schulz, *Heiner Müller*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Heiner Müller, 'Ich weiß nicht, was Avantgarde ist: Gespräch mit Eva Brenner', in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, II, 1990, pp. 94-104 (p. 96).

German Past and GDR Present

For Müller, it was not conceivable to write a play about GDR society without reference to history: 'Man kann ein DDR-Bild nicht geben, ohne die DDR im Kontext der deutschen Geschichte zu sehen.'⁵⁸ To achieve this conjunction of German past and GDR present, Müller frames *Germania Tod in Berlin* as a series of paired scenes: each pair is usually indicated as such by the use of a common scene title and designation 1 and 2. In each pair, one or more episodes from the past are set against one from the present, resulting in the structure shown in the table overleaf. The scenes from the present follow a strictly chronological order, from the founding of the GDR in 1949 to 1 July 1953, whereas the historic scenes use no such order in summoning up episodes from the past. In a play so fragmented and where the dramatic unities are so largely ignored, the orderly account of the evolving GDR provides the central point of reference. It is, as David Barnett notes, the play's main character.⁵⁹ Like main characters generally, Müller's GDR develops as the play progresses, in this case by reference to its historical inheritance. The GDR thus portrayed is one infected by two thousand years of German failure. It is a pessimistic representation of both past and present, prompted by Müller's view that German history was 'zum größten Teil auch eine deutsche Misere'.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Heiner Müller, 'Einen historischen Stoff sauber abschildern, das kann ich nicht: Ein Gespräch beim Wisconsin Workshop in Madison/USA', in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, I, 1986, pp. 31-49 (p. 32).

⁵⁹ David Barnett, *Literature versus Theatre: Textual Problems and Theatrical Realization in the Later Plays of Heiner Müller* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 168.

⁶⁰ 'Einen historischen Stoff', p. 3.

Structural Outline of Germania Tod in Berlin	
Scene No, Title and Historical Episode(s)	Scene No, Title and Paired GDR Event
<p>1. 'Die Straße 1': Revolution in Berlin, 1918.</p> <p>The communist-led revolution in November 1918 was crushed by the government, led by Friedrich Ebert of the SPD. Two leaders of the revolution, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were murdered shortly afterwards.</p>	<p>2. 'Die Straße 2': GDR Founding Day in Berlin, 7 Oct 1949.</p> <p>After four years of Soviet occupation and direct rule, the GDR was granted sovereign status, but was still under Soviet control. Enthusiasm among the GDR population was muted.</p>
<p>3. 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1': Prussia, c. 1780.</p> <p>Re-enactment of a legend, which purported to demonstrate the growing influence of the bourgeoisie, represented by the miller of Potsdam, under the absolutist rule of the Prussian monarchy, represented by Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, 1740-1786.</p>	<p>4. 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 2': Productivity award, 1950.</p> <p>In the early GDR years, workers were under intense pressure to surpass productivity norms. Workers who achieved outstanding levels of productivity were fêted by the authorities but often resented by fellow-workers, who regarded them as 'Lohndrücker'.</p>
<p>5. 'Hommage à Stalin 1': Stalingrad 1942 and the Nibelung Court.</p> <p>The Nibelungenlied tells a story of loyalty and betrayal, in which the murder of a royal family is engineered by one of their own, Kriemhild, to avenge the murder of her husband, Siegfried. The Nibelungen are here conjoined with Hitler's army at Stalingrad to suggest continuities.</p>	<p>6. 'Hommage à Stalin 2': Pub scene on day of Stalin's death.</p> <p>Stalin and Stalinism cast a long shadow over GDR society and politics. His death on 5 March 1953 and the subsequent shift in Soviet politics were profoundly significant for the conduct of politics in the GDR and in the events leading to 17 June.</p>

Structural Outline of <i>Germania Tod in Berlin (cont.)</i>	
Scene No, Title and Historical Episode(s)	Scene No, Title and Paired GDR Event
7. 'Die Heilige Familie': Hitler's bunker in Berlin. Hitler and Goebbels spent the last days of World War II cut off from reality in a bunker in Berlin, while Germans outside were ordered to fight on to a bitter and pointless end.	8. 'Das Arbeiterdenkmal': East Berlin building site, 17 June 1953 The workers on Stalinallee, a showpiece construction project, were the focus of discontent over productivity norms. It was here that the workers downed tools on 17 June and triggered the events which so seriously destabilised GDR society and politics.
9. 'Die Brüder 1': Germanic-Roman border, First Century AD. A text from the <i>Annales</i> of the First Century AD Roman historian, Tacitus. At the border between the Roman Empire and German lands, two German brothers meet and quarrel, because one has entered the service of the Romans while the other has remained loyal to his own kin.	10. 'Die Brüder 2': GDR prison on 17 June. Like Stalinallee, GDR prisons held a special significance on 17 June. Many were stormed by demonstrators and inmates released. The authorities claimed those released, like their liberators, were criminal: there were, they said, few political prisoners (and certainly no communists) in GDR jails
11. 'Nachtstück': a free-standing unpaired scene in mime.	
12. 'Tod in Berlin 1': Revolution. The final six lines of a sonnet, 'Berlin III', written by Georg Heym in 1910. The subject matter is revolution. The 1918 revolution is evoked by date of compilation rather than specifically indicated in the play.	13. 'Tod in Berlin 2': GDR hospital, 1 July 1953. Two weeks after 17 June, a symbolic death takes place in the GDR. Hilse, a Party loyalist, dies, not of injuries sustained at the hands of Western provocateurs on 17 June, but of a symbolic societal cancer.

The 'deutsche Misere' theory [...] held that the development of the German nation and state had, for various reasons, not been able to follow the course laid down in orthodox historical materialism and that, therefore, the reactionary forces in German history had been stronger than the progressive forces.⁶¹

The points in time when forces of reaction had prevailed included the Peasants' War of 1524/5, the Thirty Years War between 1618 and 1648, the era of the absolutist Prussian monarchy and the revolutions of 1848 and 1918, a catalogue of defeats that culminated in a German inability to resist fascism. This view informed Marxist thinking in the years immediately after the war. In the antifascist-democratic narrative, fascism was identified as the child of industrial monopolies, Prussian Junkers and rightwing militarists, an amalgam of the reactionary forces, in fact, which had crushed the revolutions of 1848 and 1918.⁶² Only Communism had stood against the ascendancy of Nazism; the people, who should have been the enemy of fascism, had colluded in Hitler's war crimes and treacherous attack on the Soviet Union.

This interpretation hardly sat easily with Marxist concepts of a heroic working class, and within a few years, the concept of German history as a continuous story of political and ideological misery, a 'deutsche Misere', was rejected in favour of a recognition of more progressive and liberating trends, to which the infant GDR state was the natural heir.⁶³ Antifascism remained the master narrative, but elements of Germany's past were more favourably re-evaluated and, although the revolutions of 1848 and 1918 were of course still seen as setbacks, they could also be perceived as important, if not yet decisive contributions from the masses to the advance of the class struggle.⁶⁴ The birth and development of fascism were no longer the fault of the (GDR) masses. The official history of the period 1933 to 1949 was now 'structured to associate the heritage [...] of the GDR with a (vastly mythologized) working-class resistance to fascism'.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Davies and Parker, p. 183.

⁶² Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1985), p. 47.

⁶³ Dorpalen, pp. 16 and 48.

⁶⁴ Dorpalen, pp. 204 and 320.

⁶⁵ Bathrick, p. 13.

Müller's views on both past and present were altogether more pessimistic. He saw the 1848 revolution and the Thirty Years War as low points in German history.⁶⁶ He particularly regarded the crushing of the 1918 revolution and the subsequent murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht as a tragedy, leading to German socialism's total dependence on Lenin, the Soviet Union and ultimately Stalin.⁶⁷ However, for him, the 'deutsche Misere' extended as far back as antiquity and forward to a climax in the Third Reich, and indeed right into the present GDR society.

In appraising Müller's portrayal of German history and its malign influence on the GDR present, critics tend to stress his black representations. Genia Schulz writes that Müller depicts German history as slaughterhouse, the locus of bloody conflict and enmity between brothers.⁶⁸ For Carl Weber, Müller's historical account is a sequence of abortive tragic or grotesque events.⁶⁹ Others reflect on the distorted nature of his accounts. Emmerich suggests that Müller locates his history in scenes of farce, slapstick and surrealism rather than in serious historical drama because he wants to posit that the course of German history does not warrant serious treatment.⁷⁰ Schmitt asserts that Müller on occasion plays fast and loose with the historical facts, in order to heighten effect: it is not Müller's intention, he contends, to do justice to the past, but to emphasise the harsh continuities between past and present.⁷¹

These points are well-founded: undoubtedly, the picture Müller paints of past and present is a bleak one. It is not, however, uniformly or entirely so. Amid the historical gloom there are points of light and amid the despair for the present there are slivers of hope. Eke hints at this when he writes of the play unfolding in two directions: 'Vergangenheit (deutsche Geschichte) und Zukunft (die utopische Struktur des Projekts

⁶⁶ Müller, *Zur Lage der Nation*, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Heiner Müller, 'Nekrophilie ist Liebe zur Zukunft', in *Jenseits der Nation: Im Interview mit Frank M. Raddatz* (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1991), pp. 7-34 (p. 8). Similar views are expressed in *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 359 and *Rotwelsch*, p. 140.

⁶⁸ Genia Schulz, 'Something is rotten in this Age of Hope: Heiner Müllers Blick auf die (deutsche) Geschichte', *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 5 (1979), 460-80 (469); and *Heiner Müller*, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Carl Weber, 'Heiner Müller: The Despair and the Hope', *Performing Arts Journal*, 4 (1980), no. 3, 135-40 (137).

⁷⁰ Emmerich, 'Der Alp der Geschichte', p. 121.

⁷¹ Schmitt, p. 89.

Sozialismus)',⁷² as does McGowan, when he refers to Müller's rejection of accepted historical narratives and search for a new understanding of history.⁷³ Although I would argue that the future Müller envisages is far less promising than may be inferred from Eke's phraseology, his and McGowan's words suggest a reading of *Germania Tod in Berlin* that would explain Müller's occasional expressions of optimism in an otherwise pessimistic review of past and present. In challenging established historical narratives, Müller explodes the old comfortable and comforting myths and replaces them with a much bleaker scenario, the 'deutsche Misere', which has resulted in the present ailing society. All hope of addressing and resolving the problems of the present rest on a proper understanding of their genesis. If this understanding can be achieved, there are signals, weak but discernible, in both past and present, that indicate that the destructive cycle can be broken and a socialist utopia realised.

Notwithstanding the occasional instances of optimism, the German penchant for fraternal conflict, self-destruction and blind obedience to duty throughout the ages, resulting in a German inability to resist fascism, is the overriding theme in Müller's historical review. Fraternal conflict and betrayal stretch back into antiquity, to the civil war declared against each other by the brothers Arminius and Flavus. Even the apparently unshakeable comradeship among the Nibelungen falls victim to betrayal when Gunther admits to the murder of Siegfried, his erstwhile brother-in-law and brother-in-arms. The failed revolution of 1918 is portrayed not only as a conflict between German citizens of different classes, but as a working-class betrayal of the working classes. An old man recalls the end of the Uprising, when the insurgents abandoned their leaders to their fate at the hands of a government led by supposed comrades:

Im Schloß die Bonzen ritten auf den Stühlen
Und stimmten Karl und Rosa an die Wand.
Wir schlugen die Gewehre an den Bordstein

⁷² Eke, p. 37.

⁷³ McGowan, 'Marxist-Postmodernist-German', p. 127; and 'Geschichtsbild und dramatische Form bei Heiner Müller', in *Kurz bevor der Vorhang fiel: Zum Theater der DDR*, ed. by John L. Flood (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 65-80 (p. 65).

Krochen zurück in unsre Mauerlöcher
Und rollten unsern Himmel wieder ein.
Der Präsident. Ein Arbeiter wie wir.⁷⁴

The President was Friedrich Ebert of the SPD, and Müller here draws attention to the self-destructive enmity between the SPD and the KPD, that cleared the way for the rise of fascism and the bitterest struggle of all, that between German communist and German fascist. A deadly duet between a communist and his Nazi brother is performed in a GDR prison in 1953, but it has its roots in the early days of the Third Reich.

There is a hint of blind obedience in the behaviour of both brothers in ‘Die Brüder 1’. Flavius’ loyalty to Rome has resulted in his disfigurement and the enmity of his kin; Arminius’ nationalism has driven him to the verge of civil war. But the malignancy of blind obedience and misplaced loyalty is seen at its starkest in the behaviour of the Nibelungen in ‘Hommage à Stalin 1’ and the Prussian bourgeoisie in ‘Brandenburgisches Konzert 1’.

The *Nibelungenlied* is a medieval epic poem, at whose core is ‘the theme of betrayal and its opposite, loyalty’, which unfolds ‘in the course of an epidemic of destructive violence’.⁷⁵ In the mid-eighteenth century and again from the late nineteenth century, its main significance was as a symbol of German nationalism; in Friedrich Hebbel’s words, it was the ‘Gesang von deutscher Kraft und deutscher Treue’⁷⁶ and *Nibelungentreue* or unquestioning loyalty was celebrated as one of the noblest of German virtues. However, in ‘Hommage à Stalin 1’, the Nibelung heroes do not aspire to honourable deeds; rather they pursue a path of destruction.

The *Nibelungentreue*, that standard of German virtue, is shown to be nothing other than a blind, unquestioning obedience to duty and comradeship, whose natural consequences are social degradation, bloodshed and destruction. In ‘Hommage à Stalin 1’, Müller suggests a direct link between the Nibelungen and the savagery and

⁷⁴ Heiner Müller, *Germania Tod in Berlin*, ed. by Roland Clauß (Stuttgart, Düsseldorf and Leipzig: Ernst Klett, 2004), p. 5. Future references are designated within the main text in the form (G, page number).

⁷⁵ Jan-Dirk Müller, ‘Contagious Violence’, in *A New History of German Literature*, ed. by David E. Wellbery (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2004), pp. 87-90 (p. 89).

⁷⁶ Cited in Matias Mieth, *Die Masken des Erinnerns* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 51.

destruction of Stalingrad. In doing so, he makes an implicit but clear connection to Hermann Göring's invocation to the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad to model itself on the Nibelungen and their fight to the death of the last man.⁷⁷ By introducing Julius Caesar and Napoleon, Müller is suggesting that exploitation of and disregard for human life is a consequence not only of the German evil of *Nibelungentreue*, but also of European expansionist ambition.

Whereas blind obedience to duty culminates, in 'Hommage à Stalin 1', in anarchic mayhem, the same trait is depicted in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1' as a carefully-constructed tool of the militaristic Prussian monarchy. The Marxist view of Prussian society may have been to concede to the kings some limited degree of enlightenment and to the bourgeoisie some limited role in the advance of the class struggle,⁷⁸ but Müller rejects even this minimal contribution in his re-enactment of the legend of Frederick the Great and the miller of Potsdam, a legend which originally purported to demonstrate the growing influence of the bourgeoisie under the absolutist Prussian monarchy. Frederick is portrayed as a petulant, homosexual fool, and the miller as equally foolish, with a fixation on masturbation. The two engage in a debate on the miller's right to challenge the king's authority, but the communication chasm cannot be bridged. On a number of occasions, the king solemnly declares he is 'der erste Diener meines Staates', a keystone of the doctrine of enlightened absolutism. Each time the miller understands this differently; a typical response is:

Mein Staat ist größer als deiner. Machst du es mit der rechten oder der linken Hand. (G, 8)

In Mieth's opinion, the miller's plebian ways are hardly in keeping with European bourgeois discourse in the eighteenth century.⁷⁹ However, Müller's intention is not to reflect bourgeois life and manners, but to point up the gulf in communication between the Prussian monarchy and bourgeoisie. Only when the working class, symbolised here by a flimsy cloth lion, threatens to disturb the accepted order in society, do monarchy and bourgeoisie combine forces to quell any incipient danger. In the end, the power

⁷⁷ See Herfried Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009), p. 104.

⁷⁸ Dorpalen, p. 151.

⁷⁹ Mieth, p. 44.

resident in the monarchy is unassailable, even if the monarch is a fool. A social system has been established, in which the monarchy demands and gets unquestioned, unconditional obedience from the bourgeoisie. The scene closes on an allegorical note. In cravenly swallowing the king's walking-stick, symbol of Frederick's power, the spineless miller is given the resolve he needs to march resolutely off to Prussia's endless campaigns of war.

The 'deutsche Misere' reached its nadir in the Third Reich, heir to and consummator of the catalogue of destructive traits described by Müller. In 'Die Heilige Familie', fascism's unspeakable atrocities and crimes against humanity, epitomised earlier at Stalingrad, are personified in Hitler and Goebbels. Although they are now dead and Nazism is another tragic episode in German history, the Third Reich itself has left a legacy. It has brought Germany to an end. Germany is dead, replaced by the neo-fascist state of the Federal Republic and the first 'Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat auf deutschem Boden'.

Müller's portrayal of German history is therefore bleak and there is little evidence here of the more optimistic historical narratives promoted by the Party. Yet in the final historical scene, 'Tod in Berlin 1', Müller cites a poem written by Georg Heym in 1910, which seems to suggest a faint light in this historical darkness:

Ein Armenkirchhof ragt, schwarz, Stein an Stein.
Die Toten schau'n den roten Untergang
Aus ihrem Loch. Er schmeckt wie starker Wein.
Sie sitzen strickend an der Wand entlang
Mutzen aus Ruß dem nackten Schläfenbein
Zur Marseillaise, dem alten Sturmgang. (G, 44)

There is little sense here of German faults and failings, as there is in the other historical scenes. Certainly, the scene's title and Heym's 'serious apocalyptic gloom' in a poem with 'an overpowering sense of threat'⁸⁰ create a mood of mourning for defeated causes and dead revolutionaries, but there is also a suggestion that a taste for revolution is a strong stimulant and that, despite setbacks, further revolution is patiently awaited and

⁸⁰ Stoehr, p. 67.

ultimate victory for the masses assured. Müller may be suggesting that, in the end, after so much historical misery, the progress of history towards a socialist utopia may yet be possible.

In six scenes, Müller tracks the evolution of the present GDR between the day of its foundation on 7 October 1949 and 1 July 1953, two weeks after the events of 17 June. As in his review of German history, his reading of GDR society over these early years is at odds with official narratives. In Müller's portrayal, there is a distinct lack of enthusiasm among the people for the GDR and its Soviet and socialist connections from the outset. In 'Die Straße 2', a loudspeaker declares the first 'Arbeiterundbauernstaat auf deutschem Boden'. The only applause also comes from the loudspeaker. This can be viewed, as Volker Bohn suggests, as a piece of farce,⁸¹ but it is also ironic that the only vocal approval of the new state is contrived, fabricated by the Party. It is also ironic that, on this joyous day, the Party is represented by a disembodied voice on a loudspeaker and not in person on the street. Indeed, the street is peopled by an uninspiring bunch. A number are already opposed to the 'Russenstaat' (G, 4) and even those who support the new state show little appetite for co-operating with the authorities in having the objectors apprehended. Two of the play's three prostitutes express their intention to ply their trade in future in the more prosperous West Berlin and two men on stage with suitcases indicate the beginnings of the *Republikflucht*. Only the third prostitute shows any enthusiasm for celebrating the new state.

By 5 March 1953, the day of Stalin's death, little has changed. The title of the scene set on this day, 'Hommage à Stalin 2', is ironic. Sirens and bells do indeed signal official acknowledgement of the death of the great man, conqueror of fascism and father of the people. But clearly, the Party has not been able to carry the people with it in its heroisation of Stalin. His death prompts remarkably little reaction from the people; what reaction there is to the news ranges from dry, cursory indifference: 'Lang hats gedauert' (G, 18) to quiet satisfaction: 'Das muß gefeiert werden' (G, 20).

Far from being united in socialism, the GDR and its society are deeply divided. Workers are very unhappy with their working conditions. The productivity norms are

⁸¹ Volker Bohn, 'Germania Tod in Berlin', in Lehmann and Primavesi, pp. 207-14 (p. 208).

deeply unpopular and the *Aktivisten*, workers rewarded by the Government for outperforming the norms, are regarded as ‘Arbeiterverräter’ (G, 22). One such *Aktivist* has experienced his fellow-workers’ fury at first hand. Of his wounded and bandaged head, he says:

Das ist der Dank der Arbeiterklasse.
Sie wollten mich zum Denkmal umarbeiten.
Das Material kam aus dem vierten Stock. (G, 14)

On 17 June itself, there is a lack of solidarity or unified purpose. Hilse, the old communist, refuses to have anything to do with the calls to strike. His colleagues do all strike, but their reasons for doing so are varied. One feels the need to show solidarity with his fellow workers:

Wer nicht für uns ist
Ist gegen uns. (G, 33)

For another, it is the excitement of his first strike:

Mein erster Streik. Ein Seemann
Muß alles kennen. (G, 33)

There is, however, another darker force in play on the building sites. Müller’s contention is that the Soviet occupying forces, faced with a disastrously depleted workforce after the war, replenished it with old Nazis, so long as they had not stood charged with actual war crimes. This resulted in a workforce infected and influenced by the old Nazi beliefs and aspirations.⁸²

The General, one of the group of workers which includes Hilse and the young builder, is one such old Nazi. He goes on strike because he sees the potential on 17 June seriously to embarrass the GDR government. When the call goes out exhorting the workers to march to the Ministry offices, his thought is:

⁸² Müller makes this point and identifies it as a cause of the 17 June disturbances in, for example, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 135 and ‘Stalingrad war eigentlich’, p. 199.

Jetzt wird deutsch geredet
Mit den Genossen. (G, 33)

This residual fascism is not confined to the building-sites: it extends to all corners of GDR society. It is already evident on GDR foundation day, when one man, unenamoured of the new state, looks forward to the day when the GDR and its Russia-lovers will again be on the rack:

Es gibt noch Bäume, Äste dran, in Deutschland.
Wir sehn uns wieder, Russe, wenn du hängst. (G, 4)

It is again evident on 17 June, when a communist finds himself in a GDR prison, confronted by a Nazi and other characters who, if not actually fascists, would certainly have had fascist sympathies. It is, however, most clearly demonstrated in 'Hommage à Stalin 2'. A drunk in the pub recalls his experiences as an officer at Stalingrad. Earlier in the day, he had met a man who had been one of his company on the battlefield. They had reminisced about the past and pondered the future. The drunk had put a question to his comrade:

Kannst du noch robben, Willi, altes Schwein.
Und was soll ich dir sagen, du glaubst es nicht:
Der konnte noch. (G, 23)

Willi is keeping himself in readiness to fight for the fascist cause again, should he be called upon. But most alarmingly of all, Willi is a Party functionary, a state secretary, working in the higher echelons of the Ministry.

That there are fascists at the heart of the GDR government is a serious indictment of the Party leadership. It is one of a number of indications in *Germania Tod in Berlin* that the Party has failed to show leadership and does not merit the respect of its people. Just as the prostitute, by feigning constancy and purity, has deceived and disillusioned the young builder, so has the Party betrayed the people:

Wenn dir zum Beispiel einer sagt, deine
Partei, für die du dich geschunden hast
Und hast dich schinden lassen, seit du weißt
Wo rechts und links ist, und jetzt sagt dir einer
Daß sie sich selber nicht mehr ähnlich sieht
Deine Partei, vor lauter Dreck am Stecken
Du gehst die Wände hoch und ohne Aufzug. (G, 46)

In the same final scene, Hilse, the communist, says:

Wir sind eine Partei, mein Krebs und ich. (G, 45)

He identifies himself with his Party, but a Party that now harbours a serious, possibly fatal sickness. The sickness has been there since the foundation of the GDR. In 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 2', the President declares solidarity with the injured *Aktivist*:

Die Steine, die sie auf uns schmeißen heute
Genosse, passen morgen in die Wand. (G, 14)

It is all perfunctory, however, because the President hurries off to a reception with intellectuals. The old Prussian privileged classes may have gone, but caviar and champagne in aristocratic castles is still the order of the day for those, like the President, who can aspire to it.

Du wirst dich dran gewöhnen müssen. Ich
Habs auch gelernt. (G, 14)

The 'dictatorship of the masses' is a sham. When a Party functionary says, 'wenn wir Kohlsuppe löffeln mit der Bevölkerung, machen sie Hackfleisch aus uns, hier ist Deutschland, Genosse' (G, 13), the message is clear. The Party has no greater desire than Frederick had to get too close to the masses: they are dangerous.

Müller paints a picture, then, of a society badly served by its Party and seriously, possibly terminally flawed. From a communist perspective, it is ominous that the only self-declared communists in the play, Hilse and the communist in prison, both die. Yet,

just as the final historical scene ‘Tod in Berlin 1’ carries seeds of hope for the historical process, so ‘Tod in Berlin 2’ suggests a better future for society. Hilse is dying and, with him, the way of life of Rosa Luxemburg and the old communists. Yet, before he dies, he envisions a utopia, where the red flag flies over a united Germany and German children play contentedly in a socialist world. It is a utopia that is still possible if the young builder and his pregnant bride-to-be, or the working class and the Party, can move on from their difficult past. The final word in the play, the girl’s positive ‘Ja’ suggests it is possible. But, given the obstacles and uncertainties, it is no more than a possibility.

German history is, then, a ‘deutsche Misere’, a catalogue of missed chances for the German nation, that has resulted in division of people, classes, society and the nation itself, and powerful continuities between German history and GDR society are evident. This is a pessimistic prospect, but, in contradiction, a dialectical view of history makes it possible to hope for a more optimistic alternative.

Realism and Surrealism

As we have seen, Müller began to write *Germania Tod in Berlin* in 1956, a period when he was using forms of realism and Socialist Realism in plays like *Der Lohndrucker* and *Die Umsiedlerin*. He uses this basic style in scenes in *Germania Tod in Berlin*, but now in apposition to a surrealist style which predominates in other scenes.

According to the theatre director, B. K. Tragelehn, the scene ‘Die Straße 2’ was written in 1961.⁸³ The scene, set in East Berlin on the GDR’s foundation day, is written in a style reminiscent of the ‘Produktionsstücke’ that Müller was writing at the time, generally realistic and with elements of Socialist Realism. The scene concludes with one of the play’s three prostitutes, *Hure 1*, preferring to celebrate the GDR on this joyful day rather than tout for business:

Heute ist Feiertag. Heute geh ich allein. (G, 7)

A young man has just gallantly rescued her from the unwanted attentions of a drunk. It is not stated explicitly in the play, but it seems likely that the young man is the builder

⁸³ Cited in Barnett, p. 166.

who will stand by the old communist Hilse's deathbed with *Hure 1*, now his pregnant bride-to-be, at his side, the pair symbolising hope for the future. The beginnings of a Socialist Realist story are here: a story, told in the style of nineteenth-century realism, in which flawed or under-developed characters develop into positive heroes, guided by the wisdom of the Party and socialist experience.

The rest of 'Die Straße 2', however, fails to maintain the conventions of Socialist Realism or indeed of realism generally. In the first place, the old man's speech, recalling the failed revolution of 1918, whilst realistic in its content, is delivered in a non-realistic verse form with lyrical language:

Die Kaiserhure war Proletenbraut
Für eine Nacht, nackt im Novemberschnee
Vor Hunger aufgeschwemmt, vom Generalstreik
Gerüttelt, mit Proletenblut gewaschen. (G, 4)

Secondly, dialogue and action in the rest of the scene reveal a society at odds with Party representations. People are unenthusiastic about the new State and its Soviet guarantor, the beginnings of a pervasive secret service are visible, people in all walks of social life are fleeing to the West and 'Windjacken', Western hooligans, are exerting a disruptive influence on society.

This mixture of Socialist Realism, 'anti-socialist' realism and lyricism is typical of the GDR scenes. In 'Die Brüder 2', a communist envisions a ghastly Germany under fascist/capitalist rule, which of course accords with Party views, but his vision is delivered in verse. This scene depicts that most inadmissible of occurrences, a communist in a GDR jail. In 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 2', an *Aktivist* is honoured for his achievements for socialism, but the scene also includes implied criticism of the Party leadership, and there is a surreal appearance of the ghost of Frederick the Great as a vampire. 'Hommage à Stalin 2' offers similar variety: the Socialist Realism of Hilse's uncompromising socialist stance in defence of his state and Party, as well as his fatherly concern for the young builder, is set against a realist depiction of the deep divisions within the working class in the GDR, a Nazi's lyrical recollection of past deeds and

anticipation of future ones, and a ghostly *Schädelverkäufer* who seems to hold out both fear and hope for the future of socialism.

In contrast to these realist or at least partly realistic portrayals, the historical scenes are written in very different styles. Only the opening scene, 'Die Straße 1', is played out as a realistic scene, although even here, two characters are exaggeratedly larger than life and some of the dialogue is delivered in rhyming couplets. In 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1', actors play the parts of circus clowns playing the parts of Frederick the Great and the miller. 'Hommage à Stalin 1' and 'Die Heilige Familie' are scenes of extreme, chaotic surrealism and farce. 'Die Brüder 1' is a historiographical text and 'Tod in Berlin 1' a poem, written in 1910: in neither of these scenes does Müller provide any indication as to how the text is to be performed or any other stage direction.

It has already been noted that the strictly chronological order of the GDR scenes affords a clinical appraisal of the evolution of the GDR between 1949 and 1953, whereas the random order of the historical scenes precludes a similar appraisal of German history. The contrasting stylistic approaches to the two sets of scenes highlight this difference in treatment of past and present. However, the structure of *Germania Tod in Berlin* is more than a simple contrast of scenic styles. The conjunction of realistic and surrealist scenes serves a wider purpose.

The play eschews the theatrical unities of time and place. The randomness and surrealism of the historical scenes underlines this absence of unity. A similar approach to the GDR scenes would, however, have resulted in an unco-ordinated and unfathomable assemblage of images. An alternative stabilising factor is therefore required to provide a constant point of reference and interpretive baseline. The orderly and realistically-depicted evolution of GDR society provides the unifying thread within the play, allowing the audience to follow its meaning and logical paths. Barnett points out that traditional Western drama which bypasses the unities of time and space retains a coherence by following a concept of plot.⁸⁴ The evolution of the GDR serves as this play's plot.

⁸⁴ Barnett, p. 162.

Furthermore, although the historical scenes are random in terms of chronological order, the actual pairing of scenes is not as random as it may seem at first glance. Müller creates continuity and association in different ways. A feature of *Germania Tod in Berlin* is the degree of noise and cacophony, a fact which itself, of course, serves to underline the violence and discord in German past and present. Much of this noise is used to link an historical scene to its paired GDR scene. The mocking laughter of the middle-class baker and sign-distributor at the end of 'Die Straße 1' carries over into 'Die Straße 2'. The chaotic din of crashing metal and human screams which closes the Nibelungen scene merges into the noise of sirens and bells which opens the GDR scene set on the day of Stalin's death. The detonation caused when Hitler in 'Die Heilige Familie' has Germania blown to bits by a cannon reverberates after the curtain falls on the scene. Such continuities suggest that the flaws and failings that existed in the past live on in the GDR.

Müller also links scenes more explicitly. In 'Die Straße 2', the old man on the Berlin street in the newly-founded GDR recalls the same street during the revolution of 1918. When the *Aktivist* in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 2' is set upon by Frederick's vampire-ghost, a direct link is established between the GDR in 1950 and the Prussian age of Frederick the Great depicted in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1'. The drunken ex-Nazi reminiscing in 'Hommage à Stalin 2' about his experiences in the SA and at Stalingrad establishes a continuity between the Nibelungen/Nazi forces in 'Hommage à Stalin 1' and fascism in the GDR. The ex-Nazi General in 'Das Arbeiterdenkmal' establishes a similar connection with the Third Reich depicted in 'Die Heilige Familie'.

Montage and Fragmentation

'Ich habe, wenn ich schreibe, immer nur das Bedürfnis, den Leuten so viel aufzupacken, daß sie nicht wissen, was sie zuerst tragen sollen [...]. Es geht, glaube ich, nur noch mit Überschwemmungen.'⁸⁵ When Müller made this remark in an interview in 1975, he had already concluded that standard narratives of German history must be challenged and reassessed. A new type of theatre was required, where audiences would be disorientated

⁸⁵ Heiner Müller, 'Literatur muß dem Theater Widerstand leisten: Ein Gespräch mit Horst Laube', in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, I, 1986, pp. 14-30 (p. 20).

by a bombardment of images and shocked out of the comfort zone of received notions of history and society. The key to such theatre was montage and fragmentation, the formal basis of *Germania Tod in Berlin*.

Barnett describes montage as ‘theoretically (and formally) disparate scenes [...] juxtaposed in a bid to break open ideas of linearity and cohesion’.⁸⁶ In *Germania Tod in Berlin*, the play is made up entirely of such disparate scenes or elements, and meaning is created through the structuring device of paired scenes.⁸⁷ We have already seen how such use of montage in *Germania Tod in Berlin* disrupts the dramatic unities and creates shock, ‘whereby the unexpected challenges our traditional view of the subject matter in question’.⁸⁸ As important as disparity between scenes in the play, however, is fragmentation within scenes. Erika Fischer-Lichte describes *Germania Tod in Berlin* as a ‘montage of fragments’,⁸⁹ suggesting that, in this play, the montage is entirely made up of fragments. As Stoehr argues, the process of fragmentation occurs where Müller combines ‘fragments of his own texts, other writers’ texts, history, contemporary reality and dream and nightmare images’.⁹⁰ In a letter to the theatre critic, Martin Linzer, in 1975, Müller explains the nature and purpose of fragmentation. He is writing of the staging of *Die Schlacht/Traktor*, but his remarks are generally applicable to his drama:

Formal ist SCHLACHT/TRAKTOR [...] der Versuch, ein Fragment synthetisch herzustellen. Keine dramatische Literatur ist an Fragmenten so reich wie die deutsche. Das hat mit dem Fragmentcharakter unserer (Theater-) Geschichte zu tun [...]. Die Fragmentarisierung eines Vorgangs betont seinen Prozeßcharakter, hindert das Verschwinden der Produktion im Produkt, die Vermarktung, macht das Abbild zum Versuchsfeld, auf dem Publikum koproduzieren kann. Ich glaube nicht, daß eine Geschichte, die ‘Hand und Fuß hat’ (die Fabel im klassischen Sinn), der Wirklichkeit noch beikommt.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Barnett, p. 161.

⁸⁷ Barnett, p. 163.

⁸⁸ Barnett, p. 162.

⁸⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre*, tr. by Jo Riley (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 341.

⁹⁰ Stoehr, p. 383.

⁹¹ Heiner Müller, ‘Ein Brief’, *Werke*, VIII, 2005, pp. 174-75.

Here, Müller asserts that history is not a series of tidily-coherent and completed episodes. It is instead an ongoing, incomplete process, which each of us must appraise for ourselves, rather than accepting ‘cut and dried’ narratives, such as those provided by the classical ‘Fabel’. In dramatic fragmentation, he adds, German theatrical tradition already possesses the means to convey this sense of history as continuous process and engage audiences constructively in historical re-evaluation. Müller’s use of the term ‘synthetisch’ adds a further dimension. The word suggests modification or adaptation of the fragment to ensure it has meaning in its context, something Müller achieves by his choice of location of the fragments within a montage.

Fragmentation occurs between scenes. Each historical scene is independent of preceding and succeeding historical scenes: among the more prominent differentiating features are the lack of any chronological order, the different textual and dramatic styles and the varying length of scenes. The scenes are, of course, anchored in the play because of their general historical theme and because each is paired with a GDR scene, but each historical theme is also a fragment in that it is detached from and has no structured connection to the other historical scenes. Fragmentation between scenes applies primarily to the historical scenes. As we have seen, a tighter structural relationship between the GDR scenes provides shape and continuity to the play.

Fragmentation within scenes manifests itself in a variety of ways and is not restricted to the historical scenes. A notable example of fragmentation within a scene is what Müller calls ‘Anachronismus’. Essentially, fragments of history from different eras are telescoped together within the same scene in such a way ‘daß man die Epoche zusammenschiebt, daß man jetzt in eine Art Zeitraffer auf die Geschichte, die Vergangensheitsgeschichte, blickt’.⁹² There are numerous examples in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. One that Müller himself uses to illustrate his use of the device is the appearance of Frederick the Great as a vampire in ‘Brandenburgisches Konzert 2’, a scene set in the GDR around 1950. Another is the appearance of the biblical Three Wise Men in Hitler’s bunker in 1945. In fact, there is a double layer of anachronism here, in that the

⁹² ‘Einen historischen Stoff’, p. 36.

Three Wise Men also represent the postwar Western Allies. A third example, referred to earlier, is seen in ‘Hommage à Stalin 1’, where the eras of Julius Caesar, the Nibelungen and Napoleon all coalesce into the World War II theatre at Stalingrad. Fragmentation and reconstitution of history in this manner is a reassertion that history cannot be neatly packaged and shelved: rather fragments of history are set alongside each other to demonstrate that it is a continuous process, a fusion of past, present and future.

Fragmentation extends to text in the play. Scenes are often an uneven mix of short, clipped exchanges and long, lyrical monologues, a stratagem which breaks up the flow within each scene into fragmented units. The very title, in its lack of any punctuation or syntactical structure, suggests both disjunction and continuity. Each of the three main words carries a deep significance within the context of the play. ‘Germania’ is, of course, Germany, but the word is imbued with a great deal more potency than ‘Deutschland’. The ancient ‘Germania’ of Tacitus’ time was resurrected in the Middle Ages as the ‘*teutsches Mädchen*’, symbol of national consciousness and unity. She re-emerged at different times under different heroic guises, such as victory goddess, national bride and mother of the German nation.⁹³ And Germania was the name envisaged for Albert Speer’s reconstructed capital of the Thousand-Year Reich. The ‘Germania’ concept, then, suggests German unity, which Müller still hopes for, and German militant nationalism, which he detests. The importance of ‘*Tod*’ or death as a leitmotif in the play will be discussed later. ‘Berlin’, like ‘Germania’, evokes a range of images, primarily that of capital city of Prussia and the Third Reich and now the partitioned capital of two separate Germanies.

Text and Intertextuality

Müller’s use of extraneous texts is a rich source of fragmentation in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. His importation of texts ranges from re-use of the actual text to adaptation of the ideas within a text. He frequently re-uses his own texts. A scene in *Die Schlacht*, ‘Die Nacht der langen Messer’, the story of a conflict between two brothers, one a Nazi and the other a communist is reworked with much of the original text retained in ‘Die Brüder

⁹³ For a full account, see Jost Hermand, ‘Braut, Mutter oder Hure? Heiner Müllers “Germania” und ihre Vorgeschichte’, in Hermand and Fehervary, pp. 52-69.

2' in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. The death of the communist in this same scene is based upon 'Schotterbek', his short prose piece written in 1953. Single phrases re-appear frequently. 'Ich hatt einen Kameraden' (itself borrowed from a nineteenth-century poem by Ludwig Uhland),⁹⁴ turns up in *Die Schlacht* and *Germania 3*, as well as in *Germania Tod in Berlin*.⁹⁵

Müller also borrows extensively from others. His plays are often re-workings or adaptations of earlier works. For example, *Der Lohndrücker* is heavily indebted to a number of writers, including Brecht and Eduard Claudius, who both used the original Hans Garbe story,⁹⁶ and the scene in *Wolokolamsker Chaussee*, 'Das Duell', is based on an Anna Seghers story of the same title. As we have seen, Müller's 1953 prose piece 'Das Loch im Strumpf' used not only the idea, but part of the actual text from an earlier work. The title of his autobiography, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, is taken from Ludwig Renn's novel of the same name. So extensively does he trawl for texts that, as Gemünden notes, 'it is often impossible to distinguish Müller the reader from Müller the writer'.⁹⁷

The texts Müller imports into *Germania Tod in Berlin* take various forms and create contextual links to one or other of the play's themes. Two complete scenes are borrowed texts. 'Die Brüder 1' is an extract from Tacitus' *Annals* of the first century AD, a text that played a significant part in the formation of a German national consciousness and the development of the Germania cult. Georg Heym's poem of 1910, which provides the text for the scene 'Tod in Berlin 1', is preoccupied with the subject of revolution. The *Schädelverkäufer* quotes passages from Virgil, Martin Luther, Walther von der Vogelweide and Gottfried August Bürger, which reveal the character's extensive scholarship, but also, in their sombreness, his ambivalent position between life and death.

Apart from these more erudite citations, the play is peppered with snatches from

⁹⁴ See Bernd Matzkowski, *Erläuterungen zu Heiner Müllers Germania Tod in Berlin*: vol. 401, Königs Erläuterungen und Materialien (Hollfeld: C. Bange, 2000), p. 52.

⁹⁵ *Die Schlacht*, in Heiner Müller, *Der Lohndrücker, Philoktet, Die Schlacht mit Materialien*, ed. by Reinhard Tschapke (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1975), pp. 68-78 (p. 70); and *Germania 3 Gespenster am toten Mann*, in Heiner Müller, *Germania* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 59-102 (p. 70).

⁹⁶ In the early 1950s, Brecht's unfinished Büsching project and Claudius' novel *Menschen an unserer Seite* were based on the Hans Garbe story.

⁹⁷ Gemünden, p. 118.

old romantic songs, speeches and catchphrases. Some evoke the romantic spirit of Germany's past, usually ironically. A drunk serenades *Hure 1*:

WALDESLUST WALDESLUST
O WIE EINSAM SCHLÄGT DIE BRUST. (G, 7)⁹⁸

Other texts recall the more sinister militaristic past. Goebbels is interrupted twice as he begins to recite a bellicose speech he first made in Berlin in February 1943:

WOLLT IHR DEN TOTALEN – (G, 29-30)⁹⁹

The miller of Potsdam marches off to yet another Prussian war to the words of a World War 1 catchphrase:

JEDER SCHUSS EIN RUSS JEDER TRITT EIN BRIT JEDER STOß EIN FRANZOS. (G, 13)

There are many allusions to and borrowings from other dramatists' work in *Germania Tod in Berlin*: the scene 'Nachtstück' is very reminiscent of Beckett's *Endgame*, Frederick/Clown 1's final words in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1' are:

ET TU, BRUTE (G, 13),

taken from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and in the same scene, the swallowing of Frederick's walking stick by the miller of Potsdam is an idea borrowed from Heine's *Deutschland ein Wintermärchen*.¹⁰⁰ A particularly interesting instance of this form of intertextuality is the conflation of Hilse in the final scene, 'Tod in Berlin 2', with Gerhart Hauptmann's Hilse in *Die Weber*. In a variant of his *Anachronismus*, Müller introduces an episode from history into his dramatic portrayal of the GDR in 1953, but, in this case, the historical episode is itself a dramatic representation. *Die Weber* is a dramatic depiction of the weavers' revolt in Silesia in 1844, brought about by the increasingly difficult working conditions the weavers were experiencing. Support

⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that Müller uses upper case throughout for all his citations from other authors, apart from the extract from Tacitus' *Annals* and the Heym poem, each of which forms a complete scene.

⁹⁹ The next word in Goebbels' 1943 speech was 'Krieg'. See Matzkowski, p. 57.

¹⁰⁰ See Matzkowski, p. 44.

among the weavers for the uprising was generally universal, except for Hilse, a deeply devout believer in divine providence, a man whose ‘acceptance of misery on earth is supported by an unshakeable belief in compensation in the world to come’.¹⁰¹ He also believes and trusts his monarchist/capitalist government and predicts that the uprising will end in disaster. Accordingly, he adamantly refuses to join or support the insurgents. Ironically, he dies when a ricocheting bullet from a military gun hits him and the play ends on this note.

Obvious parallels can be drawn between the two plays. The weavers, Prussian military and exploitative factory owners in *Die Weber* correspond to the construction workers, Soviet tanks and Party norm-setters respectively in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. There are also a number of similarities between Müller’s Franz Hilse and Hauptmann’s Gustav Hilse, but a number of differences too (the difference in first names being a useful starting point). Both are old working-class men, who, nevertheless, refuse to take part in a working-class uprising. In Gustav’s case it is because he trusts in God to set things right, whereas Franz implicitly trusts his Party. Both men die, despite their support for the status quo.

But there are differences. Gustav’s devotional belief system (‘quietist’, as Boulby describes it)¹⁰² is far removed from the aggressive stance that Franz displays towards anyone who, like the General who works with him, holds non-communist beliefs. Gustav’s eyes were turned towards heaven; Franz’ utopia, like Rosa Luxemburg’s, was firmly grounded:

zwischen den Abwässern aus
Den Knochenmühlen, wo dich jeder kennt. (G, 47)

And whereas Gustav dies from the direct, if unintentional action of his natural political adversaries, Franz dies of a cancer that Müller equates with a disillusionment with his natural political allies.

Further parallels are evident. There have been two failed uprisings, one in 1844

¹⁰¹ M. Boulby, ‘Introduction’, in *Die Weber by Gerhart Hauptmann*, ed. by M. Boulby (London: George G Harrap, 1971), pp. 7-78 (p. 54).

¹⁰² Ibid.

(and by extension 1848), the second on 17 June 1953. In both cases, support among the working class was not unanimous, the unspoken premise being that this may have contributed to defeat. In both cases, the holder of an older set of working-class values dies. But whereas Gustav Hilse dies firmly believing that his utopia lies in heaven, Franz dreams that his will come to pass on earth. Whether either utopia is anything other than an old man's delusion is left in the balance. As so often, Müller leaves his audience to decide for themselves which utopia, if either, is the more likely.

Destruction and Renewal

Death is the pervasive leitmotif in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. Few scenes in the play are without images or tokens of death, and its centrality is underlined in the play's title. Death, however, takes different forms and serves different representative and symbolic purposes.

It is firstly cause and effect of Germany's destructive and self-destructive tendencies. There are many indications of this throughout the play. In 'Die Brüder 1', violence is not actually enacted on stage, but in Tacitus' *Annals*, the meeting between the two brothers was sandwiched between battles in the oldest 'deutsch-germanischen Krieg'.¹⁰³ At the end of 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1', Prussian prosecution of war and World War I are both invoked. It is, however, in 'Hommage à Stalin 1' that we see German history from the bloodthirsty Nibelungen to the Nazi nemesis at Stalingrad at its most murderous, German history as slaughterhouse, as Genia Schulz puts it.¹⁰⁴

Other instances of violent death signal an end of hope. In 'Die Straße 2', the old man recalls the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, deaths which, as we have seen, represent for Müller the death of a German way to socialism. In the same vein, the death of a communist in a GDR prison on 17 June signals the end of an aspiration. At the literal level, the communist is killed by a Nazi and his accomplices, who are enraged to learn that the Uprising has failed and that their hopes of a return to fascism have been dashed. But the communist has effectively been condemned to death by fellow communists who have put him in this prison because his brand of German

¹⁰³ Schmitt, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ Schulz, *Heiner Müller*, p. 11.

socialism is at odds with the Stalinist politics of his Party. Stalin's army may have rescued the GDR (again) from the clutches of fascism, but the tragedy of 17 June is that German socialism died under the wheels of Soviet tanks, along with German working-class aspirations. The dying communist's last words, 'Wer bin ich' (G, p. 43), question his purpose as a German communist in the GDR and signal his (and Müller's) despair that the GDR has lost its way and cannot or will not take the German road to socialism.

Hope also dies in Hitler's bunker in 1945. 'Die Heilige Familie' is not only a mordant portrayal of the last days of the Third Reich, but is also a vitriolic commentary on the origins and nature of West Germany. The Third Reich is near its end, but out of its hideous, fascist lair, crawls an imperialist monster, the Federal Republic, whose birth is presided over by the West. In so doing, the Western allies help Hitler to bestow his final 'gift' on Germany, its destruction, symbolised in the blowing apart of the ancient mother-figure Germania. The Federal Republic is little more than a neo-fascist state. Elsewhere, Müller argues: 'Außerdem hat die Bundesrepublik die Versprechungen des Nationalsozialismus eingelöst'.¹⁰⁵ All hopes of a united, socialist Germany are at an end. Germany is dead, blown apart in a bunker in Berlin.

Not all death in *Germania Tod in Berlin* should, however, be regarded in such an utterly pessimistic light. If we listen to the dead, Müller says, we can find out more about the process of history:

Das Tote ist nicht tot in der Geschichte. Eine Funktion von Drama ist Totenbeschwörung – der Dialog mit den Toten darf nicht abreißen, bis sie herausgeben, was an Zukunft mit ihnen begraben worden ist.¹⁰⁶

These dead or ghostly undead inform Müller's view of history as a continuum of past, present and future. Frederick's ghost as vampire in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 2' offers a good example. His appearance associates the present with the past: it suggests that past and present have more in common than might have been supposed. In this case, it is that the exploitation of the weak by the powerful in Prussian society may have

¹⁰⁵ Heiner Müller, 'Das Böse ist die Zukunft', in *Jenseits*, pp. 69-81 (p. 76).

¹⁰⁶ Heiner Müller, 'Ein Gespräch zwischen Wolfgang Heise und Heiner Müller', in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, II, 1990, pp. 50-71 (p. 64).

an echo in the GDR. The dead in the *Armenkirchhof* in 'Tod in Berlin 1' and the *Schädelverkäufer* (if not actually a ghost, certainly very ghostly) have, as we have already seen, a dialogue to offer us, concerning the process of history. It is somewhat ambiguous, but at least it offers a potentially optimistic reading of the future.

Signs of optimism can also be gleaned from other deaths and self-destruction. Hilse's death and the self-destruction of the man, 'der vielleicht eine Puppe ist' (G, 44), are cases in point here. In Hilse's case, there is the very real possibility that his death will bring change and renewal, an aspiration heightened by the presence at his deathbed of the earnest young builder, his reformed bride-to-be and their unborn baby. Here indeed is a fusion of a failed past, a difficult present and an unknown but potentially hopeful future. In the case of the figure in 'Nachtstück', single interpretations are problematic but in one reading, 'out of death and destruction, new life emerges',¹⁰⁷ a new life which may, after so much pain, failure and defeat, represent the birth or rebirth of socialism.

Discordance and Harmony

In a sea of discordance of violent past and flawed present, Müller sets islands of harmony, which offer some respite and a degree of optimism. He creates discordance through his use of motifs of cannibalism, perverted gendering and sexuality, and general noise and mayhem. Harmony arises from the love affair that threads its way through the play and from the presence of children.

It is among the Stalingrad soldiers, that we first encounter cannibalism. Rumours of cannibalism were rife during and after that campaign.¹⁰⁸ It is a theme Müller returns to often in his work. Apart from the Stalingrad scene, which also includes a cannibalistic Julius Caesar, he refers to, alludes to or depicts the consumption of human flesh by humans on a number of occasions in the play. The drunken Nazi describes conditions in Stalingrad:

Wir haben keinen Knochen

¹⁰⁷ McGowan, 'Marxist-Postmodernist-German', p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1998), p. 413.

Gefragt, ob er vom Pferd ist oder ICH
HATT EINEN KAMARADEN. (G, 22)¹⁰⁹

Hitler eats a soldier for breakfast. In keeping with the ludicrous tenor of the scene (sharpened by the audience's general awareness that Hitler was a vegetarian) he complains that the soldier has not been properly prepared: 'Ich habe befohlen, daß meine Männer rasiert werden, bevor ich sie esse.' (G, 26) In the communist's vision of a future fascist Germany, in 'Die Brüder 2', German children suck Germany's lifeblood at their mothers' breasts (G, 42).

Whatever the circumstances, we are conditioned to regard cannibalism as being beyond the pale of all acceptable human behaviour, invoking feelings of revulsion and horror. Müller employs the image to signify the utter degradation of the 'deutsche Misere', the depravity of Stalingrad and the inhumanity of fascism.

As cannibalism is a perversion designed to shock audiences, so also is the play's portrayal of gendering and sexuality. Masturbation features in 'Hommage à Stalin 1', and also, along with hints of homosexuality, in 'Brandenburgisches Konzert 1'. Both themes appear in 'Die Heilige Familie', along with outrageous gender distortion.

In 'Hommage à Stalin 1', masturbation is part of an orgy of slaughter, self-mutilation, cannibalism and sexual frenzy, driven by bloodlust, greed, cynicism and misogyny. It is provoked when Gernot, the youngest Nibelung, wonders if the company of women might not be a more appealing alternative to constant conflict. The Nibelungen obsession with *Männerarbeit* and *Nibelungentreue*, however, precludes any embrace of such norms of civilised behaviour.

Compared to the excesses of the Nibelungen, Frederick's homosexuality and the miller's pre-occupation with masturbation are depicted in relatively mild terms. Nevertheless, the pair are portrayed as incompetent fools and there is a clear implication that their disinterest in 'proper' sex adds to their personal inadequacies.

¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, Müller re-uses the phrase 'Ich hatt einen Kamaraden' in both *Germania Tod in Berlin* and other works, always in this cannibalistic sense.

Hitler's absorption with his *Pimmel* and protecting it from the grasping hands of Germania are but a minor detail when compared to the distortion of gender and sexuality in 'Die Heilige Familie'. Goebbels is depicted as Hitler's wife, ample of bosom and heavily pregnant. He gives birth to a thalidomide wolf, an event whose staging has greatly taxed directors' ingenuity.¹¹⁰ In fact, it emerges that Goebbels is Hitler's second wife, a wildly jealous successor to Ernst Röhm:

HITLER: Ich kenne das aus meiner ersten Ehe. *Goebbels gebärdet sich hysterisch*. Bist du immer noch eifersüchtig auf den guten alten Ernst? (G, 28)¹¹¹

Among the Prussian aristocracy and bourgeoisie, in the Nibelungen court and in Hitler's retinue, not a single 'proper' man exists. They are all too busy waging war and destruction to learn the norms of civilised society. Another duality is manifested here: horrific savagery and ridiculous impotence, fused together in the same German characters.

The incidence of prostitution in the play is notable: of eighty characters, four are women (excluding the symbolic Germania) and three of these are prostitutes, statistics that are hardly representative. The three prostitutes are perfectly ordinary and have a robust sense of humour: indeed, one of them, as we shall see shortly, attains a degree of heroism. However, prostitution is a concept in which someone debases him or herself, literally or metaphorically, for sordid personal gain. In the literal sense, prostitution clearly continues to flourish in the GDR, a fact whose chief significance is that it is rather at odds with Party narratives. Müller uses the concept in its metaphorical sense to establish another point of continuity between past and present and, in so doing, to make another critical observation about the Party. The old man in 'Die Straße 2' who recalls the 1918 revolution, refers to Berlin as the 'Kaiserhure':

¹¹⁰ In the play's first showing in Munich in 1978, director Ernst Wendt had Goebbels spreadeagle himself across a Volkswagen Beetle, an icon of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder*. The wolf emerged from the car's bonnet. See Barnett, p. 180 and Henning Rischbieter, 'Nur heilloser Schrecken?' *Theater heute*, 19 (1978), no. 6, p. 10.

¹¹¹ Hitler, fearing Röhm's growing influence within the Nazi party, had him assassinated in 1934. To add further here to the confusion of sexualities, Röhm was in fact homosexual.

Hier haben wir Berlin, der Kaiserhure
Die Fetzen vom Kartoffelbauch gerissen
Den Preußenflitter von der leeren Brust. (G, 4)

Just as Berlin in the Second Reich was guilty of self-debasement, so was the Party in 1953. In the final scene, when the young builder complains bitterly of his bride-to-be, *Hure I*:

Daß sie sich selber nicht mehr ähnlich sieht, deine
Partei [...] (G, 46),

we can understand the literal point he makes. But it is also clear that the Party is charged here with having prostituted itself; it has been neither as pure nor as honest as it should have been.

As a counterweight to all this portrayal of perverted and sordid sexuality, there is a love story in *Germania Tod in Berlin*. The young builder meets *Hure I* in 1949 and carries a torch for her until they meet again in 1953. He woos her ardently and they become lovers. It is only when she is expecting his child that he learns the full truth about her past. He is devastated, but his love for her permits of no option but to make her his bride and hope that their union will be happy and permanent. Again, the story operates at a literal and a symbolic level. Symbolically, the young builder represents the working class and the girl, the Party. The future relationship between the two is vested in their unborn baby. It is an uncertain future, but with the young man's will to make it work and the girl's reformed ways, there is reason for hope that the baby will thrive and prosper.

Hope, then, lies with this baby and other children. Children, though, are not universally a symbol of hope in the play. In 'Die Straße 1', they are seen to be driven by need into the exploitative arms of the middle class, although their willingness to work for the middle-class sign-distributor also implies working-class implication in the revolution's failure. And, of course, any child tainted with fascism, such as the wolf-child in 'Die Heilige Familie' or the nightmarish children in the communist's vision in

‘Die Brüder 2’ serves as a grim warning, not as a source of optimism for the future. However, in ‘Die Straße 2’, the child on the old man’s back is, in his innocence, a stark contrast to the streetwise children in ‘Die Straße 1’, and provides a ray of hope for the new GDR state. In the final scene, the children are positive signs of hope. Not only is the unborn baby a symbol of the future, but the children in Hilse’s dying vision play contentedly in a socialist world. It is, though, no more than a hope: none of these children as yet exist. Indeed, they may be nothing more than utopian figments of Hilse’s fevered imagination.

Germania Tod in Berlin as Oppositional Writing

Müller completed *Germania Tod in Berlin* in 1971. It was published in the West in 1977 and premiered in the Munich Kammerspiele on 20 April, 1978. Not everyone was pleased with it. Critical review was fairly evenly balanced between the favourable and unfavourable, although amongst the former, it was often Ernst Wendt’s direction rather than the play itself which earned the plaudits. Some reviewers noted that, despite catcalls and walk-outs, particularly during the more shocking scenes, there was long and enthusiastic applause at the end.

Many of the generally favourable reviews were lukewarm, but the unfavourable reviews were often robustly so. Rudolf Krämer-Badori found it all Marxist nonsense, ‘ein waschechtes kommunistisches Stück [...], ein dünnes, armes Ding’.¹¹² Heinz Beckmann thought the play ‘nämlich gar kein Stück: es ist eine Müllschütte voller verbissener Einfälle’.¹¹³ Most trenchant of all, perhaps, was Georg Hensel. He saw the play as nothing more than an apologia for the SED Party and its 17 June narrative: ‘Müller hat die linientreue Parteiansicht vom 17. Juni dramatisiert: die SED-Legende fürs DDR-Lesebuch.’ So incensed was he that he saw things in the play that are simply not there: ‘[Müller] denunziert die Aufständischen als Mörder.’¹¹⁴ What is noticeable in virtually all the reviews, unfavourable or otherwise, is the palpable shock induced by the scene in Hitler’s bunker. Peter Iden’s observation was typical: ‘eine Szene von rabiater

¹¹² Rudolf Krämer-Badori, ‘Wenn der Agitprop kannibalisch wird’, *Die Welt*, 22 April 1978.

¹¹³ Heinz Beckmann, ‘Germania Ragout’, *Rheinischer Merkur*, 28 April 1978.

¹¹⁴ Hensel, ‘Schlachtszenen’.

Geschmacklosigkeit. Deutsche Geschichte im Zerrspiegel der Groteske'.¹¹⁵ It is a reaction that can also be detected in the critical literature. Klussmann concedes the brilliance of the satire in 'Die Heilige Familie', but, 'die Aspekte der Kritik an den Westmächten und an der BR Deutschland bleiben als bloßer Nonsens wirkungslos'.¹¹⁶ Likewise, Schmitt finds the scene 'eine groteske Verzeichnung, die in ihrer schwarzmalenden Übertreibung den historischen Realitäten kaum gerecht zu werden vermag'. It is not at all, Schmitt finds, like the more finely-drawn 17 June scenes.¹¹⁷ One senses that much of the shock and antipathy invoked by the play arose from Müller's conflation of Hitler, fascism and the Third Reich with West Germany and its citizens.

It must, of course, be acknowledged that the adverse reactions of Hensel, Krämer-Badori and others were those of individuals, writing for newspapers with an ideological stance in opposition to Müller's socialist values. There were many others in the West who viewed the play in a more favourable light and, at least, it was performed in the West. A total ban on both publication and performance in the GDR remained in place until 20 January 1989, when it was performed at the Berliner Ensemble under Fritz Marquardt's direction. Müller's own explanation for this ban was that the play portrayed a communist in a GDR jail: 'Ich glaube, der eigentliche Anstoß war die Gefängniszene, über die man nicht sprach, der Kommunist im DDR-Gefängnis.' (K 255) Others ascribe the play's difficulties to Party unhappiness with the association of Rosa Luxemburg with a prostitute in the final scene.¹¹⁸ Either of these would have presented a serious obstacle to *Germania Tod in Berlin's* acceptability in the GDR, but the play's critique of Party and people far transcends one or two specific depictions.

The degree to which *Germania Tod in Berlin* violated the literary conventions of Socialist Realism would have been sufficient cause for suppression. Yet there seems to be little evidence that this was a significant factor. It is interesting to note the different

¹¹⁵ Peter Iden, 'Schrecken aus Deutschland', *Die Zeit*, 28 April 1978.

¹¹⁶ Paul Gerhard Klussmann, 'Deutschland-Denkmale: umgestürzt. Zu Heiner Müllers *Germania Tod in Berlin*', *Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR*, 2 (1981), 159-76 (173).

¹¹⁷ Schmitt, p. 107.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Barnett, p. 188. According to Müller, Deputy Minister for Culture Klaus Höpcke was one of those who took this view. See *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 215.

reception accorded to *Die Schlacht*. It will be recalled that the dialogue between the Nazi and the communist in prison on 17 June in *Germania Tod in Berlin* borrows heavily from a similar scene, 'Die Nacht der langen Messer', in *Die Schlacht*. A key difference is that the scene in *Die Schlacht* takes place, like the rest of the play, in the Third Reich, not in a GDR prison. In many other respects, however, and in particular, in its use of montage and fragmentation, *Die Schlacht* is similar to *Germania Tod in Berlin*. Yet *Die Schlacht* ran continuously for a decade in East Berlin from its first showing in 1975. The conclusion, therefore, must be that, in the 1970s and 1980s, content was more important than form in determining the fate of Müller's plays in the GDR.

In its criticism of Party narratives and GDR society, *Germania Tod in Berlin* presented a serious challenge to the authorities. The play sets out to demonstrate that the Party had failed the people and the cause of German socialism. It had forgotten its mission to lead and had distanced itself from the people. It had allowed or even caused fascism to gain a dangerous toehold at all levels of government and society. It had withheld the full truth about the past, extolling the GDR's humanist inheritance, but omitting to confront the people with less praiseworthy aspects of their past. It had also withheld the full truth about the present, portraying 17 June as a Western fascist-inspired counterrevolutionary plot when it was in fact a combination of Party pusillanimity, popular apathy and the GDR's own fascist tendency. In the wake of 17 June, the Party leadership had had an opportunity to fashion a new contract with the people and to relaunch German socialism, but its fear of the people and of Western power had driven it into an ever more suffocating embrace with the Soviet Union. The people had to shoulder some of the blame. A lack of revolutionary spirit and ambition had allowed the more sinister elements of GDR society to endanger or subvert the class struggle and ultimate victory.

Müller and his dramas had always been a thorn in the Party's flesh, and the authorities would have been predisposed to regard *Germania Tod in Berlin* with disfavour in any case, but as oppositional writing, this play surpassed anything he had yet written. Where Socialist Realism demanded optimistic messages, positive heroes and a guiding role for the Party, Müller's play was profoundly pessimistic, negative

heroes far outnumbered positive ones and the Party was depicted as corrupt and incompetent. A public airing of Müller's portrayal of 17 June and its causes and consequences would have been unthinkable. For that reason, *Germania Tod in Berlin* remained unstaged in the GDR for eighteen years, a testimony to the authorities' fear of its potential.

Conclusion

Müller is an enigma. By his own admission, he hardly noticed 17 June. It was just another day, significant only because of the material he might be able to derive from it to use in his work. His literary offerings at the time reinforce this impression: unlike Brecht, Loest, Heym and others, he wrote nothing to indicate anger, anxiety or personal conflict induced by 17 June or any of its implications. In truth, his prose and interview transcriptions, suffering as they do from a penchant for self-advertisement, are not wholly convincing as evidence of his personal concern with 17 June and its implications, for, if we are to take them at face value, they suggest that he was almost totally indifferent to GDR politics and society. Yet within a few years, he had written *Der Lohndrücker* and *Die Umsiedlerin*, powerful critical commentaries, and he had already sketched out and started work on *Germania Tod in Berlin*, the most trenchant critique of all.

It cannot have been that Müller wrote these plays for immediate public, and particularly Western, consumption, because at this time he was unknown in the West. And it was certainly not a matter of churning out texts to make a living: his plays are far too good and, anyway, they were always more likely to imperil his livelihood than to enhance it. The answer lies, I think, in Müller's deep, lifelong commitment to socialism and in his belief that a better society was possible only through socialism. The problem was that the GDR was a long way from being the socialist society that Müller envisaged. Its Stalinist leaders had failed to unite and inspire the people, who were, as a result, divided and rudderless. The lessons of history and of 17 June had been ignored, and if the GDR continued to ignore them, the future for socialism in Germany was lost.

It is in his drama that Müller most powerfully and eloquently engages with these issues. Not for him an anodyne portrayal of past and present, as prescribed in Party narratives; as Kalb argues, he provides drama which ‘undermines the insidious contract between complacent audiences and the dominant bourgeois dramatic tradition’ of decorative texts, settings and costumes.¹¹⁹ He wants to shock his audience into a reappraisal of comfortable accepted versions of history and out of sleepwalking towards renewed catastrophe. He is, nevertheless, keen that his audiences make up their own minds:

Das Stück versucht nicht, den Kampf zwischen Altem und Neuem, den ein Stückschreiber nicht entscheiden kann, als mit dem Sieg des Neuen vor dem letzten Vorhang abgeschlossen darzustellen; es versucht ihn in das neue Publikum zu tragen, das ihn entscheidet.¹²⁰

Müller wrote these words as an introduction to *Der Lohndrücker*, but they are just as apt for *Germania Tod in Berlin*. He exposes the issues and problems in his society, but he will not provide instant solutions: ‘Antworten und Lösungen interessieren mich nicht. Ich kann keine anbieten. Mich interessieren Probleme und Konflikte.’¹²¹ Such perspectives ran counter to the Party’s utopian narratives.

Müller was no ‘*résistant*’, in that his opposition was never of a type designed to bring down the system. He supported the system, but wanted Party and people to be aware of the problems and to take the necessary steps to correct them. Such an exposition of ailments and remedies constituted unpalatable truths for the Party and earned for Müller and his dramas a panoply of repressive measures. The GDR regime never, of course, approached levels of persecution seen in Stalin’s USSR or Hitler’s Third Reich: nevertheless, Müller’s views were seen as inimical to the state and their expression in the face of all official efforts to suppress them required persistence, ingenuity and no little courage.

¹¹⁹ Kalb, p. 2.

¹²⁰ *Der Lohndrücker*, p. 4.

¹²¹ ‘Mauern’, p. 65.

STEFAN HEYM

‘Auf beiden Seiten ist der 17. Juni umgelogen worden’

Introduction

A feature of cultural life which existed in (and outlasted) the GDR was the complex relationship that often obtained between its writers and the authorities and between its writers and the public in both East and West and, post-1989, in the reunified Germany. With his mixed signals and guarded utterances, Brecht was, as we have seen, an early case in point. One of the most ambivalent of all the figures in this murky cultural landscape was Stefan Heym. From the time of his arrival in the GDR in 1952 until the collapse of the state, he was a thorn in the flesh of the cultural and political authorities there. His work as a journalist and author was continually blocked, and he waged a thirty-year war to have his novel about 17 June published in the GDR. He was harried by the Stasi, prevented from attending cultural events abroad, expelled from the Writers’ Union and heavily fined for publishing work in the West. He was a constant and vigorous critic of the SED regime and its Stalinist instincts. As a result, he was in great demand in Western circles as an icon of dissidence in the GDR.

Yet Heym was much more complex than this picture suggests. Throughout his life he championed socialism and he was a passionate defender of the GDR state. On occasion, his company and services were sought out by Party luminaries, such as Ulbricht and Honecker,¹ and he was never expatriated, as was Wolf Biermann, or imprisoned, as was Erich Loest. In the 1950s, his responses to events such as the death of Stalin, the Uprising on 17 June 1953 and the revelations at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in Moscow in 1956 were on occasion inconsistent and even contradictory and, of course, after the Wall fell, he was pilloried for wishing to perpetuate his own privilege and the people’s misery within a discredited system.²

¹ Heym was, for example, invited to accompany Ulbricht on a factory tour soon after 17 June.

² A particularly vitriolic article condemning Heym and other GDR intellectuals was written by Monika Maron, ‘Die Schriftsteller und das Volk’, *Der Spiegel*, 12 February 1990.

To describe Heym as an oppositional writer, then, is to invite challenges as to the nature of his dissent, the sincerity of his convictions and the integrity of his motives. The difficulty in attaching labels to Heym generally applies also to his thoughts and views on the subject of 17 June. The events of 17 June took place within weeks of his decision to live in the GDR and prompted him to write a series of articles in journals and newspapers, offering his analysis of the causes and his proposed remedies. He also resolved to write a novel about the events; that novel, *5 Tage im Juni*, was finally published in 1974 in Munich and its evolution mirrors that of Heym's own views on GDR society. In 1988, he published *Nachruf*, an autobiography, in which he covers much of this same ground, but of course from a more distant perspective. There is a consistency of view running through these texts, but it is often obscured by postulations that are ambivalent or even contradictory.

In all the texts, there is a marked journalistic quality. Heym was, of course, a very accomplished columnist and essayist, who produced a remarkably wide and influential body of work in this medium over the course of his life: this included the frequent and detailed expression of his concerns over 17 June and GDR society more generally. There are also distinct traces of a journalistic approach in his autobiography and a documentary approach is a significant feature of *5 Tage im Juni*. I will begin this chapter with some general observations about Heym's journalistic background and output. Then I will evaluate the most important of his relevant articles and essays as well as his autobiography, to elicit his views on 17 June, both in its immediate aftermath and over the longer term. With the help of insights gained from this evaluation, I will conclude with a critique of *5 Tage im Juni*.

Journalistic Influences in Heym's Work

It is notable that, of the GDR writers who voiced criticism of the regime's handling of 17 June, none used the pages of the press as extensively or as potently as Stefan Heym. Articles by Brecht, Harich, Loest and others all appeared in newsprint in the weeks after 17 June, but their contributions were limited in number and literary in register. Heym's approach revealed a much deeper awareness of the power of journalism and experience

in harnessing that power.

In *Nachruf*, Heym claims his interest in journalism manifested itself at the relatively early age of eighteen, when he moved from his native Chemnitz to Berlin to escape unwelcome Nazi attention.³ Having completed his *Abitur*, he began to combine journalistic work with studies at university in Berlin and he submitted articles and literary texts to various newspapers. His first serious assignment came from *Berlin am Morgen*, a newspaper whose management insisted on a writing style that was ‘kurz und prägnant’ (N, 59). His assignment was to spend a day with three young unemployed buskers on the streets of Berlin. By his own admission, the subsequent article, ‘Berliner Hofmusik’, was a rather flowery one, but he still deemed the effort to be laudable (N, 60). Heym’s first foray into the world of journalism revealed two characteristics that would always mark his work, a determination to tackle social issues and a desire to write in a readable, entertaining style.

Shortly after the Nazis had gained control of Germany in January 1933, Heym fled to Prague, in fear for his life. Here, he continued his involvement with the press, writing articles for German-language newspapers until 1935, when he obtained a scholarship to study German literature at university in the USA. He was to spend the next sixteen years in the USA or working for US agencies and the experiences of these years were to have a profound influence on the way his journalistic career developed.

Heym’s journalistic skills came to the attention of a group of German antifascists living in the USA and early in 1937, he became chief editor of (and contributor to) the New York-based *Deutsches Volksecho*, which was a broadly-based antifascist German-language newspaper. Heym set about his task with energy, seeking to incorporate into the *Volksecho* features of the American mass press, such as a tabloid format, generous use of photographs and eye-catching headlines.⁴ Heym himself tells of introducing front-page headlines of four centimetre-high capital letters, throwing down a very public gauntlet to fascist opponents and using the language of shock in both English and

³ Stefan Heym, *Nachruf* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2003), p. 56. Future references are indicated in the text by the designation (N, page number). The book was first published in Munich by Bertelsmann in 1988.

⁴ See Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 26.

German (N, 162-4).

Despite Heym's energy, the paper survived for only two years, having struggled constantly against stiff competition from other antifascist papers, a declining German-language readership and its own communist antecedents in an anti-communist environment. Nevertheless, the 1930s were a burgeoning time for the American popular press, and Heym gained invaluable experience of journalism in those years. In *Nachruf* (589) he acknowledges his debt as a columnist with the *Berliner Zeitung* to American columnists of those days such as Walter Winchell, whom Joseph P. McKerns calls 'the father of the modern newspaper gossip column'⁵ and Donald Paneth 'the most powerful journalist in America from 1930 to 1950'.⁶

After the *Deutsches Volksecho* had folded, Heym continued to submit articles to other newspapers, but the next major step in his education in communication skills came in 1943, when he was conscripted into the US army. After training, he joined a 'psychological warfare' unit, where he was responsible for the production of leaflets, newspapers and radio transmissions aimed at undermining morale and/or strengthening resistance to Nazism within the German armed forces. As the war came to an end, his duties were extended to questioning prisoners of war and later, to founding and editing the *Neue Zeitung*, a weekly Munich-based newspaper published by the US army and aimed at the defeated German population. As Hutchinson notes, this was all journalism of a different kind, based on a firm and sensitive knowledge of the German mind, of the propaganda to which the people of Germany had been exposed and of the day-to-day worries of a demoralised nation.⁷

These years taught Heym lessons that would remain with him when he moved to the GDR. In his interviews with defeated German soldiers, he heard a stock response over and over again: 'Was konnte ich denn tun! Ich bin doch nur ein kleiner Mann!' (N, 290) For Heym, who had always declared his solidarity with 'the little man', this

⁵ Joseph P. McKerns (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of American Journalism* (Westport: Greenwood, 1989), p. 752.

⁶ Donald Paneth, *The Encyclopedia of American Journalism* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1983), p. 520.

⁷ Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 45.

demonstrated just how vulnerable people were in the face of exploitative and corrupt wielders of power. He discovered something else: people are ultimately driven by the instinct for self-preservation, not by grand ideals: ‘die großen Ideale, wer braucht sie, wenn Seele und Intellekt verkümmert sind über die Jahre’ (N, 291). He does not make any explicit connection between these sentiments and society in the GDR, but in his journalism there in the 1950s, his articles were intended primarily for the ordinary man, and he realised that the great ideals of socialism were of little consequence, as long as society was broken.

It was natural, then, that Heym should look to journalism as a means of earning his living when he moved to the GDR. Between the time he arrived there and the end of the 1950s he produced an astonishing number of articles for a variety of newspapers and journals, in particular, the *Berliner Zeitung*, for which he wrote a weekly column between 1953 and 1958. In this period, he was best-known for his journalism, popular with a readership more used to styles described by Meg Tait as ‘generally at once leaden, dogmatic and evasive’.⁸ He himself claimed he would have preferred to create ‘schöne Literatur’ but this ‘Alltagsliteratur’ had its merits: ‘Sie zwingt den Autor, sofort und direkt zu denken, um sofort und direkt Stellung zu nehmen; sie ermöglicht es dem Autor, sofort und direkt zu den Menschen zu sprechen, um sofort und direkt in das Geschehen einzugreifen.’⁹

Heym’s freshness of approach in these articles stemmed partly from his experience and training in journalism in a competitive and multifaceted environment. He had had to compete for an audience in the USA, and had therefore had to maintain a high degree of versatility and topicality. His training in psychological warfare and his lack of training as a journalist in the GDR, with its stifling of all personal initiative, was also to his advantage.¹⁰ He married this to a highly personal style at whose heart was a passion for ‘democratic freedoms and a functioning public sphere’.¹¹ Heym was all his life a champion of socialism, and many of his articles railed against imperialist capitalism,

⁸ Meg Tait, *Taking Sides: Stefan Heym’s Historical Fiction* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 13.

⁹ Stefan Heym, ‘Vorbemerkungen’, in *Offen gesagt* (East Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1957), pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

¹⁰ Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 86.

¹¹ Regina Hahn, *The Democratic Dream: Stefan Heym in America* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 21.

which he regarded as the progenitor of and heir to fascism. But he was no slave to state socialism: instead he immersed himself in the concerns and problems of the workers and it was to the ordinary people that he addressed much of his work. He insisted a balance must be found between the interests of people as private individuals and as citizens in a socialist state.¹² Such a balance provided an environment within which everybody was allowed to air his or her views.

This concern for ordinary people informs many of Heym's articles. In 'Die kleinen Angestellten', he reiterates his belief that the individual is more important than bureaucracy and systems. In 'Bürgerliche Hosen', he reminds us that jeans are a useful everyday item for people, not an ideological statement of capitalism. In 'Kein fünftes Rad', he attacks the incompetence and lack of commitment of the GDR's trade unions in their duty of care for the interests of their own workers.¹³

It is not just in content that Heym sets out his stall as defender of the ordinary man, but also in his style and approach. The evils of imperialism and the need for an inclusive democratic socialism are his dominant themes, but his style is varied and fresh. He engages his reader in different ways. Often he introduces his article with a personal anecdote. 'Wir sind Millionen' is an attack on the West, introduced by a very personal account of a visit he made to a young couple with a three-month-old baby.¹⁴ Many of his articles start with a reader's question: in 'Kein fünftes Rad', a worker has written, asking why trade union functionaries never have a starring role in socialist films. A serious political discussion is often prefixed by a funny anecdote: in 'Gespräch in der Küche', he begins thus: 'Bei mir zu Hause haben wir die Frauenfrage so gelöst, daß ich das Geschirr abwasche.'¹⁵

Heym had no sooner embarked on his career in the GDR than the turmoil of 17 June rocked the country. Over the months that followed, he had to tread a very complex

¹² Stefan Heym, 'Der Konflikt der Gewerkschaft im Sozialismus', in *Wege und Umwege: Streitbare Schriften aus fünf Jahrzehnten* (henceforth *Wege*), ed. by Peter Mallwitz (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1980), pp. 247-50 (p. 249).

¹³ 'Die kleinen Angestellten' is reprinted in Stefan Heym, *Im Kopf – sauber* (Leipzig: Paul List, 1954), pp. 119-23. 'Bürgerliche Hosen' and 'Kein fünftes Rad' are reprinted in *Offen gesagt*, pp. 61-63 and pp. 20-23 respectively.

¹⁴ Reprinted in *Offen gesagt*, pp. 46-48.

¹⁵ Reprinted in *Im Kopf – sauber*, pp. 85-87 (p. 85).

and delicate path indeed between frankness and circumspection, as he applied all his journalistic skills to commentary and analysis of the upheaval. The articles which he wrote at this time in the *Berliner Zeitung* and other papers provide a consistent and challenging statement of his views. Stephan Bock contends that Heym's journalistic articles relating to 17 June are more important than *5 Tage im Juni*.¹⁶ Bock wrote these remarks in 1980, many years before the appearance of Heym's autobiography, *Nachruf*, but I would argue that the articles are similarly more revealing than is *Nachruf* of Heym's views in the 1950s.

The reportage characteristics inherent in Heym's journalism apply also in part to *Nachruf*. It is an approach that both benefits and handicaps the reader looking there to trace the development of Heym's thoughts on GDR society in the early 1950s or to gain insights into the puzzles of his life more generally.

Heym always maintained that all written material, whether 'schöne Literatur' or 'Alltagsliteratur', should be entertaining for the reader, and critics do agree that *Nachruf* is a good read. Emmerich, for example, finds it 'spannend und witzig' and Jäger describes it as a 'hellwache Lebensbilanz'.¹⁷ It is a fascinating account of the personal experiences of a German Jew born in 1913, who experienced life in Weimar and early Nazi Germany as a dissident socialist, World War II as an Americanised soldier, the late 1940s as a left-wing US citizen and from 1952 to 1979 as a GDR citizen, continually at odds with the authorities there. In style, Heym brings his many skills as a popular journalist and writer to bear. *Nachruf* is full of irony, which is often directed at overbearing authority. He pokes fun frequently at power and its representatives, and Ulbricht in particular is a favourite target. With great delight he describes having had sight of an official checklist of the nine most dangerous German communists in Prague in 1935: 'Nummer Drei auf der Liste ist ein gewisser Stefan Heym [...]. Nummer Sieben auf der Liste ist Ulbrich (!) Walter, ehem.' (N, 91) He spent 17 June at the Writers'

¹⁶ Stephan Bock, *Literatur – Gesellschaft – Nation: Materielle und ideelle Rahmenbedingungen der frühen DDR-Literatur* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1980), p. 188. The word Bock uses is 'gewichtiger', suggesting that the journalistic texts provide a more weighty contribution than the novel to our understanding of Heym's position.

¹⁷ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 334; and Manfred Jäger, 'Stefan Heym zieht Bilanz', *Deutschland-Archiv*, 21 (1988), 1362-69 (1369).

Union meeting in Berlin and drily notes that at one point the writers poured out of their room on to the street, ‘da es gefahrlos war’ (N, 569). The book is peppered with little anecdotes that are often amusing but of little consequence. One such story recounts how Heym knocked himself unconscious when he ran his car into another somewhere in Slovakia and how he insisted when he regained consciousness that the family poodle accompany him to the hospital (N, 681-2). I am inclined to agree with Hutchinson when he suggests that the book contains too much detail on such relatively minor episodes in Heym’s life.¹⁸ *Nachruf* is, of course, an autobiography, but at 840 pages, a lengthy and leisurely one. From a cultural-political perspective, at least, such a profusion of trivial anecdotes are diversionary and add little to our knowledge of the man.

Heym’s skills in describing location and atmosphere are considerable. The account of his first experience as a US soldier in the UK catches the difference in scale and pace between the old-fashioned, understated European country and the modern, brash New World:

Der Hafen heißt Glasgow. [...] Alles um ihn ist so anders, so altbekannt [...]. Es sind wohl die Proportionen. Die Lokomotive, ein putziges Gefährt, pustet und keucht [...]; die Waggons, winzig in Verhältnis zu den langen, breiten amerikanischen, klappern wie Kinderspielzeug [...] und durch die schmalen Fenster blickt man hinaus auf Reihen von engbrüstigen, niedrigen Häuschen mit daumenhohen Schornsteinen, aus denen, wie kleine Wattebüsche, Rauch sich kräuselt. (N, 272)

Heym was part of the support team that followed the US army vanguard on to Omaha Beach in Normandy and his description of the event unfolds cinematically. The chaos and din of his own unit’s landing, the evidence all around of a destructive, murderous battle and some straggling survivors’ reports of that battle make for a graphic and highly charged narrative (N, 285-7).

Nachruf is, then, an entertaining book that feels part historical account and part novel. It is for these reasons, however, that it suffers as an autobiography. Philippe Lejeune notes in his definition of autobiography that the development of the personality must be a crucial component of the narrative, and other critics frequently speak of

¹⁸ Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 216.

autobiography as exploring and revealing the meaning of a life.¹⁹ Yet, in *Nachruf*, the reader rarely gets sight of the inner thoughts of the author. The narrator seeks and achieves a distance from the protagonist by referring to him as a succession of third-person figures, ‘der junge Flieg’,²⁰ ‘S.H.’, ‘Sergeant S.H.’, ‘Schriftsteller S.H.’ and so on, reserving the first person for observations he makes as the narrator, or ‘Chronist’, as he sometimes refers to himself in this mode. As we shall see in Chapter 6, this was a stratagem used some years earlier by Erich Loest, but whereas Loest manages to achieve both distance and intimacy, here the effect is rather to decouple narrator and protagonist. Jäger notes that Heym comes across ‘viel stärker als Beobachter denn als Selbstbeobachter’ and to Klara Droge, he appears as ‘ein unparteiischer Beobachter’.²¹

There is a real sense that one is reading a series of newspaper reports in which the reporter describes what he sees, but largely avoids expressing his own feelings. This results in gaps in our understanding of Heym’s behaviour at critical junctures of his life and of the inner conflicts giving rise to that behaviour. There is often a suspicion that he is not being entirely open with his readers and that, in this ‘film version’ of his life, to borrow Dennis Tate’s phrase,²² Heym occasionally seeks to add a little colour to the hero. Wolf Biermann wrote in *Die Zeit* on 24 August 1990: ‘Das Buch *Nachruf* ist eine eitle Lebenslüge, in dem Heym uns erzählt, was für ein wasserdichter Held und Hellseher er von Anfang an war.’²³ The language sounds harsh, but the sentiment hints at two of the autobiography’s problematic characteristics, the author’s tendency towards ‘Eitelkeit’ and critical gaps in his life account.

¹⁹ Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Contract’, tr. by R. Carter, in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. by Tzvetan Toderov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 192-222 (p. 193); see also Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 16; and Smith and Watson, p. 13.

²⁰ Heym was born into the Flieg family and only changed his name to Heym after he left Germany.

²¹ Jäger, ‘Stefan Heym’, 1326; and Klara Droge, ‘Stefan Heym: Nachruf’, *Neue Deutsche Hefte*, 1 (1989), 127-30 (130).

²² Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives before and after the End of the GDR* (Rochester and New York: Camden House, 2007), p. 145.

²³ Cited by Klaus Kandler, ‘“Nachruf” von Stefan Heym’, *Weimarer Beiträge: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft, Ästhetik und Kulturwissenschaften*, 2 (1991), 220-26 (221).

Many critics comment on Heym's vanity.²⁴ Emmerich writes: "Geschichte" ist wo Heym selbst dabei war',²⁵ and examples of Heym's penchant for bragging are not difficult to find. He describes his delivery of the speech 'Stalin verläßt den Raum' to a writers' seminar in Berlin as 'ein Husarenstreich' (N, 685), and he boasts that he is 'die bekannteste Unperson der Republik' (N, 776). One of his early sexual partners did not match his intellectual powers but Heym was consideration personified: 'er redete mit ihr wie mit einer Frau seines Standes, obwohl sie vieles, was er sagte, nicht oder nur halb verstand, und er versuchte, ihr nicht weh zu tun: außerdem war er herrlich im Bett' (N, 100). Heym may, of course, be indulging in a little self-mocking irony here; on the other hand, it is symptomatic of the failing to which he candidly admits: 'Man könnte, im nachhinein, narzißtische Züge in sein Verhalten hineinlesen.' (N, 596) The consequence of such frequent self-acclaim is that one is bound to wonder about the accuracy of other more serious accounts, such as, for example, his actions and behaviour at the Writers' Union meeting on 17 June.

The doubt is heightened by the existence of gaps between Heym's protestations and the reader's perceptions. One such gap concerns the burning issue of the relationship in the GDR in 1953 between the intellectual and the ordinary man. Heym repeatedly proclaims his concern for the ordinary man: 'Die kleinen Leute, die Armen, die Unterdrückten, sind ja seine Leute; mit ihnen hat er sich immer solidarisiert, denn er hat gewußt, welche Kraft sie sind.' (N, 290) This claim is reinforced by his frequent, spirited outbursts of anger at the indifference shown by functionaries and bureaucrats towards the people. Yet the feeling persists that his engagement with the ordinary people may have been motivated by his own personal and professional interests. As Carsten Gansel points out, Heym's portrayal of the working man, in his 1953 *Forschungsreise ins Herz der deutschen Arbeiterklasse*, is an unflattering one.²⁶ And he was very careful, on arriving in war-shattered East Berlin, to obtain for himself and his wife a house 'in der Grünauer Intelligenz-Siedlung, der Wälder und des Wassers wegen' (N, 539).

²⁴ See for example, Dieter Schiller, "Nachruf" von Stefan Heym', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 2 (1991), 230-33 (230); and Droge, 127.

²⁵ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte*, p. 334.

²⁶ Carsten Gansel, "Nachruf" von Stefan Heym', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 2 (1991), 213-17 (215).

Possibly, the most serious gap in *Nachruf* concerns Heym's failure properly to explain the nature and evolution of his views on Stalin. By the mid-1960s, he was a vigorous and outspoken critic of Stalin and Stalinism, as can be seen from his quartet of essays and speeches on the topic, 'Kompromißlose Suche nach der Wahrheit' (1964), 'Bedeutung und Perspektive' (1964), 'Stalin verläßt den Raum' (1964) and 'Die Langweile von Minsk' (1965).²⁷ It was also around this time that he wrote (but did not publish) *Die Architekten*, his anti-Stalinist novel.²⁸ Yet the road he travelled to arrive at this point of view is not entirely obvious.

In the 1930s, when Heym was editing the *Volksecho* in New York, his sympathies lay with communism and Stalin's Soviet Union for all his readers to see, despite the fact he was fully aware, as he concedes, of the persecution, show trials and purges being conducted there (N, 166). At this stage, he could assuage his conscience by reminding himself of the Soviet Union's sworn enmity to fascism. When news broke of the Stalin-Hitler pact, however, Heym's predicament was acute as he tried manfully to load the blame on all but Soviet shoulders. Of course, as the war progressed to its conclusion, any earlier doubts Heym may have had were banished by what he saw as Stalin's decisive role in destroying fascism, and when he went to the GDR in 1952, he enthusiastically embraced Stalinism, although he continued to stay outside the Communist Party. When Stalin died in March 1953, Heym was stricken with grief (N, 559) and for the remainder of 1953, he was generous in his praise of Stalin. He quoted the words of the 'great and wise man' in an article in July²⁹ and at the end of 1953, he wrote a fulsome tribute to Stalin for the *Tägliche Rundschau*.³⁰

Like everyone else in the GDR, Heym could claim he realised the full extent of the horrors of Stalinism only after Khrushchev's revelations at the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow in 1956, but it is clear he is uncomfortable with his earlier attachment to Stalin. In *Nachruf*, he fails to confront the fact of his support for Stalin in

²⁷ All four are reprinted in *Wege*, pp. 284-99.

²⁸ It was not published until 2000.

²⁹ Stefan Heym, 'Das große Gespräch geht weiter', *Berliner Zeitung*, 5 July 1953. It is interesting to note that when the article was reprinted later in the year in a special edition of *Tribüne*, the official Trade Union newspaper, the Stalin quotation was omitted.

³⁰ The article is reprinted under the title 'Ein reiches Leben', in *Im Kopf-sauber*, pp. 75-78.

the 1930s, claiming an inability to summon up his recollections: ‘All das ist versunken in einem gnädigen Grau, das der Blick zurück nicht mehr durchdringt.’ (N, 181) As for his eulogies of 1953, he seeks only to position his actions at that time on a personal development path that culminated in ‘Stalin verläßt den Raum’ (N, 560-1). Both explanations seem to me to indicate that Heym would rather duck an issue upon which he does not wish us to dwell. This ambivalence towards Stalinism and the Soviet presence in the GDR runs through many of Heym’s texts.

My purpose here is not to denigrate Heym or his autobiography: indeed, I believe and hope to demonstrate that, in his engagement with 17 June, Heym showed himself to be a courageous oppositional writer. What I am suggesting is that aspects of *Nachruf* render it more suited to a role of support and supplement to the much more illuminating journalistic output and the novel *5 Tage im Juni*.

Heym’s Non-Fictional Responses to 17 June

Whilst Krämer believes Heym was traumatised by 17 June, Hutchinson, by contrast, talks of him ‘seizing the moment’ to write about 17 June boldly and constructively over the next few weeks.³¹ I am inclined to favour the latter reading; there seems to be little in Heym’s demeanour or texts to suggest a man in trauma, on or after 17 June. Indeed, I would suggest that after 17 June Heym soberly concluded that there was a need for radical reform in the GDR and was galvanised to champion that reform, not only in the weeks immediately after the Uprising, but for many years afterwards.

On 17 June itself, Heym was at a Writers’ Union meeting in Berlin and on the days immediately following, he participated in a number of meetings and other events which arose directly as a result of 17 June. He describes his own 17 June and his part in these meetings and events in *Nachruf*. Over the six weeks following 17 June, he wrote a series of newspaper articles for the *Berliner Zeitung* and other journals. In these, he developed and refined his analysis of 17 June, the lessons to be learned and the changes required to avoid any repetition.

³¹ Krämer, p. 8; and Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 83.

After the Fifteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED at the end of July 1953, Ulbricht regained the political initiative and public discourse on 17 June largely disappeared. Heym, however, continued to believe that the GDR must openly confront the implications of 17 June and embrace the reforms whose need had been manifested by the upheavals, and he prepared for a long struggle with the authorities. Two parallel threads mark this struggle. He continued to publish articles and essays, harking back to his themes of summer 1953: the need to redress the balance between the workers and bureaucrats and the imperative for the Party to renounce Stalinist methods of governance in favour of a more inclusive democratic socialism. The second thread was the writing and attempted publication of *5 Tage im Juni*, a fictional adaptation of the ideas set forth in his journalism. This protracted affair is described by Heym himself in *Nachruf* and is documented in detail in Krämer's *Ein dreißigjähriger Krieg gegen ein Buch*, which draws on a comprehensive collection of articles, essays and correspondence written by Heym and others, the Stefan Heym Archive at Cambridge University, SED and Stasi records and an extensive list of reviews, in both German and English.

Heym's 17 June

Heym's account of 17 June in *Nachruf* is rather thin (N, 565-70). He spent the day at the Writers' Union meeting in Berlin, chaired by Kuba. He had an argument with Otto Gotsche, Ulbricht's private secretary, who took exception to Heym's disparaging remarks about incompetent trade unions. He then crossed swords with Kuba over the content and wording of a declaration of support from the Writers' Union to the government. In essence, he claims, he won both arguments. When the upheaval on the streets died down, he went home, encountering but easily deflecting unwelcome attention from some hooligans on the way.

Heym's description of the Writers' Union meeting adds little to our knowledge of what went on there: by his account, the meeting was restricted to the clashes of the Titans, Heym versus Gotsche, followed by Heym versus Kuba. More pertinently, he does not appear to have gone on to the streets until the civil storm had abated. He is therefore not in a strong position to describe or comment upon the make-up, conduct or

demands of the crowds, the actions of other elements such as Party members, Soviet troops and Westerners, or any of the detailed dynamics driving the day's events. The shock of what other writers experienced on the streets on 17 June is evident in their texts: good examples are Brecht's letter of 1 July 1953 to Peter Suhrkamp or Loest's articles of June 1953 in *Neues Deutschland* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.³² By contrast, Heym's articles are more detached and focus on the general sociopolitical situation in the GDR and are coloured less by specific events on the day itself.

Possibly the most interesting point Heym makes in *Nachruf* relating to the events of 17 June itself concerns the role of the Soviet army. He clearly believed it was Soviet tanks that quelled the disturbances: 'Die Unter den Linden anrollenden sowjetischen Panzer [...] machen allem ein Ende.' (N, 569) He admits to having reason to be grateful to the Soviet forces on the day, for his first emotion had been outrage and anger that his and his family's hard- and so recently-earned security in the GDR had been imperilled by Germans; Party, workers, trade unions, Writers' Union, all Germans indeed. Only a foreign army had saved him. The selfish outrage passed as more reasoned analysis followed, but his warm feelings towards the Soviet Union remained.

Heym attended an extraordinary meeting of the Berlin Writers' Union on 22 June, which was also attended by Kuba, Otto Gotsche, Elisabeth Hauptmann and around two dozen others.³³ Heym's main contributions to this meeting were notable principally for his insistence on using the word 'Bevölkerung' where the others used 'Arbeiter' in discussions on how writers and intelligentsia should engage with the people. He does not mention the meeting in *Nachruf*, but his belief that the wider GDR society must be allowed to participate in all social intercourse is an underlying theme in his articles over the next six weeks. Another of his interjections at this meeting was that it was important that writers ascertain how their texts were viewed by the reading public, showing his awareness of the dynamic between writer and reader that many GDR writers at the time failed to appreciate.

³² The Brecht letters are dealt with in Chapter 3 and the Loest articles in Chapter 6.

³³ Broadly-based minutes of this meeting are in 'Bericht über die außerordentliche Sitzung des Bezirksverbandes Berlin am Montag, dem 22. Juni 1953 um 14 Uhr im Zimmer 401 im Anschluß an die Ereignisse des 17. Juli [sic] 1953', Archiv des Schriftstellerverbandes der DDR, Signatur 19/44-7, AdK.

The 17 June Newspaper Articles

Between 17 June and the end of July, Heym wrote a number of newspaper articles in which he analysed the causes of the Uprising. In chronological order of writing, they were:

21 June: ‘Memorandum an Sokolow’, in *Wege*, pp. 201-8.³⁴

21 June: ‘Gedanken zum 17. Juni 1953’, *Berliner Zeitung*.

24 June: ‘Gedanken nach 17. Juni’, *Berliner Zeitung*.

28 June: ‘Ein Dummer findet sich immer’, *Berliner Zeitung*.

5 July: ‘Das große Gespräch geht weiter’, *Berliner Zeitung*.

8 July: ‘Die kleinen Angestellten’, *Neues Deutschland*.³⁵

13 July: ‘Grossmut’, *Vorwärts*.³⁶

15 July: ‘Um die Sauberkeit im Kopf’, *Berliner Zeitung*.

July: ‘Beobachtungen zum Pressewesen in der DDR’, in *Im Kopf-sauber*, pp. 160-7.³⁷

29 July: ‘Das Volk will echten Realismus’, *Berliner Zeitung*.³⁸

These articles vary in style, depending on their primary subject matter and intended readership. The *Berliner Zeitung* articles, written for the man in the street, range over a variety of topics and are conversational and informal in style, full of anecdotes and parables. ‘Die kleinen Angestellten’ is in a similar style, but the subject matter is directed at the functionaries and bureaucrats who read *Neues Deutschland*. Earnest in tone and formal in style, ‘Memorandum an Sokolow’ is a plea for understanding and support from Soviet forces. Taken together, however, the texts reveal a consistency both in the diagnosis of the societal malady revealed on 17 June and the prescription for its remedy.

Nowhere in the articles is there the faintest criticism of the socialist system. In the battle between the ideologies, Heym was emphatically pro-socialist and had a deep

³⁴ This article was written at the request of the *Tägliche Rundschau*, but was not printed at the time.

³⁵ All citations here are from the version reprinted in *Im Kopf-sauber*, pp. 119-23.

³⁶ All citations here are from the version reprinted in *Im Kopf-sauber*, pp. 29-31.

³⁷ I can find no evidence as to which publication this article was intended for, nor as to why it was not published at the time.

³⁸ The article was subtitled ‘Beobachtungen zum literarischen Leben in der DDR’, which is the title given to the text in subsequent publications.

hatred of what he saw as US imperialist capitalism. On 10 June, a Heym article was published in the *Berliner Zeitung*, which described the author, interestingly, as ‘der jetzt in der DDR lebende amerikanische Schriftsteller’.³⁹ In this long and relentlessly anti-American piece, concerning the death sentence passed on Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for spying, Heym attacks the US political and judicial systems as corrupt and rails against the USA’s thirst for war. The article does not, of course, anticipate the events of 17 June, but it does foreground Heym’s appetite at this time for vilifying the USA.

This vilification is a consistent component of Heym’s 17 June articles. He clearly identifies the immediate source of the upheaval on 17 June as ‘die Agentenarbeit der Westmächte’.⁴⁰ The streets were full of ‘Mobs von faschistischen Sturmtrupplern in Ringelsöckchen und Cowboyhemden’, but they were simply the hired hands, the ‘Handlanger der amerikanischen Monopole und ihrer westdeutschen Filialbesitzer’.⁴¹ It was, he continues, in the nature of capitalism ever to expand its reach and to seek to remove any obstacle in its way; such a scenario would have ensued, had the instigators of the disturbances on 17 June succeeded in their objective: ‘In Gesellschaft der deutschen Bourgeoisie hätten die amerikanischen Monopole die Macht in der DDR übernommen.’⁴² This theme runs through all of Heym’s articles at this time. It was, of course, a fairly standard official narrative, but in Heym’s case, it is given additional bite by his recent bitter break with the USA.

The corollary of this anti-capitalism is, of course, an unshakeable belief in the supremacy of socialism and socialist forms of governance. To those who called on 17 June for free elections, he offers a defence of the GDR system. Free elections, Western-style, are an illusion. In the USA, he himself had participated in so-called free elections. There may well have been a change of government but: ‘Die Banken gehörten immer noch den Bankiers [...] und die Großgrundbesitzer hatten immer noch ihre riesigen Güter.’⁴³ Power in capitalist societies is in the hands of the capitalists, but in the GDR,

³⁹ Stefan Heym, ‘Ein Sturm muß sich in der Welt erheben’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 June 1953.

⁴⁰ ‘Memorandum an Sokolow’.

⁴¹ ‘Gedanken zum 17. Juni 1953’.

⁴² ‘Um die Sauberkeit im Kopf’.

⁴³ ‘Ein Dummer findet sich immer’.

the government represents and belongs to the people: ‘Also wenn man hier die Regierung zum Abtreten zwingt, bedeutet das, daß auch die Klasse, die durch die Regierung vertreten wird, von der Macht abtritt.’⁴⁴ To those who would label 17 June a ‘revolution’, Heym counters that the true revolution has already taken place. What happened on 17 June cannot be called a revolution; it was, in fact, ‘ein großangelegter konterrevolutionärer Putschversuch’.⁴⁵ At a macro-ideological level, then, Heym stood foursquare behind the SED regime: the events of 17 June were the result of a fascist counterrevolutionary putsch attempt, planned and executed by Western agencies intent on undermining the GDR and sweeping its socialist values away. After some initial, but fleeting, self-examination of its own role in the debacle, this was where the Party wanted to leave the issue. Heym, however, was determined to dig more deeply into the causes of 17 June and his articles over the course of the next six weeks offered a rather different analysis to the Party’s simplistic narrative.

Only Brecht approaches Heym in terms of volume of critical output over those weeks, but Brecht, as we have seen, generally restricted himself to criticism of cultural policy, at least in the work he published at this time. Like Brecht, Heym fully concurred with official SED doctrine that the task of professional communicators, radio, press and writers was to educate and inform the people. This, he believed, they had signally failed to do on 17 June. GDR radio had played ‘Operettenmusik’ and had transmitted news ‘von irgendwelchen Wirtschaftserfolgen in Kasachstan oder Kirgisien’ (N, 564), leaving RIAS as the only source of information for the people. An untruthful and incompetent press was equally at fault: ‘Am 17. Juni versagten die Zeitungen in einer Art, daß es wohl notwendig sein wird, Pressewesen und Pressepolitik einer gründlichen Prüfung und Revision zu unterziehen.’⁴⁶ He similarly rounds on the shortcomings of his own literary profession: ‘Hätten wir bessere und wahrere Bücher, Erzählungen, Gedichte, Stücke in größerer Anzahl gehabt, so hätten sich Tausende und Millionen Bürger der DDR unter dem Einfluß dieser Werke in den Tagen des 17. Juni anders verhalten als sie sich

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ ‘Beobachtung zum Pressewesen in der DDR’.

tatsächlich verhielten.⁴⁷

Heym, however, reserved his sharpest criticism for the Party's alienation from the ordinary people of the GDR, and in this, his analysis was much more matter-of-fact than Brecht's: 'In Fällen, wo die Wahrheit Hunderten und Tausenden von Menschen sowieso bekannt ist, kann und soll man die Tatsachen nicht vertuschen.'⁴⁸ The indisputable and unavoidable fact was that thousands had taken to the streets in the GDR on 17 June. To pretend otherwise was pointless and counterproductive, in Heym's opinion: it simply drove people into the arms of the enemy. The correct response was to explore why the people had behaved as they did and to take the steps necessary to ensure it would not happen again. Heym's analysis led him to a conclusion that fundamentally clashed with official interpretations. The disturbances on 17 June may have been sparked by Western agitation, but the root causes lay much deeper: 'Die Ursache aber ist nicht der Anlaß – und die Ursache zu den Ereignissen liegt in der DDR.'⁴⁹

The message that threads its way through Heym's articles is that the Party in its arrogance, indifference and incompetence had failed the people, resulting in widespread and justifiable discontent. Alienation had been and remained endemic at all levels and branches of the Party: 'So wie Radio, Presse, Gewerkschaften und offensichtlich auch Teile der Partei bis zum 17. Juni dieser Bevölkerung gegenüber versagten, so versagten sie auch am 17. Juni.'⁵⁰ The leadership's attempts at communication and clarification were appalling: 'Dadurch mußte zwangsläufig bei der Bevölkerung der Eindruck entstehen, daß die Regierung nicht weiß, was sie tut.'⁵¹

More specifically, Heym turns his critical gaze onto various branches of the Party apparatus, which were either part of the actual government machinery or acted as 'transmission belts' for the execution of government policy. He berates functionaries and bureaucrats, whose cliché-ridden and verbose utterances are 'nicht dazu angetan, die Menschen zum Lesen und Hören und Verstehen zu gewinnen'.⁵² They cannot or will not

⁴⁷ 'Das Volk will echten Realismus'.

⁴⁸ 'Beobachtungen zum Pressewesen in der DDR', p. 162.

⁴⁹ 'Memorandum an Sokolow'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² 'Um die Sauberkeit im Kopf'.

listen to people's problems, nor pass on uncomfortable truths to their superiors. People's lives are made a constant misery, 'weil irgendwelche stupiden Bürokratenseelen nicht aus ihrem Amtsschimmeltrott herauswollen'.⁵³

Unusually among critics of Party conduct and policy, Heym lays a large part of the blame at the door of the trade unions, whose incompetence and unapproachability he felt denied the workers hope and leadership in the days leading up to 17 June: 'Es ist doch merkwürdig, daß die Arbeiter der Stalinallee sich *nicht* an ihre Gewerkschaften mit ihren Beschwerden wandten [...]. Sie wurden ja direkt in eine Situation hineingetrieben, in der sie streiken und demonstrieren mußten.'⁵⁴ Everywhere he heard that workers had given up talking to their union representatives: 'es kommen ja doch keine Änderungen'.⁵⁵ The failings of the trade unions was a theme to which Heym returned over and over, long after the initial excitement of 17 June had died away.⁵⁶

Heym's 17 June articles are, then, critical, but not destructively so. He sees 17 June as evidence not that the political system in the GDR has failed, but that the political and intellectual elites have failed the people. In his articles, he suggests a number of remedies. Like Brecht, he insists that the first and most important is that the people must be engaged in a dialogue: 'Aber gesprochen muß werden, in beiden Richtungen; von unten nach oben wie auch von oben nach unten.'⁵⁷ The government must allow the people democratic freedom to earn a decent wage in decent working conditions, to express criticism both in public and private and to demand better responses from the state bureaucracy.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that Heym calls for the middle class to be included in this dialogue. From a purely practical point of view, he asserts, persecuting the middle class is counterproductive; it simply annoys the workers, the great majority of whom have at

⁵³ 'Die kleinen Angestellten'.

⁵⁴ 'Memorandum an Sokolow'.

⁵⁵ 'Die kleinen Angestellten'.

⁵⁶ See, for example, 'Der Konflikt der Gewerkschaft im Sozialismus', in *Wege*, pp. 247-50, dated 12 August 1956 and the comments on the role of the trade unions in *Nachruf*, p. 587.

⁵⁷ 'Das große Gespräch geht weiter'.

⁵⁸ 'Um die Sauberkeit im Kopf'.

least some middle-class relatives.⁵⁹ More positively, however, the middle class has a part to play in the creation of a new society; writers and workers cannot do it alone: ‘Aber Schriftsteller und Arbeiter zusammen können es schaffen, mit Bauern und Mittelstand und technische Intelligenz dazu – in Zusammenarbeit mit der Regierung.’⁶⁰ Those in power in the GDR must offer inclusiveness, they must be ‘eine Regierung, die aus Werktätigen besteht, eine Regierung, die die Arbeiterklasse vertritt zusammen mit den ihr verbündeten Klassen der werktätigen Bauern und des kleinen Mittelstandes’.⁶¹ It was an interesting plea for Heym to make. Perhaps he was influenced by the government’s (very temporarily) more lenient attitude towards the middle classes occasioned by the New Course. In any event, he urged an inclusiveness here that went beyond anything his contemporaries had in mind, even those like himself, who sought social reform.

The trade unions must undergo changes in attitude, procedures and personnel: ‘Mir scheint, daß die Gewerkschaftsarbeit [...] gründlich geändert werden muß.’⁶² Similarly, Heym argues that the press requires root and branch reform and he spells out the particular areas requiring change.⁶³ Finally, he calls for a new approach from writers. He believes authors must replace unrealistic Socialist Realism with a style readers can believe: ‘Auch die Beziehung zwischen Autor und Leser, zwischen Kunstproduzent und Kunstkonsument ist eine Vertrauensfrage.’⁶⁴ There is also an appeal here to the cultural authorities to loosen their control over what is published: ‘Aber die Entscheidung darüber, was gut und nützlich und notwendig ist, kann nicht einigen ewig nach oben Schielenden überlassen bleiben, auch wenn diese verantwortungsscheuen Seelen sich als Kritiker maskieren.’⁶⁵

Heym’s plea fell on deaf ears. Although conditions improved somewhat for the people, there was no noticeable change to Party attitudes, stifling bureaucracy or trade union ineffectiveness, nor were there concessions to democratic freedoms. Culturally,

⁵⁹ ‘Memorandum an Sokolow’.

⁶⁰ ‘Das große Gespräch geht weiter’.

⁶¹ ‘Um die Sauberkeit im Kopf’.

⁶² ‘Memorandum an Sokolow’.

⁶³ ‘Beobachtungen zum Pressewesen in der DDR’.

⁶⁴ ‘Das Volk will echten Realismus’.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

too, little really changed and, until the GDR collapsed in 1989, Heym's struggles with the censors were unceasing. In a speech at a Writers' Union Conference in January 1956, he denied that censorship existed in the GDR, a rather strange claim in a speech which otherwise attacked the then mandatory Socialist Realism as providing literature 'von hölzerner Primitivität'.⁶⁶ By 1979, he was less accommodating when he described the whole censorship process in the GDR as 'das Messer an der Kehle der Schriftsteller der Republik'.⁶⁷ By then, of course, he had been in a quarter-century war with the censors over *5 Tage im Juni*.

5 Tage im Juni

Der Spiegel reported Heym as saying on the evening of 17 June: 'Als ich spät am Abend nach Hause kam, wußte ich: hier ist mein neuer Roman.'⁶⁸ The novel was finally published in West Germany in November 1974, but only in November 1989 in the GDR. This was a long gestation by any standards and the underlying reasons are complex. Not the least of the reasons was that *5 Tage im Juni* is a substantial rewrite of an earlier novel, *Der Tag X*.

5 Tage im Juni is, of course, a novel, not an historical account, but for Heym, it was essential that his novel reflected historical reality. He believed 17 June could have been catastrophic for the GDR and he was determined that his novel should provide a convincing account of the causes of 17 June and by inference the steps needed to ensure it could not happen again. His characters and locations are fictional, but in setting the novel within a factual framework, with multiple links to actual events, his intention is to persuade the reader that the thoughts, words and deeds of his characters reflect the reality of the times. I will explore how Heym blurs the line between fact and fiction through his use of documentary texts, characterisation and narrative, and conclude my critique of the novel with some remarks on the extent to which Heym has succeeded in

⁶⁶ Reprinted as 'Der Schriftsteller und die Macht', in *Wege*, pp. 263-74 (p. 267).

⁶⁷ Stefan Heym, 'Das Messer an der Kehle' *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 April 1979. Reprinted in *Wege*, pp. 378-80.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, 'Tag X', *Der Spiegel*, 3 February 1965.

creating a convincing account of 17 June. First, however, it will be useful to trace the evolution of *5 Tage im Juni* from the earlier *Der Tag X*.

From Der Tag X to 5 Tage im Juni

Given Heym's relative lack of acquaintance with GDR society when he first turned his attention to his novel about 17 June, he set himself the initial task of an intensive programme of research into the Party, workers and general background.⁶⁹ He probably spent the greater part of 1954 carrying out this research and, in March 1955, he asked *Neues Deutschland* to furnish him with back copies for the critical dates around 17 June. By mid-1955 he had an outline of the novel and two years later a first version, in English, entitled *A Day Marked X*.⁷⁰ Despite the generally negative reaction from friends and colleagues, Heym persevered with a German translation, *Der Tag X*, which he sent to various people in the GDR and abroad in 1960.⁷¹ Recipients at home included leading figures in the worlds of politics, literature and journalism, such as Walter Ulbricht and Anna Seghers.

Der Tag X differed substantially in plot, characterisation and narrative style from the novel that was finally published in 1974. The main plot, concerning a trade union official, Witte, and his travails with Party and workers is largely the same, as is the progress of a romantic subplot, also involving Witte. Where *Der Tag X* differs is in its depiction of a more direct Western involvement, its cruder characterisation of Western figures and its much more simplistic structure and narrative style. Here, Western interference in GDR affairs is depicted as a plot, masterminded at the highest levels in the US and West German governments. The ringleaders are Dorothy van Diemen and Theodor Luedevitz, thinly-disguised fictional versions respectively of Eleanor Dulles,

⁶⁹ See Krämer, pp. 24-88, for much of the factual account here of the evolution from *Der Tag X* to *5 Tage*. The evaluation of *Der Tag X* and the interpretation of Heym's motives regarding its publication are my own.

⁷⁰ Stefan Heym, *A Day Marked X*, in File A/135 in the Stefan Heym Archive in Cambridge University (henceforth SHAC). For further details on SHAC, see Peter Hutchinson, 'The Stefan Heym Archive in Cambridge University Library', *German Life and Letters*, 46 (1993), no. 4, 291-96; and K. E. Attar, 'The Archive and the Artist: The Stefan Heym Archive Revisited', *German Life and Letters*, 53 (2000), no. 1, 73-88.

⁷¹ Stefan Heym, *Der Tag X* in SHAC. *Der Tag X* was distributed in 50 cyclostyle copies, but neither *Der Tag X* nor *A Day Marked X* were ever published.

wife of the US Foreign Minister, and Jakob Kaiser, West Germany's Minister for German Affairs. Other senior political and military figures from the two countries actively participate in the planning process. There is a CIA man, Jack Caffery, whose 'moll', Gudrun Kasischke, had some years earlier worked in Witte's household.

This portrayal of events which, if even remotely true, would have sparked off a very serious escalation indeed in the Cold War, belongs to the wilder reaches of Party propaganda. It is rendered even less credible by Heym's absurd characterisation. Herr Quelle of the SPD is described as having a 'Hängebauch über lächerlich winzigem Geschlechtsorgan', von Korda of RIAS is a man 'der gewisse homosexuelle Tendenzen hatte', and Dorothy van Diemen is lust incarnate: 'Es war aber eine Wollust jenseits des Geschlechtlichen; oder vielleicht war es auch Geschlecht, das nicht mehr Mann oder Frau ersehnte, sondern ein Armageddon, in das sie die Heerscharen hineinpeitschte.'⁷²

Despite this extremely unflattering depiction of Westerners and their involvement in GDR affairs, publication of *Der Tag X* was blocked in the GDR. Officially, the novel was deemed to provide a false account of the role and behaviour of the Party, place undue emphasis on the productivity norm increases, paint a distorted picture of the role of the Soviet forces and understate the activities of Western agitators. This last objection hardly seems credible.

Heym made spasmodic attempts to have the book published in the GDR and Soviet Union over the next decade, without success. Krämer claims that Heym considered publishing *Der Tag X* in the West, but that he rejected this idea as being too dangerous.⁷³ I am somewhat sceptical of this claim. Heym did not consider it too dangerous to publish his essays 'Stalin verläßt den Raum' and 'Die Langweile von Minsk' in 1964 and 1965 respectively, both attacks on Stalinist strictures in the GDR. He was attacked by Honecker at the notorious Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in December 1965 but, rather than deliver the expected *Selbstkritik*, he put up a vigorous defence of himself at a Writers' Union meeting early in

⁷² *Der Tag X*, Chapter 12, pp. 3, 8 and 17 respectively.

⁷³ Krämer, pp. 83-84.

1966.⁷⁴ This does not suggest a diffident man. Indeed, Robert Havemann claims: ‘Stefan Heym sollte der Partei dafür dankbar sein, daß *Der Tag X* nie erschienen ist.’⁷⁵ Havemann’s view was that the novel was quite simply too naïve in its portrayal of a western conspiracy and its characterisation of the conspirators. It is at least possible that Heym himself was aware of this weakness in the novel and was content to leave it unpublished. He himself exclaims: ‘Gott sei Dank, daß das Buch in dieser Form nie erschien.’ (N, 787) In any event, when he revisited the novel in the early 1970s, he wrote two hundred pages of criticism of it and resolved to undertake a comprehensive reworking. The resultant *5 Tage im Juni* was both a vastly improved novel in structure and form, and a more reflective and mature perspective on 17 June and the GDR generally.

Documentary Fiction and the Illusion of Reality

Dennis Tate refers to *5 Tage im Juni* as an ‘inimitable achievement’,⁷⁶ positing that it falls outwith any of the normal categorisations used in a comparative literary analysis of novels. We can be sure, however, that Heym himself intended it to be read as a novel: the full title is *5 Tage im Juni: Roman*. Of course, German titles in works of fiction usually include a term such as ‘Roman’ or ‘Novelle’, but not universally. Alfred Döblin, for example, was reluctant to call *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a ‘Roman’; he preferred the term ‘Geschichte’.⁷⁷ It is a choice of word that leaves open the possibility that the writer is telling a true story. Heym, on the other hand, confirms that *5 Tage im Juni* is first and foremost a novel to be read and enjoyed as such.

It is, though, a novel with a purpose beyond that of mere entertainment. By the time Heym started his reworking of *5 Tage im Juni* in the early 1970s, it was clear he no longer subscribed (if, indeed, he ever had done) to the Party doctrine that 17 June was nothing but a fascist counterrevolutionary putsch attempt. In fact, the novel reflects in

⁷⁴ Hutchinson, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Robert Havemann, *Fragen Antworten Fragen: Aus der Biographie eines deutschen Marxisten* (Munich: R. Piper, 1970), p. 142.

⁷⁶ Dennis Tate, *The East German Novel: Identity, Community, Continuity* (Bath: Bath University Press, 1984), p. viii.

⁷⁷ The full title of Döblin’s novel is *Berlin Alexanderplatz: Die Geschichte von Franz Biberkopf*.

large part the position he had adopted in those *Berliner Zeitung* articles back in 1953. A mix of factors had been in play on 17 June – Western agitation, worker discontent, inadequate Party and trade union leadership, and Soviet watchfulness. Western agitation was still a factor, and a dangerous one at that, but for Heym, Western embroilment had dwindled to little more than a sideshow: the overriding issue now was the plight of GDR society. There could be no alternative to socialism, but socialism in the GDR was in a sorry and dangerous state. The Party, whose mission it was to lead and guide the people towards socialism, had failed to do so. The people remained infected by the past and had failed to embrace socialism, which had been and continued to be a ‘gift’ from the Soviet Union, not properly appreciated in the GDR.

Heym believed that only by openly and rationally discussing 17 June could the GDR fully understand and benefit from the momentous lessons and messages it carried. To gloss it over, or misrepresent it, was a mistake and a gift to the GDR’s detractors, ‘dann wird ein Günter Graß das Gras herunterfressen’.⁷⁸ In a much-quoted view he expressed in 1973: ‘Auf beiden Seiten ist der 17. Juni umgelogen worden’,⁷⁹ we begin to appreciate the forces that motivated Heym to persevere with *5 Tage im Juni*. 17 June had been politicised on both sides of the ideological divide beyond all usefulness. What the GDR, and indeed the wider world, needed was an account of 17 June that was objective, balanced and credible. *5 Tage im Juni* was to be that account and Heym’s choice of form and style for his novel was intended to foreground these characteristics and, in doing so, to convince us of the validity of the account.

In his choice of form, Heym drew on a German leftist literary tradition, which had gained in prominence in the Weimar years of the 1920s and early 1930s. A number of broadly interchangeable labels are used to describe the novelistic output from this tradition; ‘Reportageroman’, ‘Dokumentarroman’ and ‘Zeitroman’ are three such terms. Barbara Foley identifies this type of novel as one ‘distinguished by its insistence that it

⁷⁸ Quotation included in ‘Tag X’, *Der Spiegel*, 3 February 1965.

⁷⁹ Adalbert Reif, *Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt*, 8 April 1973. Cited in Krämer, p. 6.

contains some kind of specific and verifiable link to the historical world'.⁸⁰ This link might consist of historically verifiable events, political speeches, decrees, tables of statistics, real people and places, use of dialects and so on, and by incorporating them into the novel, the author seeks to heighten the novel's sense of reality and, by association, to suggest an actuality for the novel itself.

This left-leaning style of democratic realist literature increasingly stood as the cultural counter to an emerging literature, whose reactionary, sentimentalised style already anticipated Nazi values.⁸¹ Its themes were usually social, dealing with issues of poverty and exclusion, or antifascist. It was the style of choice for writers from the Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller (BPRS), such as Willi Bredel and Theodor Plievier, and it evolved into an important model for post-1945 GDR literature. Developing in an era when communication channels such as film and radio were providing ever more access to news and factual information, it increasingly incorporated documentary or reportage material, and blurred the boundary lines between fiction and fact.⁸² This expanding use of documentary material called for changes in narrative style away from the classical nineteenth-century conventions, a trend Lukács had anticipated and deplored.⁸³ Montages of extracts from real life and narrative interaction between narrator, characters and reader became commonplace. Authors now had to give even more careful consideration to their novels' structure in the wake of this increasing incorporation of real events and facts. Two novels, one published before and the other after the Third Reich, offer themselves as excellent examples of the style, Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and Plievier's *Stalingrad* (1945).⁸⁴ Both make extensive use of newspaper excerpts and reports, actual shops and streets and, particularly in Döblin's novel, narrator-character dialogue. In *Stalingrad*, Plievier draws on political

⁸⁰ Barbara Foley, 'The Documentary Novel and the Problem of Borders', in *The Essentials of the Theory of Fiction*, ed. by Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), pp. 392-408 (p. 394).

⁸¹ Stoehr, p. 97.

⁸² Stoehr, pp. 119-20.

⁸³ Georg Lukács, 'The Novels of Willi Bredel' and 'Reportage or Portrayal?' in *Essays on Realism: Georg Lukács*, ed. by Rodney Livingstone, tr. by David Fernbach (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980).

⁸⁴ Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz. Die Geschichte von Franz Biberkopf* (Munich: dtv, 1995). First published in 1929. Theodor Plievier, *Stalingrad* (Munich: dtv, 1986). First published in 1945.

speeches, radio transmissions, army statistics and actual letters, taken from the personal effects of dead soldiers. Both novels are works of fiction, but the effect of the style employed is to blur the line between fiction and fact, and to suggest to the reader that the fictional story is indeed fact. The structure, use of documentary material and narrative style employed in *5 Tage im Juni* borrows extensively from these earlier fictional forms.

There is a very close and carefully managed relationship between the structure of *5 Tage im Juni* and its documentary content. The novel consists of fiction – a prologue, sixty-three chapters and an epilogue, interspersed with twenty historically verifiable documentary excerpts. The fictional chapters, including the prologue, describe events that take place within a period of five days from 13 June to 17 June 1953 (the epilogue describes a conversation that takes place a year later on 14 June 1954). Some events are set in West Berlin, but they mostly take place in a factory, on the streets and in various domestic and commercial premises in East Berlin. Including the prologue, two chapters describe events on 13 June, five on 14 June, fourteen on 15 June, twenty-two on 16 June and twenty-one on 17 June. Each chapter is headed by an italicised day, date and time (for example: *Montag, 15. Juni 1953, 15.30 Uhr*), a precision which suggests a diarised account of real events. The events and characters described in the novel are fictional, but there is a constant fusion of the fictional and the actual. The novel describes a factory works outing on two pleasure boats on Sunday 14 June; there was, in fact, just such a major workers' outing in East Berlin.⁸⁵ Witte and his colleagues attend a Party rally in the Friedrichstadtpalast on the evening of 16 June; in fact, a Party rally did take place. Witte goes to the *Haus der Ministerien* on Leipzigerstraße, where he hears a man announce the retraction of the productivity norms; this event actually took place. And, of course, there were demonstrations and Soviet tanks on the streets on 17 June, in the novel as in reality.

This fusion of the fictional with the actual is intensified by Heym's use of documentary material. Of the twenty documentary excerpts, ten originated in the Eastern Zone and ten in the West, a perfect balance. Of the ten documents originating in

⁸⁵ See Kowalczyk, *17.6.1953*, p. 110. Kowalczyk, however, locates the excursion on the previous day, Saturday.

the GDR, seven are statements, speeches or resolutions emanating from the most senior echelons of the SED; the remaining three are an announcement from *Tribüne*, a leading article from the *Tägliche Rundschau*, and the Soviet decree of 17 June, declaring a state of emergency in the GDR. Of the ten Western documents, seven are transcripts of transmissions by RIAS; the remaining three are statements of solidarity with GDR workers issued by West Germany's two main political parties and its trade union organisation. The documentary excerpts are carefully placed in apposition to the fictional chapters, so that they confirm or illumine a fictional event that is either about to happen (in the next chapter) or has just happened (in the preceding one).

The documentary material here heightens the illusion of reality. The novel, though, would be quite self-sufficient without the documentary material; indeed, its predecessor did not make use of such material. We would still have a novel whose diarised style and backcloth of historical events, people and places would confer on it the sense of reality Heym sought to achieve. The characters, though fictional, would still be readily identifiable with real actors in the Party, factories, streets and Soviet barracks on those June days. Heym would have succeeded in conveying the messages he wished to, without the need to fall back on the documentary material.

The documents in fact have a much more subtle and complex purpose than a simple heightening of the illusion of reality. Firstly, they are intended to stress the total objectivity and historical accuracy of Heym's account. Thus the very careful balance of ten GDR documents and ten Western documents, but it is the actual choice of documents and their positioning within the novel that reveal their true purpose.

As we have seen, seven of the GDR documents are the words of the most senior people in the SED, and seven of the Western documents are transcripts of RIAS transmissions. From this it is clear that Heym locates the large part of the responsibility for 17 June with the SED for failing to provide the necessary leadership and with RIAS for publicising and further inciting worker unrest throughout the GDR.

The Party documents damn the SED both in what they say and what they omit. The novel is introduced with an excerpt from a resolution passed at a Party conference in April 1954, *almost a year after 17 June*. It enjoins the Party, 'die Selbstkritik und Kritik

von unten zu entwickeln'.⁸⁶ Hutchinson notes that the document provides an ironic prelude to the novel.⁸⁷ It is particularly ironic and pointed when considered in conjunction with the novel's epilogue, also set a year later; nothing in the GDR has changed, the Party was blindly and paralytically bureaucratic in June 1953, and, as the epilogue demonstrates, remained so in June 1954.

A set of three communications confirming Party enactment of the productivity norm increases appears immediately after the prologue, where Witte, the trade union functionary, quarrels with Party Secretary Banggartz over Party rigidity, and before the novel proper begins. Clearly foregrounded, then, is the fundamental and real cause of worker discontent and unrest, the Party's handling of the norms.

Two further documents appear side by side. They are excerpts from the speeches of Ulbricht and Grotewohl at the emergency Party meeting on the evening of 16 June. The significance of these, the longest documentary excerpts by far in the novel, is that the two leaders of the GDR ramble on in Partyspeak without showing any consciousness of the exploding crisis and without once mentioning the word 'strike', a word on everyone else's lips in the GDR, or providing any guidance as to how to deal with the impending chaos.

The final Party document is taken from the deposition of Fritz Selbmann, Minister for Mining, with regard to his own role. He had been sent by the Politbüro to announce a retraction of the norm increases to a baying crowd outside the *Haus der Ministerien*. The crowd was demanding Ulbricht and Grotewohl. Selbmann had to admit: 'Ulbricht und Grotewohl sind nicht im Gebäude. Ich bin ermächtigt zu verhandeln.' (5T, 156) The failure of the Party leaders to engage with the people could not be more clearly expressed.

The remaining GDR documents are the *Tribüne* announcement of 16 June that the norm increases were not negotiable, the *Tägliche Rundschau* leader, where the co-operative Soviets offer a way out of the impasse, and the Soviet decree announcing a

⁸⁶ Stefan Heym, *5 Tage im Juni* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002), p. 5. Future references are from this edition and are indicated in the text by the designation (5T, page number). The novel was first published by Bertelsmann, Munich in 1974.

⁸⁷ Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 101.

state of emergency on 17 June. Heym felt very strongly that the trade unions had let the workers down badly and the *Tribüne* excerpt simply affirms that. There is an interesting contradistinction to be made between the actuality of the Eastern documents and the fictionality of their contents. In every case, the document is shown to be a lie; the ‘truths’ and ‘facts’ they express are cynical untruths and inventions, designed to mislead and exploit the people.

The Western documents are much less interesting and not nearly so explosive. The seven RIAS transcripts largely reiterate the same incitations and messages of support over and over again. The remaining three support Heym’s belief that the Western hooligans’ presence on the streets of East Berlin on 17 June was not a coincidence, but the result of planning in the West. Jakob Kaiser’s statement of March, 1952, ‘Der Generalstabsplan ist so gut wie fertig’, is followed immediately in the novel by the reappearance in East Berlin of Heinz Hofer, a petty criminal with Nazi tendencies, whose job it is to organise thuggery on the streets. Clarification of the supportive role of the SPD Ostbüro in *Neues Vorwärts* (the West Berlin trade union publication) comes just before two East Berlin workers, Kallmann and Gadebusch, meet the SPD Herr Quelle in West Berlin. This is as close as Heym gets to asserting that West German intervention in the GDR on 17 June was organised at a senior political level.

What Heym has done then is to underpin the sense of reality of fictional events, by associating them closely with documentary material. The documents are indisputably real; they are all in the public domain for anyone to check. And so the fictional events must also represent reality. The documents serve the purpose, therefore, of guiding us to the right conclusions.⁸⁸ In a different style of novel, the narrator would have met this requirement. In *5 Tage im Juni*, however, the narrator conspicuously avoids comment or taking sides.⁸⁹ Here characterisation and dialogue fulfil this role.

⁸⁸ Ute Brandes, *Zitat und Montage in der neueren DDR-Prosa* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1984), p.132.

⁸⁹ Brandes, p. 135.

Characterisation

5 Tage im Juni is a fictionalised account of events in East Berlin on 17 June 1953 and the preceding four days. The central plot concerns the struggle of Martin Witte, a trade union official, to prevent a strike on 17 June in his factory, Merkur, a large nationalised concern (*Volkseigener Betrieb* or *VEB*) in the suburbs of East Berlin. His heroic efforts to ward off a strike fail because of the attitudes and actions of the people ranged against him, and only the benign presence of Soviet troops prevents the strike from broadening into a full-scale national catastrophe. In his depiction of the people in his novel, Heym presents an uncomplicated view of 17 June and its causes. Particular types of people behave in a consistently particular way. Just as in his newspaper articles of June and July 1953, where there is little attempt to differentiate or nuance characters of the same type, so also do all the major characters in *5 Tage im Juni* conform to one type or another. It is as though the creation of complex fictional personalities might deflect from the realities of his 17 June story.

The main character types in the novel are Party member, unaffiliated worker, fascist recidivist, Western activist and Soviet military officer. Even Martin Witte and the SPD worker, August Kallmann, who are engaged in a battle to win the hearts and minds of the workers, conform to type, although both they and their interrelationship are quite complex.

Martin Witte and August Kallmann

Witte is the novel's central character, whose thoughts and experiences drive the story forward,⁹⁰ and it is through Witte above all that we gain access to Heym's own views on 17 June and GDR society. Heym gave very careful thought to his hero: in the Stefan Heym Archive in Cambridge, there is a character outline of Witte which runs to twenty-six typewritten pages. Yet the character has come in for widespread criticism as an empty, overblown 'positive hero'.⁹¹ Certainly, for someone who, as Reinhard Zachau

⁹⁰ Pernkopf, p. 197.

⁹¹ Krämer offers an extensive list of critics of Witte's characterisation including, for example, F. J. Raddatz and Hans Jansen, pp.182-84.

asserts, was critical of the concept of the positive hero,⁹² Heym has created a character here that many would regard as comfortably meeting the Socialist Realist criteria. Witte is an attractive man, with deep reserves of mental and physical courage, a clear thinker and leader of men, champion of socialism and scourge of privilege. His past is marked with both tragedy and heroism and, of course, he carried the fight to fascism. He has, however, managed to alienate many of those around him. He has fallen foul of the Western *provocateurs*; unfortunately, he has also alienated his own workers and, most damagingly of all, his Party. He cannot then be a positive hero in any sense that adherents of orthodox Socialist Realism would recognise.

Yet, I think Heym intended to construct a positive hero here or, as Pernkopf has it, an ‘alternative hero’.⁹³ Witte is a model, a blueprint for the brand of socialism Heym longed to see in the GDR. This blueprint is defined by what he stands against. Of course, he stands against the West and all its works. However, his main frustrations and disappointments relate to his own GDR society. He rails against Party rigidity and incompetence. His analysis of the performance of the top politicians at the 16 June rally is bleak:

Und die Redner. Im Hintergrund die von oben angestrahlten Reihen fast bewegungsloser höherer Funktionäre, sprachen sie in der Manier, in der sie immer sprachen, belehrend, die Augen weniger auf ihre Zuhörer gerichtet als auf das Papier vor ihnen; und doch waren da sonderbare Töne; eine Abstraktion, als wäre es nicht ihre Partei, von der sie sprachen, als wären es nicht sie selbst, ihr Politbüro, ihr Zentralkomitee, die geirrt hatten. (5T, 180)

He regrets the lack of true revolutionary fervour among his fellow workers: ‘Der Feind ist da, aber was wäre er ohne unsere Schwächen?’ (5T, 60) He rages in frustration that the union, his union, does not support and guide the workers. He sarcastically notes that GDR radio has ceded the propagandistic ground to the more insistent and pervasive Western propaganda: ‘Unsere [radio channels] berichteten über Erfolge beim Aufbau in der Usbekischen Sozialistischen Sowjetrepublik.’ (5T, 163) Whilst RIAS is transmitting

⁹² Reinhard Zachau, ‘Stefan Heym and GDR Cultural Politics’, in *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. by William Niven and James Jordan (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), pp. 125-42 (p. 129).

⁹³ Pernkopf, p. 206.

exciting, if biased, accounts of events at home, GDR radio is featuring boring trivia about a country no-one knows or cares anything about.

On the evening of 17 June, Witte shares his final reflections with his secretary, but they are in effect a soliloquy. In the course of the day, he reflects, workers reproached him for not listening to the people earlier. But these were the same people who did not want to listen to the gospel of socialism. Given this lack of revolutionary fervour, it is up to the Party, ‘trotz ihrer Fehler und Mängel’ (5T, 261), to lead the people. But it must be a Party not of ‘Feiglinge, Dummköpfe, Schönfärber und Beamtenseelen, an denen es bei uns in der Partei nicht mangelt’, but of ‘Genossen mit Herz’, who have the courage to do what must be done, no matter how unpopular (5T, 261). He muses on the likelihood that blame for 17 June will be liberally scattered around by the authorities, but it is too simplistic to treat 17 June as an isolated event: ‘Doch ist die Schuld nicht nur von heute und gestern. Auch für die Arbeiterbewegung gilt, daß nur der sich der Zukunft zuwenden kann, der die Vergangenheit bewältigt hat.’ (5T, 262) These are not simply the musings of one man at the end of a demanding day, rather they are Heym’s analysis of the ills within GDR society.

Most of Witte’s adversaries, whether rigid Party functionaries, disgruntled workers or treacherous insurrectionists, behave in predictable fashion. August Kallmann is rather more complex. Of all the workers, he is, as Pernkopf asserts, the most impressive and contradictory.⁹⁴ He is an old SPD man from the Weimar days and his battle of wills and words with Witte reflects all the bitter rivalry between the two parties, SPD and KPD, which share a common goal of socialism but not a common route to the goal. Kallmann is decent and hardworking. He commands respect among his peers. He is as committed to social justice as any, but he hates communism and the Soviet Union and longs instead for the old Weimar days:

Sie [die Kommunisten] waren die Ursache des Unglücks [...]. Ohne sie würde die Geschichte sich ruhig und demokratisch entwickelt haben, [...] bis der Sozialismus eintrat. [...] Mitten unter den Ruinen des Betriebs hatte er gestanden [...] und da waren sie

⁹⁴ Pernkopf, p. 199.

durchgekommen, die Sowjets, die Kommunisten. [...] Ein Offizier blieb stehen und sah sich an, was er tat und nickte: 'Gut' und zeigte auf das Wrack einer Drehbank und verkündete: 'Deins!'
Seines! August Kallmanns! Ein schönes Geschenk! (5T, 46)

Kallmann feels passionately about the rights of workers. As far as he is concerned, they have been let down both by their unions and the government, who have sought to impose Russian ways on Germans: 'Aber unser deutscher Arbeiter, das ist ein Fachmann, ein denkender Mensch, den kann man nicht so behandeln.' (5T, 38) Because of this concern, he has allowed himself, ill-advisedly, to be seduced into leading the strike at Merkur. It is a dangerous course of action and Kallmann looks to Witte to help him out of his dilemma by softening, to some extent, the Party line in favour of a modicum of flexibility towards the workers. This Witte cannot or will not do, and a disillusioned Kallmann is compelled to flee to the West to escape Party retribution.

Heym portrays Kallmann as an old man, adhering to an old way of life that is no longer appropriate. The SPD in the past have offered little resistance to fascism; it was left to the communists to fight fascism while Kallmann and his likes worked under Hitler just as they had under the Kaiser and in the Weimar Republic. Now, Heym suggests, the rump of SPD adherents left in the GDR constitute a dangerous fifth column with links to fellow party members in the West. It is an entrenched Party view, a rather different depiction of the SPD to the model suggested in Loest's post-*Wende* novel, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Reinhard Zachau sees in Witte and Kallmann the GDR's two main competing social forces; Witte, the spokesman for a critical socialism, Kallmann for an unreflective, 'postfascist' socialism.⁹⁵ Yet it is too simplistic to say that Witte is the hero and Kallmann his antithesis. Witte is the trade unionist who has failed his workers, even if the fault lay largely with others. He has a dark past, hinting at ideological disobedience. In choosing an adulterous relationship with Anna Hofer, the wife of a fascist recidivist (herself with Nazi, antisemitic antecedents) in preference to the love of

⁹⁵ Reinhard Zachau, *Stefan Heym* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1982), pp. 84-85; and 'Stefan Heym and GDR Politics', p. 136.

Greta Dahlewitz, steadfast and a true ‘Heldin der Arbeit’, he shows a certain lack of sound socialist judgement.

Krämer makes the very interesting point that Kallmann has generally been favourably reviewed by English-speaking critics, possibly because they are less fixated than their German counterparts on ideological issues.⁹⁶ For some, nowadays, Kallmann may seem the more complex and admirable figure, probably not what Heym intended.

The Party

Apart from Witte who, as chairman of the factory trade union, is a Party functionary, the key Party members in *5 Tage im Juni* are Banggartz and Sonneberg, employed in Merkur to oversee compliance with Party policy; Dreesen and Pettenkoffer, senior functionaries within the Party administration; and Ewers, a senior operative in the Stasi. In addition, there are half a dozen workers in Merkur who are also Party members. These are the people in the vanguard of socialism, charged by ideology to lead, guide and educate the masses. *5 Tage im Juni* is the story of their failure to do so. They are all decent enough people but rigid in their views and interpretations, reduced to mouthing platitudes and devoid of any understanding of or empathy with the workers. Personal initiative is neither approved of nor required: ‘Mir genügt, was das Politbüro beschließt,’ says Banggartz (5T, 9).

The novel opens with Banggartz’s words: ‘Entweder du hältst dich an die Parteibeschlüsse, Genosse Witte, oder du ziehst die Konsequenzen.’ (5T, 7) It closes a year later with Sonneberg’s words to Witte: ‘Ich freue mich wirklich, daß du Vernunft angenommen hast.’ (5T, 264) After a tumultuous week and twelve months of time to reflect, nothing has changed and no lessons have been learned.

Dreesen and Pettenkoffer are equally circumscribed by Party procedures and protocol. Dreesen displays a typical alienation from the workers; they should surely realise ‘daß alles, was Partei und Regierung tun, zu ihrem Besten geschieht’ (5T, 59). He is uneasily aware that the Party may have problems, but he reasons: ‘Du kannst dich nicht gegen einen ZK-Beschluss stellen.’ (5T, 60) Pettenkoffer is more senior and even

⁹⁶ Krämer, p. 184.

further removed from the realities of everyday life. He talks mostly in functionary jargon. 'Wir lassen uns nicht unter Druck setzen. Und den Feind zerschlagen wir' (5T, 148) is his unspecific answer to the mounting crisis. 'Ich kenne doch unsere Werktätigen,' he declares in a blinding flash of self-delusion (5T, 148). Major Ewers of the Stasi plays an insubstantial role. His presence is simply a reminder of the pervasive power and presence of the Stasi, even in 1953; it also gives Heym a chance to have a little dry fun with the Stasi as the 'Schutz der Republik vor geheimen Feinden' (5T, 97).

The trade unions were a key cog in the Party machine. Heym repeatedly asserted that he felt it was a trade union's duty first and foremost to represent the interests and protect the rights of its worker members. In the GDR, however, the trade union's role was not to stand up for the workers, but to fall in behind the Party and act as a 'transmission belt' for the conveyance of Party policy and instructions to the workers. In any potential or actual conflict between workers' interests and the Party, the trade unions were obliged to come down on the side of the Party. This conflict, and the trade unions' failure properly to support and guide the workers, is a central theme in the novel. The Party demanded subservience from the unions; as a result, the workers lost all trust and respect for their unions. The die was cast when the unions' own paper, *Tribüne*, demanded of the workers, on the morning of 16 June, that they meekly comply with the norm increases; that may have been the trigger for the events of the next two days. Witte, the thinking union official, is caught in an insoluble dilemma: 'Die ich verteidigen soll, bedrohen die Macht, die ich verteidigen muß.' (5T, 139) It is a conflict he does not resolve and, finally, is not allowed to resolve. It is his wish to stay on and try to bring the workers and Party together: 'Hier haben die Kollegen Vertrauen zu mir, hier kann ich etwas tun für die Partei.' (5T, 263) The Party is not listening.

The Workers

In his article of 21 June 1953, originally intended for the *Tägliche Rundschau*, Heym wrote: 'Die Grundtatsache in Deutschland ist, daß die deutschen Arbeiter *keine* Revolution gemacht haben.'⁹⁷ It is a sentiment which reveals the ambivalence towards

⁹⁷ 'Memorandum an Sokolow', in *Wege*, p. 200.

the masses which Heym shared with Brecht and other intellectuals in the early days of the GDR.⁹⁸ Heym himself was, of course, a committed socialist and believed that socialism stood between Germany and another catastrophic *Hitlerzeit*. In his view, only those who remained unconverted to the socialist cause could contemplate, as the workers did on 17 June, such insane folly as endangering the socialist state. Some workers had embraced socialism and become members of, or at least supported, the Party. The majority, however, were opposed to socialism for reasons varying from basic material need to sinister political motivation. This dichotomy is reflected in *5 Tage im Juni*.

There are around two dozen working-class characters in the novel. A handful are Party members; as one would expect, they are generally supportive of the Party and band together to ward off the worst consequences of the militant workers' behaviour. Apart from Greta Dahlewitz, whose commitment to socialism is, at least in part, motivated by her love of Witte, the working-class members of the Party are colourless. The other group of workers, not affiliated, are much more interesting. This group, depicted as representative of large swathes of GDR workers in the factories and building sites in 1953, revolves around Kallmann, but is manipulated by Fred Gadebusch.

Gadebusch is a shadowy figure, not given to sharing his thoughts: 'ein stiller Mensch, sorgfältig und korrekt, hieß es; Junggeselle' (5T, 22). According to his live-in lover, Goodie Cass, 'sagt er immer Verbindungen muß der Mensch haben aber selbst nicht hervortreten' (5T, 32). Gadebusch's connections are with powerful Western agents and, together with them, he is planning insurrection in Merkur. He has identified Witte as the main obstacle to his plans and as someone, therefore, who may have to be eliminated. The term 'Drahtzieher' was much used by Party authorities to describe the sinister people working quietly behind the scenes, fermenting instability in the GDR. Gadebusch is one such a 'Drahtzieher'. He surrounds himself with people who have no empathy for the socialist ideal, people only too ready to undermine the socialist state. These are ordinary men although, on closer inspection, we discover that Heym has drawn an interesting cross-section of GDR society. There is the capitalist Wiesener:

⁹⁸ Brecht, for example, said that the workers could not yet be trusted with the task of taking socialism forward, in a letter to his editor, Peter Suhrkamp. See *BFA*, XXX, 1998, p.182.

‘früher hatte er mal eine Werkstatt besessen, irgendwo im Polnischen’ (5T, 22). Big Klaus and his nephew little Klaus are more interested in wine and song than politics, but they habitually sneer at authority: ‘Vielleicht steckst du dir auch noch ’nen Besenstiel hinten rein und wackelst mit dem Arsch bei der Arbeit; das fegt den Fußboden’ (5T, 53) is indicative of the level of debate to which big Klaus aspires. They are not just manipulated, but are themselves always ready to raise the tempo whenever the appetite for revolt appears to flag. And always among these people the dark past is never far away. Csisek threatens a factory official with violence if he does not hand over a key: ‘Csisek selbst staunte: da war er, auferstanden, Unteroffizier Csisek, von der Stadtkommandantur in Rowno in der Ukraine.’ (5T, 210)

The workers, then, must in Heym’s opinion carry some of the blame for 17 June. Because they have not been able to accept the logic of socialism, they were prepared to collaborate with the GDR’s enemies and put at risk everything that had been achieved. Nor are the actual workers the only ones at fault. The widow Hofer and her neighbours harbour a deep hatred of socialism, held in check only by a fear of official retribution: ‘Diese Männer voller Ressentiments, diese Frauen, die seit Jahr und Tag von Erinnerungen an Verschollene und Tote lebten: nun hatten sie eine [Anna] greifbar, die sie hassen konnten für den verlorenen Krieg und die Russen und die Knappheit und die Farblosigkeit ihres Daseins.’ (5T, 137) And, as Anna says to Witte: ‘Aber es gibt so viele von ihnen.’ (5T, 70)

The masses have, though, good reason for their burning resentment. A pall of want and decay hangs over society. Prices are high and, anyway, the shop shelves are empty. A run-down café offers Witte and Anna only tasteless grey sausage and potato salad, whereas Kallmann and Gadebusch enjoy delicious food and beer in an immaculate Western restaurant. And everywhere the norm increases are driving a massive wedge between the workers and their state. The worker Wiesener’s bitter outburst is typical:

Der neue Kurs hat eingesetzt, alles wird erleichtert, aber hier, im Blatt der Gewerkschaft, für die jeder von uns Beitrag zahlt, was steht da geschrieben? Der neue Kurs bedeutet *nicht*, steht da, daß die zehnprozentige Normerhöhung zurückgenommen wird. Nun äußere dich mal! (5T, 116)

The Westerners

The role of Westerners, so sinisterly portrayed in *Der Tag X*, is substantially moderated in *5 Tage im Juni*. It is still Heym's contention, however, that the West was implicated in the events of 17 June. In his depiction of Western intervention, two figures emerge, each linked to a documentary excerpt. Heinz Hofer makes his entrance in the novel immediately after the statement by Jakob Kaiser, affirming that West German government plans with regard to an imminent 'Tag X' were in hand. Hofer, a traitorous GDR citizen, is in league with Western agencies and indeed it transpires that his task is to co-ordinate the activities of Western hooligans on the streets of East Berlin.

Kallmann and Gadebusch go to visit the SPD Herr Quelle in West Berlin, immediately after the excerpt from *Neues Vorwärts*, outlining the supportive role being offered by the SPD to the rebelling workers. We are therefore invited to infer organised intervention by the SPD in GDR affairs. There is, however, no evidence that Herr Quelle is acquainted with Hofer or that the political parties in West Germany are collaborating with each other.

Indeed, Herr Quelle is not a particularly obnoxious character. He does appear to some extent to have workers' interests at heart, and he and Kallmann relate warmly to each other. He 'spins' a propagandistic story from Goodie Cass' death and it is true that Kallmann and Gadebusch are irredeemably compromised in the GDR, but this was hardly Herr Quelle's doing.

Heinz Hofer is altogether a different proposition. Although a GDR citizen, he lives in the West, where his fascist leanings are more easily accommodated. He has inherited from his vile Nazi parents a thoroughly unpleasant personality. He is a criminal and wife-abuser, a hater of all things socialist and he has a collection of unsavoury friends from the West, whom he deploys in East Berlin to stir up trouble. In the end, of course, he and his friends prove to be spineless and he himself meets his just deserts at the hands of the GDR police. Hofer and his henchmen represent the fascist, Western 'Ringelsöckchen', who in the official GDR narrative were prime movers in the events of 17 June. They were not in East Berlin by accident. Hofer himself arrived there on Sunday 14 June with imminent plans 'so bald sich das hier ändert' (5T, 26). He

and his allies are on the streets of East Berlin on 16 and 17 June, mingling with the crowd and causing mayhem and disruption. Clearly, then, Heym subscribes to the premise that Westerners had a hand in provoking and exacerbating the events of 17 June. The documentary excerpts are produced as evidence of politically-organised intervention by Western agencies. The storylines show that planning of subversion took place in West German political circles and its execution was carried out by fascist thugs with pronounced criminal tendencies. Unlike the earlier *Der Tag X*, however, there is no hint whatsoever of any US involvement, nor indeed of any actual West German government intervention: in 1953, the SPD in West Germany were a somewhat marginalised opposition party.

The Soviets

Heym's treatment of Soviet involvement is confined to two documentary excerpts and two characters in *5 Tage im Juni*. The documents are an excerpt from the *Tägliche Rundschau* and a copy of the decree declaring a state of emergency in the GDR on 17 June; the characters are Solowjow and Bjelin, senior officers in the Soviet occupying army. Yet the role of the occupying force in the novel is decisive. It is also extremely complex and is another instance of Heym's perennial ambivalence towards Stalin and the Soviet Union. As we have seen, by the mid-1960s, Heym was robustly anti-Stalin and openly critical of the SED Party leadership's Stalinist politics. Yet in *5 Tage im Juni* there are mixed signals. There is a hint that, in the uncertainty and loss of firm leadership following Stalin's death, Moscow might have sacrificed the GDR on the altar of expediency by implementing 'die Lösung Beria: Liquidierung des Unternehmens DDR' (5T, 105). However, the *Tägliche Rundschau* excerpt takes a quite different tack.

The *Tägliche Rundschau* reflected the sociopolitical messages the Soviets wished to impart to the population of the GDR and the excerpt chosen by Heym is taken from a leading article of 12 June 1953. The background should be recalled. The article appeared the day after the SED had published details of the New Course, a course of action insisted upon by the Soviet Union, backtracking rapidly from the excesses of Stalin, who had died just three months previously. The article argues that not only did

the Party leadership commit mistakes in the past, but in doing so it was supported by its old Soviet masters, among whom, of course, Stalin was supreme: ‘Die ehemalige Sowjetische Kontrollkommission ist im gewissen Grade ebenfalls für die begangenen Fehler verantwortlich.’ (5T, 72) The repeal of these measures means that the GDR is back on the correct track of working towards a peaceful reunification of sovereign, democratic Germany. Given the febrile jockeying for position in the Kremlin at the time, it is difficult to know whether the Soviets, or which Soviets, actually meant this and indeed the Soviet officers in the novel reflect this uncertainty. What is important is that the words in this report provide a platform upon which Heym can mount a defence of the presence of Soviet forces on German soil and of Soviet motives and actions on 17 June. The idea which underpins this defence is that the defeat of fascism, establishment of socialism and the guarantee of peace was a Soviet ‘gift’ to the people of the GDR. ‘Sie haben uns befreit’, Witte tells the Soviet officers. ‘Sie haben uns die Revolution geschenkt. [...] Vielleicht war das Geschenk zu groß.’ (5T, 73) Neither the political leaders nor the people of the GDR are yet up to accepting and developing this gift. The Soviets are therefore required to continue to protect socialism, reluctantly, ‘in diesem geteilten, durcheinander gewirbelten Land’ (5T, 105). And since the GDR stands helpless against western imperialist ambition, only the Soviet Union can guarantee continuing peace and Germany’s democratic renewal. The *Tägliche Rundschau* article conveys a further message. Whereas the Soviets declare that they have rejected the old Stalinist ways in favour of a new, positive plan for the GDR, the Party leadership, in failing to show imagination and flexibility, is stuck in the old Stalinist rut.

The position of the second Soviet-related document is interesting. Normally, documentary excerpts *precede* the events they are intended to support; the state of emergency decree, however, is inserted *after* an attack on the GDR worker, Kallmann, by Western hooligans. The obvious inference is that the state of emergency was invoked in the interests of the beleaguered citizens of the GDR. Soviet tanks move into Berlin early on 17 June, not to repress GDR citizens, but to protect them from catastrophe. ‘Was auch immer sich da anbahnte im Osten dieser geteilten Stadt [...], es mußte zerschlagen werden, bevor es zu der großen Konfrontation am Brandenburger Tor

führte.’ (5T, 198) The only shots fired by the Soviet tanks are into the air, solely to discourage stone-throwing western hooligans. What Heym portrays is a protective and benign Soviet Union, determined, of course, to keep the GDR from the clutches of fascism and Western imperialism, but, at the same time, keen to work towards a unified, neutral, democratic Germany.

The individual characters in this novel, then, are representative, straying little from their ascribed typifications. In that sense one could call *5 Tage im Juni* a Socialist Realist novel. However, as continual blocking of publication demonstrated, Heym’s representations did not please the Party. True, there were Western agitators behind the scenes and fascist thugs on the streets on 17 June, but, in contrast to a progressive Soviet Union, the Party is unheroic and Stalinist, and the hero does not progress positively to a perfect understanding of the socialist ideal.

Narrative Style

In any novel where the story is substantially told by a narrator, his point of view inevitably intervenes. In a novel that purports to reflect actual events, such narratorial bias may well serve to reduce the credibility of his account; to use a journalistic analogy, the author is no longer providing a news report, but a lead article. Heym’s solution is to avoid expansive narrative in favour of a reportage approach, and to make his story progress instead through character dialogue and inner monologue.

Descriptive narrative is spare, uncomplicated and journalistic. Sentences are sometimes without verbs, sometimes even monosyllabic. Heym describes the start of Kallmann’s visit to Witte thus:

 Noch einmal die Suche nach dem Schalter. Dann sah er den zartlila gestrichenen
 Blechbriefkasten und das Schild *Hofer* und die Klingel und drückte auf den Knopf.
 Nichts.
 Er klingelte noch einmal.
 Hinter der Tür ging eine Klappe hoch; ein Lichtpunkt blinkte auf im Spion. (5T, 37)

This excerpt encapsulates much of the narrative technique which Heym uses throughout the novel. The language and vocabulary are unadorned and the register is conversational

rather than literary. Heym uses other devices that owe more to journalism than to an elevated literary style. The opening sentence of Chapter 14: '*Montag, 15. Juni 1953, 14.30 Uhr* betrat Gudrun Kasischke alias Goodie Cass die Pfortnerbude am Haupttor von VEB Merkur' (5T, 75) exemplifies two such devices. The effect of heading each chapter with date and time is to distance the opening phrase from the verb and thus seemingly to invert normal word order and change the register. And the term 'Gudrun Kasischke alias Goodie Cass' is used habitually to introduce this young lady. Mannerisms such as these give the text a racy feel and are reminiscent of a somewhat sardonic, streetwise style that was common in US journalism of the 1930s.

Since narrative description is so spare and minimal, other stratagems are required to allow the reader to interpret developments and motivations in accordance with the author's intentions. We have to rely heavily on characters' words and thoughts.

Words are straightforward: they are expressed in dialogue and this novel uses dialogue extensively. Dialogue is normally framed in direct speech. In three instances the direct speech is set out as in a play, complete with speaker indication and asides, a device that makes the episode concerned stand out in contrast to the preceding and following sections. In the most substantive of these three mini-dramas, an unpleasant row ensues, involving Heinz Hofer, his awful, unreconstructed Nazi mother and his estranged wife, Anna. The row takes place outside the Hofers' house and soon neighbours, similarly unreconstructed, join in (5T, 133-8). The evils of Nazism, past and residual, and the widespread hatred of socialism is foregrounded here and the tense, dramatic format works well in conveying how bleak will be the prospects for GDR society, if these people gain any leverage.

In some instances, the author uses reported speech. Two notable examples of this involve Anna Hofer. In the first case, she describes to Martin Witte her life in a Nazi environment as a young girl, whose family had been obliged to billet a dying communist, from whom she had learnt much (5T, 15-18). The second case is where she confides, again to Witte, her hopes and fears for her relationship with him, immediately prior to their making love (5T, 175). The use of reported speech in both these cases serves to convey Anna's account in a contracted form, thereby avoiding too much

interference with the brisk pace of the novel. There is, though, another factor here, harder to define. The clue lies in the sentence preceding Anna's first words: 'Witte war ein guter Zuhörer; die Menschen, ihre Gefühle, ihre Reaktionen interessierten ihn.' (5T, 16) Anna's two little speeches, indirectly reported, tell us as much about Witte as they do about Anna. It is an opportunity to inform us a little more about the heroic Witte's qualities as a decent man and a gentle lover.

Words alone do not provide a complete insight into a person's character, qualities and motivations. People often have private reasons for behaving or thinking as they do and they often prefer to keep these reasons private. In *5 Tage im Juni*, where there is no narrator to reveal these thoughts, inner monologue is used extensively:

Und wenn er nun tatsächlich nicht allein ist, dachte Kallmann, was sage ich dann? [...] Kallmann starrte in die Finsternis. Was sollte ihm passieren? Ihm war nie was passiert, nicht einmal in der Hitlerzeit [...]. Warum sollte einem guten Arbeiter, der seine Pflicht gewissenhaft tat, etwas passieren? (5T, 37)

This passage is typical of Heym's use of inner monologue. It brings together *erlebte Rede*, 'a rendering of a character's thoughts in his own idiom, while maintaining the third person form of narration', and *interior monologue*, a 'transposition into present tense and first person' of the same thoughts.⁹⁹ What is interesting here is that Heym fuses the two forms seamlessly to let us into Kallmann's thinking. Since Kallmann is alone, dialogue is not feasible and, even if it were, he may prefer not to give voice to his thoughts anyway.

Inner monologue is used to reveal the thoughts and opinions not only of the character concerned, but of whom and what the character represents. It is interesting, therefore, to note that neither the Hofers nor Herr Quelle, a Western politician, engage in inner monologue. Nor are we ever allowed such an insight into the mind of Fred Gadebusch, the shadowy fixer who collaborates with Herr Quelle to subvert Kallmann and other workers. There is, then, no attempt in this novel to present any Western point of view, noble or ignoble. This seems to affirm Heym's belief that, while there were

⁹⁹ Dorrit Cohn, 'Narrated Monologue: Definition of a Fictional Style', *Comparative Literature*, 18 (1996), no. 2, 97-112 (98).

certainly Westerners involved on 17 June, their motives and behaviour were ultimately unimportant: what mattered were the faults and fissures in GDR society.

Heym uses inner monologue on occasion to peer into the mindset of Party functionaries and members of the Soviet occupying forces. Anna Hofer and Greta Dahlowitz also reveal their thoughts, in their cases personal rather than representative. However, the most extensive use of the technique is to chart the thoughts and beliefs of the novel's two leading characters, Witte and Kallmann. It is in this unspoken dialogue between communist and social democrat that the struggle for the GDR's soul unfolds.

There is another form of inner monologue, reserved exclusively for Gudrun Kasischke, alias Goodie Cass. Goodie, a bubbly, bouncy stripper in a West Berlin nightclub, is used by Gadebusch, her lover, to ferry secret messages to Herr Quelle. Goodie's path has crossed Witte's in the past and when she discovers in one of Gadebusch's messages that Witte's life is in danger, she takes steps to warn him, a decision that will cost her her life. Goodie engages in a series of monologues, but in her case they are unstructured jumbles of thoughts and half-thoughts, or streams of consciousness. One such is 'in bezug auf Martin Witte':

[...] es muß nicht der sein wo ich gedient hab damals aber alles stimmt haargenau 1947 taucht er auf in dem Betrieb 1947 haben sie meine Alten eingelocht 1947 hat Herr Witte die Frau begraben und ist fort auch das andere trifft zu daß er Unruhe verbreitet wo er ist. (5T, 34)

It has been suggested that, in associating Goodie Cass with this stream of consciousness format, Heym's intention was to portray her as ideologically unsound and corrupted by an immoral West,¹⁰⁰ an interesting reminder that this literary form was condemned as decadent by the champions of Socialist Realism. Goodie's ramblings, however, suggest a vulnerability that many readers would find endearing; it therefore seems unlikely that Heym uses the format purposely to demean her. It is just as likely his intention is to flout another of the Party's cultural shibboleths. The ramblings have, in any case, an important functional purpose. It is through Goodie's reflections that we learn of Witte's

¹⁰⁰ Brandes, p. 135.

past, thereby rounding out our understanding of the man's motivations and complexities in the only way possible, since Witte is too noble to engage in bouts of self-congratulatory reflection. She also sheds a good deal of light on the character and activities of Gadebusch and his Western collaborators, people who, as we have seen, are not allowed to reveal their own thoughts.

A Convincing Account?

5 Tage im Juni attracted a great deal of attention when it was first published in 1974 and for a number of years afterwards. It is an interesting observation that in English-speaking circles, criticism has tended to focus on its literary and aesthetic merits.¹⁰¹ From this standpoint, many have found fault with the novel. Certainly, *5 Tage im Juni* is not a great novel. It is not even Heym's best portrayal of the paralysing weight of Stalinism on GDR society. From a purely literary point of view, his novel *Die Architekten* is far superior in terms of characterisation and plot.¹⁰²

German criticism of *5 Tage im Juni* has paid a great deal of attention to the historical accuracy of its account of the events of 17 June. Considerations concerning the accuracy of the account are often coloured by preconceptions as to the precise nature of the disturbances of 17 June; people's uprising or workers' gesture; East German spontaneity or West German agitation; failed socialism or imperialist ambition. Many reviewers felt, for example, that the book was too preoccupied with the Western agent theory, and that its credibility suffered as a result.¹⁰³ Heym's novel, Brecht's *Buckower Elegien* and Müller's *Germania Tod in Berlin* were all subjected to criticism of this nature. Often, fury at the writer's ideological stance precluded more reflective appraisal of the underlying literary quality of the work. In any case, the charge that *5 Tage im Juni* is overly and mistakenly preoccupied with the Western agent theory is exaggerated. West German intervention in GDR affairs is a fact, not an invention by Heym. The novel's documentary Western excerpts (Jakob Kaiser's remarks on 'Tag X' and the very

¹⁰¹ See Krämer for a comprehensive review of the reception of the novel by English-language reviewers as well as reviewers in both the GDR and West Germany, pp. 161-97.

¹⁰² Stefan Heym, *Die Architekten* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 2000). Although the novel was not published until 2000, Heym had actually completed it in the mid-1960s.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Zachau, *Stefan Heym*, p. 89; and Mohr, in Lamers, p. 73.

public encouragement by Western agencies to GDR citizens to defy their government) are in the public domain. Likewise, that there were Western mischief-makers in East Berlin on 17 June is beyond dispute. In *5 Tage im Juni*, Heinz Hofer and his friends provide Western thuggery and Herr Quelle supplies a modicum of political and logistical support, but the instigators of the strike at Merkur are, after all, Gadebusch and Kallmann, two GDR workers. Heym's novel is not really about Western subversion on 17 June; it is, as Fritz Raddatz argues, a study of conflict in socialism.¹⁰⁴ It is in this light that the novel's truthfulness and accuracy must be judged.

Nevertheless, there is a major shortcoming in Heym's treatment of 17 June, which seriously undermines the novel's aspiration to objectivity and balance. It concerns the selectivity Heym exercises in his choice of documentary material. He would claim to have been even-handed – ten Western documents, ten Eastern. However, he has been, to coin a phrase, economical with the truth. He has been highly selective and has used documents that reflect not just history, but his version of history, his particular thesis. This is a pity. A more balanced selection of documents would have included some which might at first glance seem to refute Heym's views, for example, documents indicating a degree of soul-searching in the upper echelons of the Party or even in Western agencies. Rather than weaken his case, this would actually have served to emphasise just how complex the conflicts within socialism and indeed within capitalism were.

It would, however, be hugely unfair to Heym to end an analysis of *5 Tage im Juni* on such a negative note. There is much to admire in the novel. At a basic level, it is 'a good read' – fast-paced, full of suspense and informative. Reich-Ranicki's assertion that Heym had written a novel intended to be simultaneously acceptable to the GDR and attractive to West German readers ('dieser deutsche Silberblick')¹⁰⁵ was an extreme formulation of a common charge levelled at the author. This surely misses the point, or rather two points. Firstly, *5 Tage im Juni* did indeed have a political message,

¹⁰⁴ Fritz Raddatz, 'Fünf Tage im Juni: Gruppenbild mit Genosse' *Der Spiegel*, 18 November 1974.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in Krämer, p. 172.

but it was a novel and Heym believed that a novel should above all be entertaining.¹⁰⁶ It has been said of this type of novel that its special importance lies ‘in its attempt to reach beyond the usual small audience for *belles-lettres* to influence a much broader public and thereby effect social or political change’.¹⁰⁷ It would have been strange indeed if Heym had set out to write a novel that was unattractive to any part of this broader public.

The more substantive point is that Heym found fault with both East and West German society and politics and showed considerable courage in saying so in *5 Tage im Juni*. His frustration with Party incompetence and his fear of a return to fascism were lifelong views. To label *5 Tage im Juni* as an opportunistic piece of work is to do an injustice to the constancy and consistency of those views. In any event, of course, the novel was not acceptable in the GDR. It contained too many unpalatable truths for Ulbricht, Honecker and the GDR’s other political leaders. Perhaps, as Armin Stolper has suggested, if the Party had listened more carefully to the messages in *5 Tage im Juni*, the history of the GDR up to 1989 and even beyond would have been quite different.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The events of 17 June played a central role in Heym’s career until and beyond the end of the GDR’s existence. He was in East Berlin on the day itself and wrote a series of newspaper articles critical of the Party and its policies over the next six weeks. He soon began to work on his novel of 17 June, also intended as a critical response to the way in which the Party governed the GDR, and for the next thirty years, fought with the authorities to have it published. Despite official obstruction in the GDR, *5 Tage im Juni* was published in the West in 1974, but it appeared in the GDR itself only days before the Wall came down.

No other writer made 17 June the focal point of opposition to the regime as vigorously or for as long as Heym did. The authorities met his opposition with

¹⁰⁶ Heym stresses this point in ‘Das Volk will echten Realismus’.

¹⁰⁷ Elke Matijevich, *The Zeitroman of the Late Weimar Republic* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Armin Stolper, ‘Ich habe gelesen’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 38 (1990), no. 3, 43-49 (48).

obstruction, harassment and financial penalties. Yet he escaped heavier punishment. Hutchinson asks why Heym was never imprisoned and offers three reasons: Heym was a Jew, he fought against fascism and he was too well-known.¹⁰⁹ This is inadequate; many in the GDR who fulfilled one, two or all three of these criteria were sent to prison.¹¹⁰ Indeed, to answer the question in the context of Heym's engagement with 17 June, we need to reframe it. Why was Heym not punished in the 1950s and 1960s, as Loest and Harich were, or in the 1970s, as Biermann and Havemann were?

In 1953, Loest and Harich wrote articles in the press that were highly critical of the Party: four years later, they were both in prison. The articles were not the direct reason for their imprisonment, but by writing them, Loest and Harich set themselves on an inexorable path to their own downfall. Heym's series of *Berliner Zeitung* articles, by contrast, were republished within months in a special edition brochure of *Tribüne*. They were again published a year later along with other critical articles in the collection, *Im Kopf-sauber*. If these publications did not constitute an official imprimatur, they certainly signalled that the Party was not unhappy with the articles. In the 1970s, the Party finally lost patience with what it saw as Biermann's disloyalty to the GDR and Havemann's public questioning of the nature of GDR socialism. By this stage, imprisonment was no longer an acceptable option, but Biermann was expatriated and Havemann confined to house arrest. Yet, when *5 Tage im Juni* was published in 1974, the regime was unhappy with the novel's portrayal of 17 June and its causes, but not sufficiently so to expatriate Heym or confine him to house arrest.¹¹¹

My view is that Loest and Harich, Biermann and Havemann were regarded by the Party as dangerous and disloyal subversives, intent on undermining the state, whereas Heym, for all his awkward literary troublemaking, was seen as someone whose loyalty to the state was not in doubt. It is inconceivable that Ulbricht would have invited Loest to accompany him to meet the people in 1953, as he did Heym (N, 575) or that

¹⁰⁹ Hutchinson, *Stefan Heym*, p. 137.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Jeffrey Herf, 'East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994) no. 4, 627-61. Merker himself was not a Jew, but the article amply illustrates how dangerous life was for Jews in the GDR.

¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the Party did impose a heavy fine on Heym, passed a new law designed to restrain him further and had him expelled from the Writers' Union.

Honecker would have invited Biermann to a meeting and addressed him ‘mit dem Du der alten Genossen’ as he did Heym (N, 783). Whether Heym was less ‘dangerous’ than these others is doubtful, but his loyalty to socialism remained unequivocal throughout his life, and his deep-seated belief in the beneficence of the Soviet presence in the GDR is equally manifest in his texts. For many, this precludes any consideration of Heym as an oppositional spokesman. Yet his *Berliner Zeitung* articles and *5 Tage im Juni* could hardly more clearly challenge the Party, contradict its interpretation of 17 June and criticise its policies: these texts therefore fully warrant inclusion in the canon of oppositional GDR literature. Heym’s opposition was not of the brash, impulsive variety, for he, like Brecht, was circumspect and often ambivalent, careful not to present himself as an easy target. In this way, he created for himself the space to practise his opposition.

ERICH LOEST

‘Keine Sekunde lang bereute er, nicht taktisch klug geheuchelt zu haben’

Introduction

After the traumatic events of 17 June 1953 and the ensuing months, the years 1954 and 1955 were relatively uneventful in the cultural politics domain in the GDR. Ulbricht had regained the political initiative; the masses had been neutralised by a mixture of punishments for participants in the 17 June Uprising and slightly improved living standards for the rest of the country; and the intellectuals, having gained a modicum of concessions on the cultural-political front, settled down to a relatively acquiescent existence. Indeed, at the much delayed Fourth Congress of the Writers’ Union in January 1956 the mood was so subdued ‘daß die kritische Aufbruchstimmung des Jahres 1953 die Debatte nicht entscheidend bestimmen konnte’.¹ However, just as the Congress was drawing to a close, the Twentieth Party Conference of the Soviet Communist Party was opening in Moscow, and Khrushchev’s damning indictment of Stalin and Stalinism, delivered at the Conference, ushered in a period of political and cultural ferment across the Soviet bloc. In Poland and Hungary, this crystallized as a demand for a shift away from old Stalinist prescriptions. Intellectuals in the GDR, particularly amongst the intelligentsia in East Berlin and Leipzig, began to campaign vigorously for similar reforms in political and cultural policy in the GDR, and Erich Loest, who lived and worked in Leipzig, was one of those caught up in the flow. As the years 1956 and 1957 unfolded, Loest’s experiences would create for him a place as one of the GDR’s most oppositional writers. For Loest and his enemies, however, the trouble did not begin in 1956; there was an earlier departure point, 17 June 1953.

In a speech in Dresden in 2003, fifty years after the event, Loest reminded his audience how profoundly the events of 17 June had influenced his entire life thereafter: ‘Nicht viele Tage erschütterten mich so, wühlten auf, kehrten in meinem Innersten das

¹ Jäger, *Kultur und Politik*, p. 77.

Unterste zuoberst wie dieser Mittwoch im Juni.² Between 1953 and 1957, he transformed from committed Party loyalist to vigorous critic of the SED regime, an evolution that can be traced in the press and journal articles that he wrote at the time. For this defiance, he paid a price of seven years in prison between 1957 and 1964, where he was forbidden to write anything at all. After his release, his life increasingly became a struggle with the political and cultural authorities in the GDR, culminating in his decision to emigrate to West Germany in 1981, where he published his autobiography, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*.³ Exile in the West and away from his beloved Leipzig seems to have diminished his appetite for creative writing:⁴ certainly, during this period, he wrote nothing of any consequence concerning 17 June. Happily restored to Leipzig after German reunification, Loest was re-energised, and the renewed debate on the Uprising occasioned by its fiftieth anniversary on 17 June 2003 prompted him to return to the subject in a number of texts, and in particular in his novel, *Sommengewitter*, published in 2005.⁵

I will explore these journalistic, autobiographical and fictional texts, in which Loest analyses the nature of the Uprising of 17 June and which reveal the extent of the dilemmas and difficulties it presented for him. As in the case of Brecht, Müller and Heym, I will assess to what extent Loest may be regarded as a writer oppositional to the GDR and its regime. In the case of the other writers, the fictional work examined was written while the author lived and worked in the GDR. When Loest wrote his novel, the GDR and its regime had ceased to exist. If writing may be considered oppositional only where what is opposed (still) exists, then *Sommengewitter* is not oppositional. On the other hand, if oppositional writing is considered to be writing which explains why the author felt the need to oppose, then *Sommengewitter*, written from a post-*Wende* distance, not only confirms Loest's long-held views on the Uprising, but also offers fresh insights into the nature of and reasons for Loest's opposition to the SED regime.

² Erich Loest, 'Welch wilder, wirrer Tag. Rede zum 17. Juni', in *Einmal Exil und zurück* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2008), pp. 49-56 (p. 49).

³ Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß: Ein Lebenslauf* (Munich: dtv, 2005). First published in Hamburg by Hoffmann and Campe, 1981.

⁴ See Ian Wallace, 'Our Personality: Erich Loest', *Politics and Society in Germany, Austria and Switzerland*, 1 (1989), no. 3, 63-69 (63-64).

⁵ Erich Loest, *Sommengewitter* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005).

Loest According to Himself

Most of what we know of Loest's thoughts and actions on 17 June and during the subsequent months is gleaned from his autobiography, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, complemented by the journalistic articles he wrote in June and July, 1953. Since this is the case, we need to pay special attention to the nature of these texts and the circumstances under which they came into being.

Durch die Erde ein Riß is the first of a number of autobiographical works Loest has produced. It is an account of his life between 1936 and 1964, and deals in depth with 17 June 1953. In 1990, he published *Der Zorn des Schafes*: it encompasses a much wider timespan, from his birth in 1926 to 1990, but the events of 17 June are accorded a few lines only. *Prozesskosten* appeared in 2007: it, however, is not strictly autobiography, but rather an account of his own and associated trials in 1957 and 1958; 17 June plays no significant part. Other works such as *Der vierte Zensor* (1984) and *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann* (1991) are similarly accounts of specific aspects of Loest's life in the 1970s, in particular, his running battles with cultural authorities in the GDR. Again, there is no significant reference to 17 June.

Of all his autobiographical work, then, only in his first, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, is there a significant treatment of 17 June. It may seem strange that an event so profoundly important in Loest's life should not be accorded a higher profile in his autobiographical work. I will return to this point later; in passing, I would suggest that the explanation may lie in Loest's perception, after the publication of *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, of waning public appetite for or interest in 17 June, in either East or West.

Durch die Erde ein Riß deals with Loest's life between 1936 and 1964, more precisely, 25 September 1964, the day he was released from prison, having served a sentence of almost seven years. Loest accounts for his life over this period in fifteen chapters. The first three chapters cover the period from when he was a ten-year-old in 1936 in Nazi society, through the war, to the downfall of Hitler and the Third Reich. The next three chapters chart his progress from disillusion and disappointment at the end of the war to his new life as an enthusiastic and successful Party functionary in the GDR. The central part of the book, chapters 7 to 9, deals with the tumultuous year 1953. Chapters 10

to 12 are an account of Loest's response to the revelations in Moscow in February 1956, and his subsequent arrest, interrogation and trial, and the final three chapters deal with his time in prison.

While *Durch die Erde ein Riß* charts Loest's life between 1936 and 1964, to describe it as an autobiography would be an oversimplification. Clearly, the book is autobiographical, in that it fulfils Philippe Lejeune's 'pacte autobiographique', where the writer guarantees to the reader that the author, narrator and protagonist are the one identical person, and the co-extensive 'referential contract', in which the author undertakes to tell the truth, to the best of his ability, in what he writes.⁶ However, as Paul John Eakin says, 'the form of an autobiography is increasingly understood as a manifestation of the autobiographer's concept of self'.⁷ Loest's concept of self in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* extends beyond that of a straightforward autobiographer.

Within the genre of autobiographical writing, a distinction is often drawn between autobiography and memoir. Within this distinction, the autobiography is focussed on the self, the memoir on others.⁸ What is meant here, as Harold Rosen suggests, is that the autobiography charts the development and meaning of a private life, whereas the memoir is a kind of writing in which the author gives an account of a public life.⁹ Accounts of one's own life written by politicians and other public figures are often described as memoirs, in that the mutual influence exerted between the author and external events and institutions is brought into consideration.

Memoirs, then, will often be heavily overlaid with politics and history and the memoirist will in such circumstances usually advance his own interpretation of both. However, a memoir is not history in the historian's sense. Life-narratives offer a subjective truth.¹⁰ The historian, on the other hand, strives to be rigorously objective, offering 'truths' which are independently verifiable. Hayden White draws the distinction

⁶ Lejeune, pp. 209 and 212.

⁷ Paul John Eakin, 'Narrative and Chronology as Structures of Reference and the New Model Autobiographer', in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. by James Olney (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 32-41 (p. 34).

⁸ Pascal, p. 5.

⁹ Harold Rosen, *Speaking from Memory: A Guide to Autobiographical Acts and Practices* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1998), pp. 21-23.

¹⁰ Smith and Watson, p. 10.

between the explicit or implicit presence of the 'ego' in subjective discourse and the absence of any reference to the narrator in historical narrative.¹¹ Any memoir which purports to present history must therefore be treated with extreme caution. Nevertheless, the memoirist is entitled to challenge prevailing versions of events and his chronicle of these events will be a valuable contribution to the literature on the historical and sociopolitical ground it covers. In *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, Loest sets out to provide an account of his personal odyssey, but an odyssey that is very firmly embedded in the society in which he lived. Indeed, he suggests that his personal journey is representative of a generation. Additionally, he is anxious to set the record straight, to rebut others' versions of events and in this sense, he is also setting out an alternative version of history. The concept of self in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* is one of autobiographer, memoirist and chronicler.

The first thing to note is the title Loest chose for his book, *Durch die Erde ein Riß: Ein Lebenslauf*. 'Durch die Erde ein Riß' is the final line of a poem written by Johannes Becher to mark Stalin's death, and the fissure that rent Loest's world was, as we shall see, one which also had its origins in the death of Stalin, spreading forward in time to create further fissuring as GDR society fragmented, but also backward to join up with the fissure created nearly a decade earlier by the Nazi defeat and Hitler's downfall. That trauma had not, as one might have expected, hardened Loest against future shocks. In describing his response to Stalin's death, he aligns that shock with the earlier one caused by Hitler's downfall: 'Er war 27 und nicht mehr 17, politische, ideologische Schründe lagen hinter ihm, aller seelische und gedankliche Fundus war schon einmal gebeutelt worden. [...] Der Schmerz war neu, rein, mit Skepsis nicht vermischt.'¹² However, he does not call his book 'Durch *meine* Erde ein Riß' or '*mein* Lebenslauf'. It could be anyone's 'Lebenslauf'; a common 'Lebenslauf', just as the earth is common to all and fissures in the earth are cataclysmic for all. Loest's choice of words for his title suggests that the fissures in society which so profoundly affected his own life had a similar effect on others who experienced them. The route his life took, he is suggesting, was one shared by many.

¹¹ White, p. 3.

¹² Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p.189. Future references are designated within the text as (D, page number).

Loest does not use the narrative 'I' in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, preferring to identify himself, the protagonist or subject of the story, in the third person. In this, he seems to flout a ground rule of autobiography. According to Lejeune, the use of any person other than the first to denote the protagonist is rare in autobiography, and the use of the third person implies either enormous self esteem (as in the case of Julius Caesar) or humility before God (as in some religious autobiographies).¹³ Lejeune's observation may have less validity in the case of more recent autobiographical work: Loest's certainly avoids excesses of either self-importance or humility. The narrator in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* identifies not just with one third person but with two. Essentially, the narrator has two identities. One is Loest, the chronicler, detached observer and commentator; the other, Loest the protagonist, subject of the autobiographical narrative. In a further twist, the protagonist has both a regular and a supplementary identity.

Loest uses the abbreviation 'L.' to identify himself as protagonist in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*. Sometimes he prefixes a title, so we have, for example, 'Pimpfanwärter L.', 'Gefreiter L.', 'Sextaner L.', 'Genosse L.' and he occasionally describes himself as 'Erich' or 'E. L.', particularly when referring to himself as a very young child. These prefixes and other forms do not seem to imply separate identities, particularly since they are all used concurrently and interchangeably with the simple 'L.' Rather, he uses the terms others might have used of him or to address him at different stages of his life. His use of the full name Loest provides an interesting variant on this theme. The name hardly ever appears. He refers to his father a few times as Alfred Loest (although also sometimes, confusingly, as Alfred L). Apart from this the full name appears only in direct or indirect speech, quotations or cited texts. In these cases, 'Loest' or 'Herr Loest' are often used to demonstrate that he is no longer regarded as 'Genosse Loest', but a bourgeois enemy of the masses. In an extremely hostile article in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* in September 1953, for example, the name Loest appears a dozen times, pointedly unembellished in contrast to that of his antagonist, the loyal Genosse Böhme (D, 241-5). Loest himself notes the conjunction of mode of address with social status in Party discourses: '*Herr Loest* habe weitere begangen, Herr Loest *sei* [italics in the original] ein faschistischer

¹³ Lejeune, p. 195.

Provokateur.’ (D, 246) However, not all cited texts containing his name are hostile; he uses an extract from a text written by Gerhard Zwerenz, his friend, which paints him in a favourable light as a generous host and responsible citizen (D, 262-3).

In the final chapter, Loest himself uses his own full name, when he, the protagonist, dreams of life after prison. He sees himself as ‘nicht mehr 23/59, sondern wieder Loest, *Herr Loest*, wenn ich bitten darf’ (D, 392). Here, it is used in contrast to 23/59, Loest’s prison number and the protagonist’s supplementary identity. When he first arrived in Bautzen Prison, in March 1959, he was ordered to identify himself: ‘Und L. sagte zum erstenmal, und tausendmal sollte er es wiederholen: “Strafgefangener dreiundzwanzigeneunundfünfzig meldet sich ab.”’ (D, 356) Of course, his jailors referred to him routinely by this number but Loest himself often uses the designation: ‘Das Gras wurde grün im Freistundenhof, die Kastanien hinter der Mauer blühten, 23/59 und 24/59 gingen eine halbe Stunde lang im Kreis, turnten die Freiübungen durch, dann hockten sie sich wieder gegenüber.’ (D, 359) The passage highlights how completely the regime had removed his right to normal social intercourse, undermined his human dignity and condemned him to a life of numbing monotony. The use of ‘Loest, *Herr Loest*’ is his defiant declaration that he will survive this barbarity and reclaim his individuality and identity. His enemies used the term as an indictment; he now embraces it as a mark of liberation.

The use of the third person to recount events in the protagonist’s life is reinforced by his use of the third person to relay the thoughts of the narrator’s other identity, the chronicler. The account of life between 1936 and 1964, told from the protagonist’s perspective, proceeds along fairly regular chronological lines, but this narrative is frequently interrupted by observations made from a different perspective, that of the chronicler, observing as he writes. The chronicler views the past from the vantage point of the present: ‘Der Chronist, ein Mittfünfziger, lauscht, äugt, tastet zurück, um dieses Burschleins habhaft zu werden, das in seiner Erinnerung hochschnellt, sächsich spricht, marschiert, sich ängstigt, hofft.’ (D, 17)

The chronicler, with the maturity and wisdom gained from a life of fifty years, looks back critically over the callow protagonist’s life, applying a rigorous test to the

accuracy of the memories and placing the protagonist's actions and feelings in the much wider social and historical context of which the younger man would not have been aware. Whereas the protagonist's account arises from his own, possibly inaccurate memories, the chronicler is at pains to stress the reliability and impartiality of his observations. He has checked his own recollections against those of friends and family and he makes frequent use of the records and diaries of others, such as the public Mittweida 'Stadtchronist' and the private records of a local diarist, Dr. Sauer.¹⁴ He also draws extensively on other documentary material, newspaper articles, quotations from other writers and letters to and from his family. And, of course, from his vantage point in the present, he is in a position to challenge the veracity of older historical accounts and to offer his own interpretations.

The chronicler lives in the present; he can look back not just to the period framed by the autobiographical narrative, but to time before and after it. With the help of an old family album, the chronicler looks back to his early infancy and becomes aware that he inherited a trait from his grandmother Martha that would have been of no consequence to the protagonist, but which the chronicler, fully aware of Nazism's ideas on Aryan purity, can now understand in its full social and historical significance: 'Ein Germane war er keineswegs; die Loests aus Pommern waren blond und blauäugig, aber Martha, das schönste Mädchen aus der Weberstraße, hatte massenhaft Pigmente in die Erbmasse eingestreut.' (D, 19-20) More frequently, the chronicler recounts a tale from the period between the end of the narrated events in 1964 and the time of writing. During the course of reflecting on the effect of his Party membership on his writing quality (itself a digression from the protagonist's tale), the chronicler recalls a conversation on a subject with another writer: 'Einmal saß der Chronist mit Juri Trifanov [...]. Das war 1976.' (D, 178)

Mostly, the chronicler observes the past from his present-day stance. These reflections are prompted by specific actions of the protagonist, but the chronicler often suggests a more general relevance. Two extracts from the autobiography will serve as illustration.

¹⁴ Loest cites Dr. Sauer on a number of occasions. See, for example, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 20, 21 and 23.

Ein Drittel Jahrhundert später hört der Chronist manchmal um Mitternacht die Nachrichten des Deutschlandfunks und zuvor die Hymne der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, textlos. Danach Pause, Stille. Das Ohr des Chronisten wartet. Nach einer Pause von anderthalb Sekunden meint sein Ohr, es müßte weitergehen im Stampfrhythmus, wie es tausendmal weiterging mit dem Horst-Wessel-Lied, härter jetzt, kämpferischer, nicht mehr weihevoll: Tam tam tam tam! Die Dauer dieser Pause ist eingeschliffen wie die Fortsetzung. Vernunft und die Strecke eines halben Lebens kommen dagegen nicht an. (D, 53)

War er Karrierist? Eines ist gewiß: Nicht mehr lange hin, und er wäre verwundert gefragt worden: Du bist kein Genosse? Aber warum denn nicht? Wenn er dann nein gesagt hätte, wäre seine Laufbahn an dieser Zeitung beendet gewesen. Das wußte er, aber es bedrängte ihn nicht [...]. Er hätte sich geschämt, den freundlichen, von ihrer Sache begeisterten Menschen, die gelitten hatten, als er zu den Bedrückern gehört hatte, ins Gesicht zu sagen: Ich will nicht euer Genosse sein! [...] Mit diesem Schritt bewies er, daß er kein Nazi mehr war, daß nun auch für ihn der Weg frei lag für friedliches Wachsen. Einer, der einer Karriere wegen seine Gesinnung verleugnete, war er nicht. Aber genausowenig war er sich der Tragweite dessen, was er da tat, bewußt. (D, 127-8)

These extracts present the chronicler's reflections on two crucial events in the protagonist's life, joining the Nazi movement as a teenager and then, a decade later, enrolment in the SED. Each text deals with a powerful sociopolitical force acting on the protagonist. In the first instance, the depth of the Nazi reach into the protagonist's psyche was so profound that, even thirty years later, he still reacts in Pavlovian fashion to the old symbols of fascism. The second extract illustrates the irresistibility of the economic, sociopolitical and moral pressures applied in the infant socialist state. The chronicler does not disguise the fact that, in both cases, the young man was a willing, indeed enthusiastic participant, but each time it was beyond the protagonist's powers of reason to resist or assess the consequences.

The chronicler, then, portrays the inevitability of the protagonist's entanglement in fascism and then socialism. There are, however, indications that this entanglement was not simply an individual's experience, but a more general one. Much of the first extract is written in an impersonal style, 'es müßte weitergehen [...] wie es tausendmal weiterging', 'ist eingeschliffen', 'Vernunft und die Strecke eines Lebens kommen dagegen nicht an',

suggesting that it was not simply the young Loest who was infected but a whole society. And, in noting the relationship between those most nationalistic of symbols, the anthems of the Third Reich and West Germany, the chronicler draws attention to the continuity that exists between the Nazi past and the West German present, and in doing so, he implicates not only a past society, but an entire present one.

The second extract is written in a more personally oriented style, but here also, there is intent to identify a generation with the actions of an individual. The chronicler does not answer his own question: was the protagonist a careerist, because he joined the SED to secure his job? No answer is needed, because the young Loest's wish to work as a journalist and his commitment to the Party as the guarantor of peace were in perfect harmony. It was a harmony of the times. Everyone was expected to conform, but in a hotbed of antifascist fervour and socialist comradeship, most were happy to conform. A price would ultimately be paid, but for a generation which embraced socialism after 1945, no such thoughts were in their minds at that time.

The conventional relationship in an autobiography is one where author, narrator and protagonist are the same person. This is the relationship that obtains, for example, in *Der Zorn des Schafes*, and here the protagonist uses the more usual autobiographical 'I'. The text begins: 'Meine Eltern haben mich nach meinem Onkel benannt', and ends: 'Ich fürchte. Nun werden sie wieder eine Weile bellen.'¹⁵ The relationship in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* is extended beyond this and altered. Author, narrator and protagonist are now joined in the same person by the chronicler, and the use of the third person to relay the protagonist's account and the chronicler's observations creates a distance between each of them and the narrator. The relationships are not equidistant: the narrator is much closer to his chronicler than to his protagonist, distancing the latter even further from the narrator.

Critical opinion is divided on the success of Loest's use of the third person to emphasise the objectivity of his account. Sabine Brandt finds 'daß Loest sich gar nicht an uns wendet, sondern immer nur an sich selbst'.¹⁶ This assertion does not sit easily with Loest's absorption with the society, first Nazi, then communist, within which he lived.

¹⁵ Erich Loest, *Der Zorn des Schafes: Aus meinem Tagewerk* (Künzelsau and Leipzig: Linden, 1990), pp. 7 and 393.

¹⁶ Sabine Brandt, 'Durch die Erde geht ein Riß', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 November 1981.

Stephen Reinhardt feels that *Durch die Erde ein Riß* attains a ‘Charakter der Annäherung’ by eschewing the tone of strident certainty associated with many ‘Ich-Autobiographien’,¹⁷ whereas Heinrich Mohr suggests that Loest achieves distance, in part, from a ‘Moment von Verfremdung’.¹⁸ Certainly, Loest’s gently ironic and understated approach to the recounting of his undoubtedly harrowing experiences invites sympathy and understanding, as Reinhardt implies, but Mohr’s Brechtian term, suggesting a fresh and differentiated look at a life and times, offers a richer path of inquiry.

It is indeed the determination to cast a fresh light on events that removes *Durch die Erde ein Riß* beyond the category of uncomplicated autobiography. True, he writes to set the record straight in the matter of his own activities, particularly between 1953 and 1957. He also sets out, however, to challenge received versions of history more generally, especially that of eastern Germany between 1936 and 1964, using his own memories and experiences as exemplars. *Durch die Erde ein Riß* is therefore both personal story and historical interpretation; as Stefanie Schneider argues: ‘Erich Loest gliedert sein Leben in das “Bezugssystem der Geschichte” ein und gibt sich somit als Chronist erkennen.’¹⁹ This can be a problematic combination. There is widespread suspicion among historians towards the portrayal of autobiography as history.²⁰ In reading the book as a record of the times, these reservations should be borne in mind.

Nevertheless, in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, Loest addresses issues of social and historical import, such as the spread and influence of Nazism among ordinary people in eastern Germany; as Thies Ziemke notes, he did so at a time when few others did and his account is therefore of significant value.²¹ And when we recall that historians themselves were deeply divided, often along ideological lines, as to the nature of the Uprising on 17 June and the role in the events of the writers, then Loest’s account, from his unique vantage-point, remains of great importance.

¹⁷ Stephen Reinhardt, ‘Alle Entwicklung aus Widerspruch: Erich Loests Autobiographie’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 7 November 1981.

¹⁸ Heinrich Mohr, “‘Spurensicherung’: Erich Loests Versuch, die “eigene Wahrheit” zu schreiben’, *Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR*, 3 (1982), 1-17 (6).

¹⁹ Schneider, p. 45.

²⁰ See, for example, Keith Thomas, *History and Literature* (Swansea: University College of Swansea, 1988), p. 13; and Saunders, p. 35.

²¹ Thies Ziemke, ‘Dreißig deutsche Jahre: Ein Lehrstück’, *Linkskurve*, 3 (1981), 44-46 (45).

Loest and 17 June

On the morning of 17 June 1953, Erich Loest, 27, celebrated novelist and industrious Party functionary, arrived by train in East Berlin to participate in a GDR-wide Writers' Union meeting, called by Kurt Barthel (Kuba), its chairman. Just six months later, Loest's belief in socialism was still intact, but his love affair with the Party was over, he was no longer chairman of the Leipzig Writers' Union and his status as model intellectual had been radically revised. How could circumstances have changed so fundamentally in such a brief period of time? The answer, of course, is the Uprising of 17 June, and in this section we will examine the events and consequences of 17 June from Loest's perspective, drawing on his own observations, as set forth in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, as well as a number of press and journal articles written by him in the course of 1953.

The Portents

Like so many others in Nazi Germany, the youthful Loest had been seduced by the prospect of participation in power, but, after the shock of Hitler's defeat and death, he vowed never again to become involved in politics or the pursuit of personal power. Yet, in 1947, he joined the SED. As he himself says, with a mixture of irony and self-effacement he commonly uses in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*: 'Februar 1945: Wir werden siegen, weil wir den Führer haben! Februar 1946: Nie wieder Politik! Februar 1947: Brüder, in eins nun die Hände!' (D, 128) This was written some time in the 1970s, enjoying, therefore, the benefit of distance. The reality, as Loest acknowledges, was that joining the SED was partly a career move, in that, as a journalist with a Party newspaper, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, membership of the Party was more or less mandatory. But Loest claims a deeper conviction: 'Es ging um den Frieden, den Frieden, alles andere war zweitrangig. [...] Am energischsten im Friedenskampf, im Aufbaukampf war die SED.' (D, 126) He never wavered in his conviction that socialism represented the world's best chance of combatting fascism and promoting peace and social justice. Loest subscribed, of course, to the antifascist and Marxist-Leninist principles which underpinned GDR socialism and informed the SED narrative in the 1950s. In an interview in 1976, he described his post-war search for the most potent form of antifascism and, in Saxony,

found it in the SED.²² When he was interviewed much later concerning his hopes and fears in those June 1953 days, he expressed the hope that a socialism would have emerged that would deliver true democracy: ‘so hatten es uns ja Marx und Engels versprochen’.²³ Yet he also says of his entry into the SED that it was a low-key event, ‘absolut unfeierlich’ (D, 127). This hints at another strand in Loest’s thinking that he was to articulate later and that was to become a central motif in his life and work. It was that his socialism was anchored in the solid, understated traditions of the German workers’ movement, as promoted by August Bebel and the SPD, rather than in the rhetoric of Marxism and the KPD.

In any event, Loest worked enthusiastically over the following years in the interests of the Party. He joined the Kulturbund in 1950 and by the beginning of 1952, he was, at 26 years old, chairman of the Leipzig branch of the Writers’ Union and it was in this capacity that he travelled to Berlin on 17 June 1953.

The road to this exalted juncture had not, however, been an uninterrupted pathway to success. Loest and the Party had already had misgivings about each other. In 1949, Loest published his first major novel, *Jungen, die übrigblieben*, a semi-autobiographical account of a young man caught up in Hitler’s war. The novel attracted sharp criticism in the pages of the *Tägliche Rundschau*. The novel’s main character too closely identified with Nazi sentiments, the newspaper’s critics found; Loest had failed to find a proper distance and was therefore guilty of ‘Standpunktlosigkeit’ and ‘Schnoddrigkeit’ (D, 147). The Party could not ignore such criticism from such a source: Loest was sternly reprimanded and sent to work in a factory, where he might cleanse himself of the tendencies he had inherited from his bourgeois roots and learn to embrace true proletarian consciousness (D, 148).

Loest found the whole experience, which cost him his job at the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, deeply chastening and discouraging. However, he picked himself up and turned to writing on a full-time, self-employed basis. His next novel, *Die Westmark fällt*

²² Karl Corino, “‘Es geht seinen Gang oder Mühen in unseren Ebenen’”: Ein Gespräch mit dem DDR-Schriftsteller Erich Loest’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3 April 1976.

²³ Udo Scheer, ‘Hoffnung und Ernüchterung: Ein MUT-Interview zum 17 Juni mit Erich Loest’, *MUT*, 430 (2003), 42-46 (43).

weiter appeared in early 1952. By common critical consent, it is an inferior piece of work: Stephan Bock, for example, finds it much too narrowly partisan to have any particular merit.²⁴

However, it seems clear that Loest was more interested at this point in political rehabilitation than literary merit. Patricia E. Buckley notes that the book's reception in the GDR, which was very positive, had 'little, if anything, to do with the work's literary qualities, such as they are, but rather reflect[ed] the success with which Loest managed to produce a novel that incorporated the characteristics which official literary policy demanded in a work of socialist realism'.²⁵ Even Loest's very good friend, Gerhard Zwerenz, is dismissive. The book was 'in seiner politischen Tendenz so hanebüchen, daß die Partei es als ein Werk des "sozialistischen Realismus" anerkannte und als Selbstkritik des bis dahin als Faschisten verschrieenen Loest wertete'.²⁶ In fact, Zwerenz got his facts wrong here. The book was published well before the accusations of fascism and subsequent *Selbstkritik* to which Zwerenz refers. His general assessment is however accurate. The book was a *Selbstkritik* of sorts, and when Loest shortly afterwards was elected chairman of the Leipzig Writers' Union, he would have regarded his rehabilitation as complete.

Even as the Party was signalling its approval of a reformed Loest, he was beginning to experience doubts about sociopolitical trends in the GDR. In July 1952, Ulbricht ushered in the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* programme. In principle, Loest supported efforts to build a strong socialist society, but the persecution of the Churches, harassment of small businesses and the sharp downturn in the people's standard of living caused him disquiet and personal unhappiness. As a privileged member of the Party intelligentsia, he was shielded from the worst of the social consequences of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*, but his father, who ran a small business, bitterly resented the Party and his wife's grandfather, an old SPD man, resigned from the SED in disgust. Naturally, Loest's relationships with

²⁴ Bock, p. 176.

²⁵ Patricia E. Buckley, *The Major Works of Erich Loest 1950 – 1985*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Loughborough University of Technology (1989), p. 34.

²⁶ Gerhard Zwerenz, 'Immer noch stalinistische Terrorjustiz: Der exemplarische Fall des Schriftstellers Erich Loest', *SBZ-Archiv*, 2 (1959), 18-21 (19).

his family became very strained: ‘Es ist ein mieses Geschäft, Durchhalteparolen zu verbreiten, wenn andere durchzuhalten haben.’ (D, 188) Loest’s observation reveals the depth of his internal conflict between ideological enthusiasm and human concern.

As 1953 opened, these mixed emotions continued and Stalin’s death in March merely intensified Loest’s inner conflict. The demise of such a colossus as Stalin was difficult for many in the GDR, including Loest, to come to terms with, yet within weeks, small harbingers of later revelations as to Stalin’s true nature began to appear and to fuel the existing anxiety. One notable example which Loest cites is the ‘Doctors’ Case’ (D, 191). In January 1953, nine doctors, six of them Jewish, were alleged to have confessed to the murder of Zhdanov in 1948 and to other practices inimical to the Soviet Union. Less than a month after Stalin’s death, they were all released without further ado.²⁷

All the while, economic and social conditions in the GDR worsened until, in early June, the government was forced to roll back the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* in favour of a New Course. Loest recalls that he recognised the immediate benefits the New Course brought to the long-suffering people, but the enforced disappearance of the word ‘Sozialismus’ from all discourse seemed to him a defeat. That, and the conspicuous absence of any political leadership or direction was dispiriting in the extreme: ‘Abends [...] fühlte sich L. hundeehend.’ (D, 195)

As 17 June approached, then, Loest’s mind was in turmoil. His world, which had held such promise just over a year ago, was now deeply fissured. The certainties of Stalin’s wise leadership and the Party’s sure guidance had fragmented. The social fabric in the GDR was coming apart at the seams and socialism itself was under threat. Although Loest’s commitment to Party and socialism remained solid, he was not in an optimistic mood.

In East Berlin on 17 June

Loest’s earliest attempts to explain what he saw in East Berlin on 17 June were two newspaper articles, ‘Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert’ in *Neues Deutschland* on 21 June and ‘Der “Tag X” in Berlin’ in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 23 June. The two

²⁷ See Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 1064-65.

articles are broadly similar in tone, adhering closely, as Matthias Braun suggests, to the Party's ideological line.²⁸ In the *Neues Deutschland* article, no reason is given for workers being on the streets: that they were there at all has to be inferred. The disturbances were the work of the West German government and its fascist henchmen:

Heruntergekommene Jugendliche, Strolche, 'Bubis' mit chromblitzenden Rädern, Mädchen, denen man nicht im Dunklen begegnen möchte – was in Westberlin an Abschaum aufzubieten war, hatten versucht, die Arbeiter des demokratischen Sektors vor den Kriegskarren ihrer Hintermänner zu spannen.²⁹

Party members had behaved with courage and resoluteness, as had the workers, who, aghast at what had happened, had assumed the role of unofficial guardians of the state, realising 'daß sie keine Erlaubnis brauchen, die Republik zu schützen, daß sie keine Erlaubnis brauchen, jede Provokation zurückzuschlagen, sondern daß es ihre Pflicht und ihr ureigenstes Interesse ist, das zu tun'.³⁰

The second article is largely in the same vein. Much of the same language is used and many words and phrases have been imported directly from the earlier article. The analysis of the source and objective of the Uprising remains the same:

Es ging in diesen Morgenstunden des 17. Juni längst nicht mehr um Normen. [...] Es ging um etwas ganz anderes: es ging um den Aufstand, um die Aufrichtung des Faschismus in Berlin, es ging letztlich um die Entfesselung eines dritten Weltkrieges.³¹

There is one slight difference. Loest mentions the productivity norms, even if they are discounted as a factor. Later in the article, he refers to the workers' grievances: 'Sie wußten daß das, was sie ursprünglich gewollt hatten, richtig gewesen war.'³² He goes on to say that, of course, the workers also knew now that they had been exploited; nevertheless, Loest is here conceding that workers were on the streets and had good reason

²⁸ Matthias Braun, 'Aufstand und Autoren: Die Junitage im Spiegel der DDR-Literatur', in *Der Bitterfelder Aufstand: Der 17. Juni 1953 und die Deutschlandpolitik*, ed. by Stephanie Wahl and Paul Werner Wagner (Leipzig: Forum, 2003), pp. 175-95 (p. 176). Braun refers specifically to the *Neues Deutschland* article.

²⁹ Erich Loest, 'Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert', *Neues Deutschland*, 21 June 1953.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Erich Loest, 'Der "Tag X" in Berlin', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 23 June 1953.

³² Ibid.

to be there.

Loest claims his *Leipziger Volkszeitung* article had been doctored by the paper's editorial staff (D, 213). This may be so: unfortunately, the original text is not to hand. It seems a little strange that an article which had been doctored should still look and sound remarkably similar to the earlier *Neues Deutschland* article, unless it too had been doctored. The *Leipziger Volkszeitung* article may indeed have been altered, but the two articles describe the same incidents and use the same phraseology, and therefore offer a consistent line of thinking. It is an untenable line of thinking. In the *Neues Deutschland* article, Loest describes the workers as unofficial policemen rounding up and handing over 'Bubis' on their bicycles, and in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* article he describes the utter shame suffered by the Stalinallee builders. Everything we know about 17 June tells us that this is laughable, patent nonsense. Why, then, did Loest write it? Despite the misgivings of the past year, Erich Loest was, on 17 June, a rock-solid supporter of the SED and the Party leadership. The events of the day shocked him to the core but did not alter his beliefs or his trust in the Party. He would have felt obliged to do all in his power to help his Party move forward and resolve its difficulties, even if it required a bit of poetic licence. However, these two articles were the last 'party-line' texts Loest was to write on the subject of 17 June (or indeed any other subject).

What seems to have caused such an abrupt volte-face in Loest's views was not that he stopped believing in the Party, but that the Party's refusal to move forward disappointed him profoundly: 'Kaum war eine Woche nach dem wüsten Tag vergangen, da registrierte L. in den Zeitungen eine Wandlung, die ihm beschönigend erschien, zukleisternd, die Bitternis zuckernd, da packte ihn Ärger.' (D, 215) In other words, it was the Party that had behaved inconsistently, not Loest.

We cannot say that the views expressed in the *Neues Deutschland* and *Leipziger Volkszeitung* articles never corresponded to Loest's 'true' views on 17 June, but we can draw a line under them and look to *Durch die Erde ein Riß* for his more considered opinions. Here, Loest's account of events on the streets of East Berlin on 17 June is detailed, but differs little from other eye-witness reports insofar as undisputed facts are concerned. When he climbed off the morning train in Friedrichstraße station, he noticed

that more people than usual were milling around, including groups of boisterous youths, who looked as if they came from West Berlin. He made his way, unchallenged, to the Writers' Union meeting, but it quickly became clear that serious disorder was developing on the streets outside. Kuba despatched his members to the streets with the official exhortation: 'Diskutieren, nicht provozieren!' Here Loest encountered pandemonium. Thousands were milling around, kiosks were ablaze, hooligans were obstructing the emergency services, Party functionaries were wandering around, sporadically engaging people in conversation, with little success. Soviet tanks stood in the streets, their personnel looking on impassively, but police were conspicuously absent as waves of marchers poured westwards towards the government district, in particular, towards the *Haus der Ministerien*. A thunderstorm broke, driving the demonstrators off the streets and Loest back to the Writers' Union meeting-rooms. The streets filled up again in the afternoon and the mood seemed to grow uglier. The building housing the Writers' Union meeting came under threat of attack, but a second thunderstorm erupted, again taking much of the heat out of a dangerous situation. The Soviet tanks began to move forward in the rain, Loest and some colleagues waved to them in greeting, the crowds dispersed, some home to the East, others back to West Berlin. The Uprising was over.

Loest's account is differentiated in a number of respects. Firstly there were quite visibly West German agitators in East Berlin on 17 June from early morning, 'Jugendliche verwegenen Aussehens, Westberliner wohl, in Trüppchen' (D, 199), until the very end, 'die Westberliner Trupps hauten ab und nahmen ihre Toten mit' (D, 215). They certainly meddled, but they were not the primary source of the Uprising and indeed those agitators who exhorted the demonstrators to march into West Berlin were ignored. The primary motivation on 17 June was working-class anger and discontent with living conditions and broken Party promises:

Nun erhoben sich Zehntausende von Berlinern aus gegenteiligen Gründen. Sie waren der großen Worte überdrüssig, der Überheblichkeit so manchen Funktionärs, der Kluft zwischen unten und oben, der zu langsamen Verbesserung und nun sogar Verschlechterung ihrer Lage [...]. Der Neue Kurs versprach allen Vorteile, nur nicht den Arbeitern. (D, 201)

However, as the day progressed, there was a sharp change of mood: ‘Hier würde nicht mehr über Normen und HO-Preise gestritten werden, nun wurde auch nicht mehr für oder wider die Losung argumentiert: Der Spitzbart muß weg! Die Konterrevolution griff an.’ (D, 204)

Loest paints a wonderfully mordant and ironic picture of the ineptitude and incomprehension of the writers (including himself) in the face of such social turmoil. Kuba telephoned the Central Committee: now would appear to be the time for a display of urgency and energy, panic even. Not so: ‘Unter den kochenden Straßen hindurch blieben die Kabel kühl.’ (D, 203) The commotion outside did not distract the assembly from the important task of designing a nice little red birthday card for Gustav Just: getting it delivered was, however, beyond their powers of imagination. Loest does not spare himself. As his thoughts turned to lunch, he opined: ‘Bürgerkrieg hin, Bürgerkrieg her, aber zwischendurch muß man mal essen.’ (D, 203) And feast in splendour they did, pontificating all the while on the ‘Tohuwabohu da draußen’ (D, 204). It is a telling indictment of the alienation that had set in between a hungry, desperate people and a privileged, cosseted intelligentsia.

Loest makes clear, then, that he accepts neither the ‘Volksaufstand’ nor the ‘faschistischer Putsch’ interpretations of 17 June. Essentially, 17 June was an ‘Industrie-rebellion’, as he was later to call it.³³ The GDR and Western narratives agreed that Soviet occupying forces played a decisive role in quelling the Uprising, although, of course, with very different views on the virtues of this intervention. Loest certainly acknowledges the presence of Soviet tanks,³⁴ but he discounts their significance in the resolution of 17 June. In a direct challenge to both the main historical narratives, Loest the chronicler offers his own interpretation of the course of events on 17 June: ‘Der Chronist hält die geschichtsbildende Rolle der Gewitter des 17. Juni für erheblich.’ (D, 203)

³³ ‘Die vergessene Revolution – Der 17. Juni 1953 – Seine Wirkung bis heute’: Prof Dr. h.c. Heinz Friedrich und Erich Loest in Gespräch mit Christoph Lindenmeyer, in a transmission of *Forum*, 17 June 2003. www.br-online.de/alpha/forum/vor0306/20030617.shtml. Last accessed 21 May 2009.

³⁴ In fact, Loest admits that he waved a greeting to the tanks. See *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 205.

The Aftermath

As we have seen, Loest's immediate response to 17 June was to fall into line behind the Party. He tells us that he wrote his *Neues Deutschland* article on the evening of 17 June itself (D, 207). He returned to Leipzig on 20 June and his article for the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* seems likely to have been completed by then. When he got back to Leipzig, however, his views began to change immediately. On 23 June, the day his article appeared in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, Loest attended an extraordinary meeting of the Leipzig branch of the Writers' Union. Twenty-one members were present and the general tenor of the meeting was one of criticism of the government, writers and the press. Loest himself joined in the criticism, demanding an end to 'Verniedlichungspropaganda'. It was agreed that Loest and two others should draft a resolution to send to the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. The resolution was duly despatched the following day, signed by Loest in his capacity as chairman of the Writers' Union. It was strong stuff: 'Wir wehren uns gegen unwahre, lückenhafte und beschönigende Informationen. [...] Wir fordern rückhaltlose Wahrheit.' Otherwise, it suggested, there would be another, even more explosive 17 June.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, the resolution was never published.

Loest claims that the formulation and endorsement of the resolution went through the proper procedural channels (D, 213). However, a file note, 'Erklärung der Leipziger Schriftsteller zur Resolution v. 24.6.1953', would seem to cast some doubt on this.³⁶ The note asserts that both the agreement to produce a resolution and its drafting were hurried, that the resolution itself was insufficiently cognizant of the Party's position and that Loest had signed and despatched it without due consultation. The note ends: 'Wir haben die partei- und regierungsfeindliche Tätigkeit Loests erkannt und ihn seiner Amtes als Bezirksvorsitzenden enthoben, zugleich ein Ausschlußverfahren aus dem DSV gegen ihn beantragt.'³⁷

The note is unsigned and it is unclear to whom it may have been addressed. It is also undated, but given the intimation that Loest has been stripped of his chairmanship

³⁵ Both the minute of the meeting and the resolution are to be found in 'Deutsche Schriftsteller-verbandsmaterialien 1953', in the Literaturarchiv, Leipziger Städtische Bibliotheken.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

(itself a sign that the note carries the Writers' Union imprimatur), it must have been written some weeks after the meeting and despatch of the resolution.³⁸ Loest may well be right that his colleagues acquiesced in the resolution, and this note signals nothing more than these same colleagues running for cover. What is beyond dispute is that the Writers' Union meeting of 23 June marks the point where Loest diverged from the Party's path.

Das Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel was a weekly literary journal, published in Leipzig and, in 1953, edited by Wolfgang Böhme. There was no reference to the events of 17 June in the 20 June edition, but a week later, Erich Loest's article 'Es wurden Bücher verbrannt' appeared.³⁹ The article refers back and relates to an earlier article, 'Diese Bücher wurden verbrannt, weil ihr nicht genug aus ihnen gelernt hattet', an article Loest wrote to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Nazi bookburning orgy of May 1933: the gist of that article is that Germans sleepwalked into compliance with Nazism.⁴⁰ He develops this theme in 'Es wurden Bücher verbrannt', using as his departure point reports of thugs breaking into bookshops and setting fire to books in Berlin and Leipzig on 17 June. Loest rehearses the argument that the workers had justifiable grounds for going on to the streets, but their demonstrations had been exploited by fascist thugs. That this had been allowed to happen was because the people of the GDR had not been properly educated as to the dangers of fascism, and that was a job the Party, writers and press had signally failed to do.

Loest's analysis can be seen taking shape here. Western elements had taken advantage of deep and justifiable worker discontent to further their own cause, but in reality the responsibility for 17 June lay with the cultural and political elites in the GDR and, if they did not take steps to reconnect with the people and provide leadership, another 17 June would be the result. In fact, the government itself was not criticised in this article, and the general tone seems relatively mild. It was, however, noticeable that already as soon as 21 June at the Fourteenth Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, analysis

³⁸ Loest was stripped of his chairmanship and expelled from the Leipzig Writers' Union in September 1953.

³⁹ Erich Loest, 'Es wurden Bücher verbrannt', *Das Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, 26 (1953), p. 526.

⁴⁰ Erich Loest, 'Diese Bücher wurden verbrannt, weil ihr nicht genug aus ihnen gelernt hattet', *Das Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, 19 (1953).

of 17 June focussed on the ‘Tag X’ interpretation and all the earlier talk of Party failings had disappeared.⁴¹ Any criticism of the system, however mild, was now unwelcome.

One week later, the *Börsenblatt* published another Loest article, ‘Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne’, which is reproduced in full in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* (D, 215-21).

Loest gets quickly to the point:

Es wäre den Provokateuren nicht gelungen, Teile der Arbeiterschaft vor ihren Karren zu spannen, wenn nicht von Regierung und Partei, wenn nicht von allen führenden und leitenden Organen innerhalb der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Fehler von zum Teil ernstem Ausmaß begangen worden wären. (D, 216)

Having implicated the entire GDR political and intellectual leadership in the 17 June disaster, Loest then turns to the specific catalogue of failings demonstrated by the press. It had been too eager to please the Party and government with facile and insincere praise: ‘Jahrelang ging das so, die kritiklosen Jasager hatten das Wort. [...] Kritik in der Presse war nicht gefragt.’ (D, 217) The torrent of meaningless dross, the complete lack of any information on workers’ difficulties with the government and trades union left only RIAS to provide the people with information. The press, then, did nothing to head off 17 June: ‘sie saßen im Elfenbeinturm und schwangen die Rote Fahne’ (D, 219). Loest makes sure his readers know which elements of the press he is referring to: ‘an der Spitze steuerten zweifellos die Bezirkszeitungen der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei’ (D, 218), and he accuses the editors of *Neues Deutschland*, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* and *Tägliche Rundschau* of bias and distortion. The press must abandon all of this: ‘Sie müssen aufmerksam auf das lauschen, was die Massen sprechen, denken, wollen.’ (D, 221) Stephan Bock is of the opinion that this was the most important text Loest wrote in the 1950s.⁴² It was also the last significant text he wrote in this decade.

Loest’s article provoked great excitement. Karl Wilhelm Fricke, who was working as a young journalist in West Berlin and who, at that time, knew nothing of Erich Loest,

⁴¹ See the reproduction of the ‘Beschuß der 14. Tagung des ZK der SED, 21 Juni 1953’, in Spittmann and Fricke, pp. 188-92.

⁴² Bock, p. 179.

remembers reading it in West Berlin in astonishment.⁴³ In the GDR, Loest received support from some surprising quarters, even if it was largely privately expressed,⁴⁴ but others were hostile. Wilhelm Girnus, editor of *Neues Deutschland*, demanded a retraction (D, 221). There were no meetings of the Leipzig Writers' Union in July or August,⁴⁵ but one can well imagine that the knives were out in Leipzig for Loest. On 1 August, Wolfgang Böhme published an article in his own *Börsenblatt*.⁴⁶ In this article, in effect a *Selbstkritik* in admission of his mistake in printing Loest's article, Böhme repeats the standard Party line on 17 June and dissociates himself and his journal from Loest and his piece. According to Loest, Böhme wanted him to join in this public act of repentance, but he, Loest, resolutely refused (D, 223-4). Nevertheless, when he left Leipzig on 25 August on a cultural visit to Hungary, he was in a very nervous frame of mind.

And well he might, because, on 16 September, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* published an article, 'Der Fall Loest'.⁴⁷ The article was truly poisonous, accusing Loest of promoting the views and objectives of the enemy ("Argumente" der amerikanischen Organisatoren der faschistischen Provokation') and calling on the Writers' Union to expel him. The article is peppered with the term 'Feind' and variants, 'die Volksfeindlichkeit des Artikels von Loest', 'die Positionen des Feindes des Volkes' and so on, portraying him as a traitor who must be cut adrift: 'Aber dieser Loest sitzt nicht einmal in einem Elfenbeinturm, sondern auf einem sinkenden Schiff, und was er schwingt, das ist nicht die rote Fahne, sondern die Fahne der faschistischen Provokateure.'⁴⁸ The article was unsigned, according it thereby editorial and indeed Party status. Only one day later, Ulbricht told the Central Committee of the SED that some members of the Intelligenz had

⁴³ Karl Wilhelm Fricke, 'Begegnungen mit Erich Loest', in *Es ging seinen Gang: Erich Loest zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Wolfram Dorn and others (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1996), pp. 39-43 (p. 39).

⁴⁴ Loest tells of a supportive letter from Kuba (*Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 222). In fact, Loest treats Kuba generously throughout *Durch die Erde ein Riß*.

⁴⁵ According to the 'Bericht für die Monate September-Oktober' for the Leipzig Writers' Union, dated 27 October 1953, in 'Deutsche Schriftstellerverbandsmaterialien'.

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Böhme, 'Für eine konsequente Haltung der Presse! Eine notwendige Klarstellung zum Artikel "Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne" im Bbl. Nr. 27', *Das Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, 31, 1953, 626-27.

⁴⁷ 'Der Fall Loest', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 16 September 1953.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

clearly been infected by the West German ‘Niedergangerscheinungen’.⁴⁹ It seems very likely that Ulbricht, himself a Leipziger, would have had Loest in mind and would have approved of the article in *the Leipziger Volkszeitung*.

In fact, Loest’s place in the Writers’ Union was rescued by Kuba and the Berlin head office, who overrode the wishes of the Leipzig branch, but in reality his 17 June adventure was now over and he was henceforth a marked man. When he raised his head above the parapet again in 1956, the Leipzig *Apparat* remembered ‘Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne’ and exacted full revenge. Loest had not, however, forsaken socialism. Even in the spring and summer of 1957, when he was in deep trouble with the SED regime, abandonment of socialism and the GDR was unthinkable:

Undenkbar wäre es für ihn gewesen, nach Westdeutschland zu gehen. Das galt ihm als Adenauers kapitalistischer, revanchistischer Staat [...]. Ihm galt ein noch so strapaziöser Sozialismus immer noch moralischer und zukunftssträchtiger als das perfekte Wirtschaftswunder. (D, 307)

Loest never wavered from the view that he first articulated in ‘Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne’, that the Western *Volksaufstand* explanation of 17 June was just as far from the truth as the fascist putsch theory: ‘Volksaufstand hie, faschistischer Putschversuch da. Jede Seite malte ihr Propagandabild und überpinselte nach Kräften, was nicht hineinpaßte.’ (D, 209) It was still his view in 2003, when he cast doubt on the reliability and veracity of eye-witness accounts, photographs and other records used in the West to support the *Volksaufstand* narrative.⁵⁰

Loest had, therefore, in a matter of months, transformed from faithful functionary to leading critic of the Party. The year 1953 had turned everything on its head: ‘Dieses Jahr hatte ihn umgestülpt.’ (D, 253) This was a sentiment he was to reiterate many times. In *Der Zorn des Schafes*, for example, he says: ‘Der 17. Juni und der XX. Sowjetische Parteitag im Februar 1956 schlugen Risse in mein Weltbild.’⁵¹

⁴⁹ See Schubbe, p. 312.

⁵⁰ Loest, ‘Welch wilder, wirrer Tag’, pp. 50-51.

⁵¹ *Der Zorn des Schafes*, p. 43.

It was not, however, 17 June that ripped his world apart, but what happened over the ensuing weeks. In the days around and immediately after 17 June, the Party had seemed genuinely resolved to learn from past mistakes and forge a closer bond with the people. With great enthusiasm, the intelligentsia took their cue from this new Party spirit. Individuals, such as Brecht, Wolfgang Harich and Günter Cwojdrak and institutions, such as the Kulturbund and Academy, urged honesty and dialogue. Loest also caught the fever. He felt there was an opportunity to break with the old Stalinist ways and move forward: ‘Die große Möglichkeit schien gekommen, Verkrustungen aufzubrechen, den Kommunismus wieder in Fahrt zu bringen.’⁵² But he was bitterly disappointed and dismayed when it soon became obvious that the Party had no intention of moving forward, but was determined instead to persist with the old rigidities. His disillusionment was a ‘zweites Erwachen’ similar to the painful lesson he had received after Hitler’s defeat. This time, though, he resolved never again to allow himself to be so blindly led:

Jetzt, sagte er sich heftig und entschlossen, wirst du nie mehr blind glauben, alles wirst du prüfen und Menschen und Dinge wenden. Du wirst dein Gewissen als etwas betrachten, wofür du verantwortlich bist, du kannst es niemandem zur beliebigen Verwendung überlassen, auch keiner Partei. (D, 254)

Sommergewitter

Sommergewitter is a novel, a work of fiction, but is more than that. It is Loest’s account of 17 June, an event that shook him to his very core and changed his life for ever, as he repeatedly reminds us. He sees no problem in combining fiction and history to provide an account of what happened on 17 June, why it happened and what the consequences were. Indeed, he has said that he believes literature has an important role to play in portraying the history of people: more can be learned from novels than from history books about history and social tensions.⁵³

In writing *Sommergewitter*, Loest has set himself a clear mission. It is to offer us, in fictional form, his analysis of 17 June and to persuade us that his interpretation of the events is the correct one. He is positing that his novel is, in effect, an historical account.

⁵² Erich Loest, *Prozesskosten: Bericht* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007), p. 11.

⁵³ Jutta Sauer, ‘Interview mit Erich Loest’, in *Es ging seinen Gang*, pp. 100-2 (p. 101).

He seeks to advance and underpin the historical accuracy of his story by setting it within a factual shell of events, places and people, and by incorporating material from his own life and experiences. Even where the characters are fictional, they are representative of actual people. From the multiple perspectives of these representative and real characters emerges Loest's own interpretation of 17 June.

Plot and Characterisation

Sommergewitter is a story of 17 June, told from the perspective of every significant social segment in GDR society. Alfred Mannschatz is an old SPD man: 'Ich bin seit mehr als vierzig Jahren in der SPD oder der USPD und nun in der SED; als ich eintrat, lebte August Bebel noch.'⁵⁴ His son-in-law, Hartmut Brücken, is a decent, unspectacular working-class man, who observes in dismay the disintegration of GDR society and who becomes unwittingly embroiled in the turmoil of 17 June. The other significant members of GDR society to suffer in this climate are the middle-class or self-employed people and anyone connected to the Church and its organisations. They are represented by Schmolka, a small businessman.

The adversaries of these people, bedrock of GDR society, are the Party and its functionaries. Bruno Pfefferkorn is head of the Stasi in Halle, a district that also includes Bitterfeld. Pfefferkorn's antifascist credentials initially seem impeccable; a resistance hero from the early Weimar days and a prisoner in Buchenwald concentration camp for the duration of the Third Reich. He is ably assisted by the enthusiastically communist Kodelwitz. Melchior Anetzperg is also a Party functionary: he has recently graduated as a sociologist and is a Marxist intellectual, representative of the intelligentsia in the GDR.

There is a third element in GDR society: enemies of the state. They are old Nazis who have slipped through the denazification net because the GDR (or SBZ as it was in 1945) simply needed to build up its labour force and could not afford to be too fussy concerning the background of all its workers. These people dream of the day the socialist state will be toppled and fascism restored.

⁵⁴ Loest, *Sommergewitter*, p. 56. Future references are indicated in the text by the designation (S, page number).

A number of minor characters, some based on actual people, complete a comprehensive cross-section of social groups. It is largely a man's world, with three important exceptions. One is Clara Brücken, daughter of Mannschatz and loyal and supportive wife to Hartmut. Another is Thekla Pfefferkorn, unfaithful wife to Bruno. The third is Erna Dorn, a real life figure whose case was one of the most controversial to emerge from the events of 17 June. The characters' experiences, actions and attitudes on 17 June form the nub of the novel, but the action begins on 5 March 1953, the day of Stalin's death, and closes some days after 17 June. Loest therefore creates a panoramic view of the complex shifts and currents in GDR society as well as a multi-perspectival account of the causes, course of events and consequences of 17 June.

In the first section of the novel, Loest skilfully paints a picture of a broken and divided society in the GDR rushing towards cataclysm on 17 June. The *Aufbau des Sozialismus* is in full swing and there is want and poverty everywhere: 'Erst der Weltfriede und neue Hochöfen an der Oder im Geiste des großen weisen Stalin? Kinderfahrräder irgendwann, erst Karabiner für kasernierte Polizisten.' (S, 51) The Churches, middle classes and small farmers are being persecuted. Mannschatz hears at first hand a self-employed barber's bitter complaint: 'Und Kalkow berichtete, er kriege keine Lebensmittelkarten mehr, denn er sei Kaufmann, Händler, *Ausbeuter*.' (S, 57) In disgust at such trampling over the lives of ordinary people, Mannschatz leaves the Party. Everywhere, workers are angry about the unrelenting pressure of increased productivity norms. Factory and site managers struggle with flawed working conditions and materials, but every attempt to exhort the workers to make the best of the situation inevitably invites a tirade against the norms: 'Natürlich die Normen, natürlich das übliche Hickhack.' (S, 51)

As the masses sink ever deeper into misery, the Party marches onwards in spectacularly blind arrogance. The novel opens with a festive reunion of SED members, old antifascist campaigners. Tables groan under the weight of fine food and drink, far more than the assembly could ever expect to consume. The functionaries are perfectly aware that, outside this room, butter and meat are unattainable: 'Aber sie hätten die Brauen hochgezogen, wenn sie auf diese Diskrepanz hingewiesen worden wären – keine

Gleichmacherei, Genosse!’ (S, 10)

Awareness of social deprivation does not even register, it seems, with the Party’s intellectuals. While people starve, Thekla Pfefferkorn and Melchior Anetzperg discuss ‘die Bauernfrage [...] hier und heute in diesem zauberhaften Kampf Frühling’ (S, 67). Later, Anetzperg establishes a link between the New Course and Leninism: ‘Anetzperg entwickelte flüssig, hochdeutsch und trotz der freien Rede in vollständigen Sätzen: Er ziehe eine Parallele zur Neuen Ökonomischen Politik von 1921.’ (S, 109) It is elegant, but hardly addresses the real concerns of real people.

The GDR is of course a repressive regime, complete with its instrument of repression. It is the Stasi’s job to hunt down and harry anyone who does not conform to the Party’s prescribed order. Just now, Bruno Pfefferkorn has plenty on his plate. Schmolka is under arrest and interrogation in a filthy prison. The issue is not so much the gravity of his crime, but whether he is suitable material for a show trial, a ‘Prozeß mit propagandistischer Wirkung’ (S, 25). The case against him is flimsy, but he is a middle-class businessman: ‘Im Kirchenvorstand, seine Kinder in der Jungen Gemeinde. Mal ansehen, den Burschen.’ (S, 25) Mannschatz’ brother-in-law has been thrown into prison for defying the LPG (agricultural collectivisation) programme. Hordes of subversives, malcontents and would-be escapees from the GDR who have emerged in the shadow of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* threaten to overwhelm Stasi resources, a situation not helped by over-fussy court officials, who insist on due legal process.

Eight years after the end of the war, a sinister underground network of old Nazis in the GDR dreams of the dismantling of socialism and a return to pan-German fascism. They are ready accomplices for similarly inimical, anti-socialist agencies in the West. One such is Hemsberger, who does more than dream; he spies on military bases in the GDR. His spymaster is Potschinski, a shady figure who operates in both West and East Berlin, on behalf of the Ostbüro der SPD and the Kampfgruppe gegen Unmenschlichkeit (KgU).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Both these groups were established in West Berlin after the war. Their aim was to support resistance in the GDR to the communist regime and to work towards East German incorporation into West Germany. See, for example, Erhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949 -1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000), pp. 93-95.

When the novel moves to the events of 17 June itself, the overriding sense is not of barricades, revolution and hand-to-hand fighting, but of confusion and incompetence. Hartmut Brücken finds himself involuntarily co-opted onto a committee leading the strike in Bitterfeld. The committee acts with the best and loftiest of intentions, but as everywhere else in the GDR, there is no strategy, no plan, no co-ordination; the strike stumbles from pillar to post: ‘Was und wohin? Das haben sie nicht ausgemacht im Rathaus, den nächsten Schritt haben sie festgelegt, aber nicht den dritten und vierten.’ (S, 208) The strike in Bitterfeld peters out, not because of Party decisiveness, Soviet tanks or thunderstorms, but simply through lack of direction. Brücken is forced to go on the run from the vengeful authorities.

These same authorities have hardly covered themselves in glory. The events of 17 June have taken them, too, completely by surprise. Lines of communication, confused at the best of times, have collapsed: ‘Die jeweilige Kontaktperson meldete an ihre Kreisdienststelle, manche vorher noch an den Führungs-IM. Der Kreis gab weiter an den Bezirk, der ans Ministerium. [...] Was für den Normalzustand gedacht, funktionierte aber nicht, wenn Dämme brachen.’ (S, 140) The result is utter chaos in town halls, courts of justice, prisons, and other public institutions throughout the GDR, bordering at times on the absurd. ‘Vielleicht ein kleiner stilistischer Ratschlag’, suggests the post office manager to the strike committee, concerning what can only be described as an insurrectional telegram they wish to send to Wladimir Semjonov, head of the Soviet occupying forces (S, 206).

Some have profited from the confusion. Schmolka is released from prison, benefiting from the New Course derestrictions, and takes the chance to get out of the GDR. Also taking advantage are the West Berlin thugs who, in receipt of payments from Potschinski, add to the mayhem in East Berlin by setting fire to kiosks and generally making a nuisance of themselves, before returning to the West. Potschinski himself stays long enough to see the thunderstorm bring the uprising to an end.

The third and final part of the novel surveys the wreckage after 17 June. The Party turns on its own. The Stasi are made to bear the blame for the chaos in Halle and Bitterfeld. Pfefferkorn acts desperately and ruthlessly to save his career, but it is in vain.

The man, once feted as an antifascist hero, is physically broken and morally crushed. Anetzperg, the Party thinker, is also cast out. He thinks too clearly and voices inconvenient truths.

It is the ordinary people who suffer most. The Brücken family has been ripped apart. Hartmut has escaped to the West. In the hope of luring him back to the GDR, the authorities have arrested his wife Clara, heavily-pregnant with her third child, and sentenced her to three years in prison. It is an act of cruel vindictiveness. At least the Brückens have a future, even if it is somewhere where it will not benefit the GDR. Erna Dorn has none. Desperate to produce evidence that the Uprising was a fascist plot, the Party constructs the flimsiest case imaginable against this poor, unbalanced creature. In one of the most morally bankrupt of all its injustices towards its own people, the Party takes her life to deflect attention from its own failure.

An Accurate Account?

Barbara Foley contends that ‘empirical data enter the historical novel [...] to reinforce the text’s claim to offer a persuasive interpretation of its referent’.⁵⁶ This is Loest’s intention when he uses actual people, places and events in *Sommergewitter*. We need to be careful, however, as to what we define as empirical data. Real places and real people exist or have existed: there is therefore no cause to dispute their existence. Very specific events, such as a law enacted, a speech made or a building set on fire are similarly beyond dispute, where we can satisfy ourselves that the event has been properly and factually recorded. However, where the narrator in a novel gives voice to an actual person’s unspoken thoughts, describes public reaction to a new law or ascribes the burning of a building to one or more specific people, such data is not empirical if not supported by factual evidence, even if the narrator may wish it to appear so. In *Sommergewitter*, it is necessary to recognise that imagined people and events are fictional, even though they may be representative of real people and situations. Likewise, words and thoughts are imputed in the novel to actual people, but are imagined, an invention of the author’s. Imagined

⁵⁶ Barbara Foley, *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 144.

people, situations, dialogue and thoughts are not history or ‘empirical data’ in the strict sense. It is a point which must be borne in mind in any appraisal of the accuracy of Loest’s account of 17 June.

The events described in *Sommergewitter* unfolded in the GDR in the weeks between the beginning of March and the end of June 1953. It is around the undisputed facts that Loest weaves his fictional story. To align his story even more closely with fact, to impart the greatest possible impression of actuality, he introduces real places and people. Most of the action in this novel takes place in Halle and Bitterfeld, often in actual locations within these towns. Pfefferkorn goes to the Steintor detention centre in Halle to check up on the situation there on 17 June; the same evening, a rally is planned for the town’s central square, the Hallmarkt. In Bitterfeld, crowds congregate on the Platz der Jugend, formerly known, and still in 1953 generally referred to, as the Binnengartenwiese. When Hartmut Brücken flees from the authorities after the Uprising fails, he goes to West Berlin by way of the Dübenerheide, the Pretzsch ferry across the Elbe and on northwards through Teltow and Kleinmachnow. It is precisely the route a fleeing Bitterfelder would have taken to West Berlin in 1953.

Similarly, real people make an appearance in the novel. A number of characters are mentioned, who featured in a significant way in the events of 1953, but who otherwise play no active part here. Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl and Ernst Scharnowski are examples.⁵⁷ Frequently, well-known figures from GDR cultural circles are woven into the story to suggest historical authenticity and, as Paul Gerhard Klussmann notes, to capture the spirit of the times.⁵⁸ Thekla Pfefferkorn reminisces about past incidents from the time she first met her husband: ‘Bruno Apitz saß dabei, der ihren Bruno aus Buchenwald kannte, der hoffte, mit der Geschichte von einem im Lager verborgenen jüdischen Jungen einen

⁵⁷ Ernst Scharnowski was the West German trade union leader, who on RIAS allegedly exhorted East Berlin workers to go on strike, an allegation denied by RIAS. See Chamberlin and Wetzel, in Spittmann and Fricke, pp. 212-15.

⁵⁸ Paul Gerhard Klussmann, ‘Lötzinn und Freiheit: Erich Loests neue Interpretation des 17. Juni 1953’, *IDF-Publik: Informationen aus dem Institut für Deutschlandforschung der Ruhr-Universität Bochum*, 40 (2005), 3-4 (3).

Roman hinzukriegen.’ (S, 72)⁵⁹ Others who appear in this passive sense include Franz Fühmann and Anna Seghers.

A number of real people play an active role in the plot. The most notable of these are Horst Sindermann and Fred Oelßner, senior figures in the Party, and Paul Otmer and Wilhelm Fiebelkorn, two of the strike organisers in Bitterfeld. Although Sindermann does not appear to have played any great role in the Party’s handling of 17 June, he was a senior functionary who would, two years later, join the Central Committee with responsibility for propaganda. Later, he became First Secretary of the Halle *Bezirksleitung* and President of the *Volkskammer*. In 1953, Oelßner was a member of the Politbüro. In the novel, these two share a ruthless determination to protect their own interests within the Party in the treacherous post-17 June politicking. The Party needs a scapegoat to bear the blame for the havoc in the Halle district and Oelßner’s arrival at a meeting of Party bosses there concentrates minds wonderfully. Sindermann, an erstwhile friend and comrade of Pfefferkorn, knows of an old skeleton in the Stasi chief’s cupboard. He warns Pfefferkorn to proceed with caution but it sounds to Pfefferkorn like a thinly veiled threat:

War das Mahnung zur Vorsicht, oder knallte ihm ein Rivale einen Knüppel zwischen die Beine? Sollte dieser Hinweis bedeuten: Jemand, irgendwer, notfalls *sogar ich* habe was in der Hand, daß dich von einer Sekunde zur anderen aus den Latschen schmeißt?’ (S, 198)

At the meeting, it is soon clear that Oelßner regards the performance of the Stasi on 17 June as having been incompetent and from that point, Pfefferkorn’s career within the Party is finished: ‘Für Pfefferkorn war klar, daß er in dieser Beratung kein Bein auf die Erde kriegen würde.’ (S, 196)

Although Hartmut Brücken, central character and one of the strike leaders in *Sommergewitter*, is a fictional character, the novel tracks the unfolding events in Bitterfeld on 17 June very closely indeed. On that day, a strike committee was formed in Bitterfeld, consisting of a teacher, Wilhelm Fiebelkorn, an electrician, Paul Othma, an electrical engineer, Horst Sowada, and about a dozen others. As the day progressed, the group

⁵⁹ The novel referred to here is *Nackt unter Wölfen* published in 1958. There is an interesting conjunction of narrated past, present and future here, reminiscent of similar constructions in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*.

evolved from strike committee to quasi-city government, occupying every public building of significance and sending a telegram to the government in Berlin, demanding its resignation, and another to Semjonov, seeking his support for the workers' demands. It was, of course, all in vain, and when the Uprising failed, Fiebelkorn, Sowada and other members of the committee fled to the West: Othma was apprehended and sentenced to twelve years in prison.⁶⁰

In *Sommergewitter*, the strike leaders are Fiebelkorn, Paule Otmer and Brücken. Apart from the switch from Sowada to Brücken and the (unexplained) change of name from Paul Othma to Paule Otmer, the fictional strike committee corresponds to the real one and mirrors its progress throughout the day, although the telegram to Semjonov is given more prominence in the novel than the telegram to the government.

The most remarkable of all the real stories in the novel is that of Erna Dorn. In November 1945, she turned up in Halle, the bearer of an 'Entlassungsbescheinigung' from a Czechoslovak concentration camp and an 'OdF-Ausweis', the special privileges pass given to victims of fascism. Her behaviour in Halle became increasingly erratic, and during a second spell in prison for petty crime, she began to make claims to fellow prisoners of having been a wardress at Ravensbrück concentration camp and of currently being a spy in the pay of Western agencies. Unsurprisingly, this came to the ears of the authorities and, after a lengthy investigation, she was sentenced in May 1953, to fifteen years in prison for crimes against humanity, despite a lack of plausible evidence.⁶¹

Less than one month later, Erna Dorn was set free when demonstrators stormed Halle prison on 17 June. What happened next is unclear, but she was taken into custody on either 17 or 18 June, tried on 22 June and on the same day, condemned to death, a sentence that was carried out on 1 October 1953. The case against her was that she had been a ringleader of the fascist-led putsch in Halle and had made an inflammatory and insurrectionist speech on 17 June at a rally in the Hallmarkt. The only evidence laid against her was her own testimony (heard in private without benefit of defence lawyers or neutral observers) and a letter she had allegedly written to her father on 17 June, which

⁶⁰ See Knabe, pp. 210-17.

⁶¹ The history of Erna Dorn is told in Jens Ebert and Inge Eschebach (eds.), *'Die Kommandeuse': Erna Dorn – zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Kaltem Krieg* (Berlin: Dietz, 1994).

had been found on her person when she was re-arrested.

From the very outset, the case was advanced by the Party as incontrovertible evidence that 17 June was the work of fascists and Western agents. Even before the case was heard, the tone was set by the Central Committee of the SED at a meeting on 21 June:

An Hand der in den Westberliner Agentenzentralen vorbereiteten Listen wurden vorübergehend faschistische und kriminelle Verbrecher aus der Haftanstalt herausgeholt, wie zum Beispiel die wegen bestialischer Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit von der demokratischen Justiz verurteilte SS-Kommandeuse des Frauenkonzentrationslagers Ravensbrück, Erna Dorn.⁶²

And even before this, the *Hallenser Freiheit* published an article on 20 June, headed ‘SS-Kommandeuse und kriminelle Elemente im “Führungsstab” der Provokateure’. Similar articles were run by *Neues Deutschland* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 24 and 25 June respectively, both with the same heading, ‘SS-Kommandeuse im Führungsstab der Provokateure’. The stories and wording are too similar to suggest anything other than a concerted Party campaign to set Erna Dorn at the heart of its 17 June narrative.

In a sense, Erna Dorn lies at the heart of Loest’s novel too. Here, Dorn is allowed to tell her own story; one which sharply contradicts the official version and further undermines the Party. To reiterate my point about empirical data, however, we must bear in mind that the Dorn narrative in *Sommergewitter* is Loest’s invention, not fact.

Personal Experiences

Although *Sommergewitter* cannot be called an autobiographical novel, it is very heavily coloured and influenced by Loest’s own personal experiences. Rosen argues:

All novelists are autobiographers in two distinct ways. Firstly, they may draw directly on their own life experience in a sustained way, allowing it to dominate an entire work or, second, in fabricating whole stories, they must, at a deeper level, stay in touch with their life experience.⁶³

⁶² ‘Beschuß der 14. Tagung der ZK der SED, 21. Juni 1953’, in Spittmann und Fricke, pp. 188-92 (p. 189).

⁶³ Rosen, p. 36.

In writing *Sommengewitter*, Loest falls largely into the first of these categories. At a general level, the novel is based on and portrays events that constituted a life-altering experience for the author. In addition, he draws on experiences from his life more generally to add authentic colour to his story.

Although disturbances took place throughout the GDR on 17 June, the eye of the storm was, of course, East Berlin. The social and political fate of the Uprising, and indeed of the GDR in the immediate future, was determined by events in Berlin on that day. It is therefore natural that Loest should want to incorporate events in Berlin into *Sommengewitter*, and he does so, portraying the Uprising there through the eyes of Potschinski, the shadowy figure who operates on the edges of the law in both East and West Berlin. As an agent for the *KgU*, he is violently anti-communist and he expresses his feelings in caustic and ironic terms: ‘Die verehrten Genossen hockten an ihren Schreibtischen und erfanden den neuen Sozialismus.’ (S, 143)

Loest was, as we have seen, in East Berlin on 17 June and described the events he had witnessed in the days after the disturbances in articles for *Neues Deutschland* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, and later in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*. The 1953 articles were, of course, written from his perspective as a senior Party functionary and the portrayal in *Durch die Erde ein Riß* from that of a chronicler in the early 1980s of the GDR of those June days. In *Sommengewitter*, Loest chooses to narrate events in Berlin from a Western agent’s point of view. In doing so, the author hopes to deal conclusively with the question of Western involvement in the Uprising of 17 June.

Much of what Potschinski witnesses has already been described by Loest elsewhere; thousands mill around the streets, thugs set fire to kiosks and generally create mayhem, nervous Party functionaries walk around the streets, ‘um zu diskutieren, sich aber nicht provozieren zu lassen’ (S, 144), and a mob break into an upper-floor house in Friedrichstraße, seize a red flag which had been flying at a window and throw it in flames to the ground.

From Potschinski we learn a good deal more. It is he who has incited the small group of hooligans, paying each 50 marks to start fires and obstruct the authorities. He notes the unwillingness of the Party functionaries to engage with the hooligans; it is only

the appearance of Soviet soldiers that prompts the hooligans to take to their heels back to the West, followed by Potschinski on his bicycle, ‘diese uralte Damenmühle aus der Kellerecke’ (S, 141), and not a ‘chromblitzendes Rad’ as Loest would have it in his *Neues Deutschland* article. He sees, and is surprised, how the violent and very sudden thunderstorm has cleared the streets in seconds:

Das war ja nun eine Überraschung: Hilfloze Bürogeossen und zehntausende marschierende Arbeiter – von Naturgewalten gestoppt, zerschlagen, zerrieben. Nichts fürs Lesebuch später. Wo waren die Aufstandshelden hin, in die U-Bahnschächte, die Hauseingänge? Hinter einer Hauslücke wurde der Himmel schon wieder hell. (S, 148)

What strikes Potschinski most of all is that this was a workers’ uprising. As a German working-class man himself, he firmly believes that West Germany has a duty to support fellow Germans. What he sees, however, are Western forces at the border with strict instructions not to cross the invisible ‘Riß durch die Welt’ (S, 188) into the East. What he hears in the Ostbüro makes plain to him that the Western Allies have colluded again with the Soviet Union in bringing misery to Germany: ‘Die Großen Vier einig gegen die lästigen blöden Deutschen. Wer badete wie immer die Scheiße aus: die Arbeiter. [...] Deutscher Alltag.’ (S, 194)

It is interesting that Loest should include a strand relating to activities in East Berlin in a story that is essentially an account of events in the Leipzig conurbation. It may be argued that this is unnecessary and diffuses the plot somewhat to the detriment of the novel generally. I believe Loest has incorporated the Berlin events into the novel for a number of reasons. He himself spent 17 June on the streets of East Berlin. He witnessed Western involvement, but, as we have seen, he has consistently maintained that this involvement was peripheral to the real causes underlying the Uprising. Given the central role of Western involvement in SED narratives, Loest would feel it is necessary to deal with this point in any account of 17 June. In a novel, however, where the author is resolved to reflect actuality as closely as possible, simply switching the activities of Westerners from East Berlin to Leipzig or Halle is not possible; they must be located where they actually happened. The East Berlin subplot allows the author to make a further

point. He demonstrates that, in Halle and Bitterfeld, the Uprising failed for want of leadership and organisation of the workers; in Berlin, because of thunderstorms. He is conflating two points here. Loest came to believe that the Uprising on 17 June was essentially a rebellion by workers of the SPD tradition against the undemocratic strictures of the KPD and its hegemony within the SED. In 2005, he said: 'Ich bin dann auf die Idee gekommen es war der Aufruhr des Geistes der Sozialdemokratie gegen den Kommunismus.'⁶⁴ The SPD's heartland was in Saxony and the Uprising could be expected to be at its most passionate in Leipzig, Halle and Bitterfeld. But he is also fond of saying that the weather had a significant bearing on the outcome of 17 June. Soviet intervention was not required; workers' lack of leadership and organisation could not survive a summer squall.

Arrest, interrogation and imprisonment were, sadly, an experience many thousands were forced to suffer in the GDR. Although this included intellectuals, few were writers of literature. Thus, Loest brings to fiction a unique and utterly convincing account of these procedures in the GDR in the 1950s, drawing on his own experiences between 1957 and 1964.

Loest was taken into custody on 14 November 1957 and his interrogation went on for over a year: he was finally sentenced to seven and a half years' imprisonment on 23 December 1958. He was released on 25 September 1964. It would be difficult to rank in order of unpleasantness the experiences Loest had to endure, but the list would include the numbing monotony of the daily routine, the unpleasant conditions of prison life, the interminable legal process and the repugnant nature of Stasi tactics. All are vividly depicted in *Sommengewitter*.

In *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, Loest entitles the first of his chapters on his time in prison 'Gemordete Zeit' (the word choice suggests a criminal act), and he refers often to the unending monotony of time passing: 'Ein Jahr bestand aus 365 Tagen, zwölf Briefen, vier Besuchen und zwei bis drei Magengeschwüren. Was soll einer schreiben über solch

⁶⁴ Loest made these remarks in a radio interview, 'Für mich ist es ein großer Wendepunkt' with Holger Hettinger, 6 September, 2005: <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/kulturinterview/415411>. Accessed on 12 February 2008.

ein Jahr?’ (D, 384) In *Sommengewitter*, Schmolka is being investigated for possible business offences detrimental to the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*. He has already been in detention for five months as the novel opens and is obliged to repeat himself ‘zum dutzendsten Mal seinem Vernehmer’ (S, 87). Apart from his endless meetings with his interrogators, he has little to look forward to: ‘Was hieß hier Freistunde, von den fünf bis sieben Minuten gingen noch zwei oder drei auf der Treppe drauf. Wenn er am Vormittag vernommen wurde, fiel der Hofgang für ihn ohnehin aus. Sonntags waren weder Hofgang noch Vernehmung.’ (S, 76)

Reviewing the novel, Udo Scheer writes: ‘Erich Loest [...] weiß, wovon er erzählt, wenn er beschreibt, wie Kübel stinken.’⁶⁵ It was not just the slopping out which Loest had experienced and describes graphically in the novel, but the constant hunger, disgusting ‘Grießsuppe’ and ‘fünf Scheiben Brot mit Margarine bekratz’t’ (S, 82-3), and the smell of the very fabric of the place: everyone taken there could smell the mortar (S, 77 and 257). Perhaps worst of all were the spells in solitary confinement, which Loest himself regularly experienced. Similarly, Schmolka is frequently sent to an isolation cell, although he has not made up his mind whether this is actually his worst option: ‘Wie lange brauchte einer im Knast, bis er entscheiden konnte, was besser war: Einzelhaft oder zu viert auf Zelle oder im Saal mit fünfzig, achtzig?’ (S, 83)

Prison is not a pleasant experience, even in the most enlightened of societies. What made the GDR prison of the 1950s particularly odious was the extent to which corruption and oppression pervaded the entire judicial process. Both Schmolka and Clara Brücken (and, of course, Erna Dorn) were subjected to the full panoply of Stasi tactics. Blackmail of a detainee and threat of harm to the detainee’s family were commonplace; Clara Brücken is warned of unspecified danger to her sick father: ‘Denken sie doch mal an Ihren Vater.’ (S, 256) She is also reminded that she and her unborn child will be kept in separate prisons after its birth (S, 303). A common practice was to move a spy into the cell of a detainee weakened by constant and confusing questioning, allied to a lack of proper sustenance. Schmolka was, fortunately for him, shrewd enough to counter this stratagem: ‘Es konnte nicht schaden, wenn Vernehmer und Spitzel zu unterschiedlichen

⁶⁵ Udo Scheer, ‘Alles noch viel schlimmer’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 September 2005.

Auffassungen kamen!’ (S, 76) To complete the picture of corruption, Schmolka’s defence lawyer, Dr. Bergenr n is, like Loest’s own defence lawyer in 1957, dishonest and, in effect, in collaboration with the prosecution.

Before departing from this topic, it is interesting to note that the circumstances of Clara Br cken’s arrest and detention in *Sommergewitter* are reflected in Loest’s own life. Shortly after his arrest at the end of 1957, Loest learned that Annelies, his wife, had also been taken into custody. There were no apparent grounds for this, other than to coerce Loest into co-operation with his interrogators. Loest stood firm and Annelies was released again in April 1958, without charge or apology, but the entire episode troubled and upset Loest very deeply indeed.⁶⁶ There is no hint, in either *Sommergewitter* or *Durch die Erde ein Ri * of a moral dilemma, in that an innocent wife suffers because of the actions (however blameless) of her husband: the focus is on the ruthlessness and cynicism of the GDR authorities. Yet the moral issue is one that most readers will ponder.

There are other, lesser, instances of Loest drawing on his own experiences. In *Durch die Erde ein Ri *, Loest describes how his wife’s grandfather, ‘in der SPD seit Bebels Zeiten und nun in der SED’ (D, 94), resigned in the worsening conditions of 1952. In *Sommergewitter*, Alfred Mannschatz reflects: ‘Ich bin in die SPD eingetreten, als August Bebel noch lebte.’ (S, 94) Because he can no longer stomach what is happening to ordinary people, he, like Loest’s grandfather-in-law, resigns from the SED.

This is not an exhaustive list of the personal memories Loest brings to the novel. Such experiences are to be found on practically every page. Schmolka’s recollection of his days in Hitler’s army, the hooligans who tear down Mannschatz’ flag of solidarity on 17 June, the meeting of Party functionaries to discuss 17 June are further examples of Loest’s use of events and experiences in his own life to enhance the appearance of authenticity in the novel.

Narrative Style

Everything must then appear based in reality and credible, as in any historical account. It is also important, as in any historical account, that the narrative is not only credible, but

⁶⁶ Loest relates this episode in *Durch die Erde ein Ri *, pp. 323-33.

also uncoloured by authorial opinion or prejudice. Like Heym in *5 Tage im Juni*, Loest lets the characters in *Sommergewitter* speak for themselves, with little narratorial intervention, through a wide range of forms: direct speech, indirect speech, internal monologue and *erlebte Rede*, whilst in the case of Erna Dorn, her story unfolds in a series of streams of consciousness, recounted in a thick East Prussian accent.

Dialogue, whether spoken or unspoken, is natural, conversational and appropriate in each case to the speaker. Workers speak in local dialect, and not always politically correctly:

‘In ’nem anständigen Brigadevertrag muß drinstehn, daß die Bereitstellung von Material vorausgesetzt ist. Und da sehe ich schwarz.’

Aus dem Hintergrund: ‘Schwarz wie ’n Neger um Mitternacht.’ (S, 49)

Lawyers speak in suave, conspiratorial tones, civil servants in formal, complete sentences and Party functionaries in *Kaderwelsch*: ‘Und hebe damit die klassenmäßig abartige Symbiose dialektisch auf’, remarks Thekla Pfefferkorn to Melchior Anetzperg in the course of an ideological discussion (S, 68).

Indirect speech is employed frequently, affording narrative economy. When Potschinski offers his Eastern informant something to eat and drink in a West Berlin bar, a number of ideas are conveyed in one passage: ‘Potschinski fragte, ob Herr Postberg vielleicht doch etwas essen wolle oder was besseres trinken als Cola. Viel Zeit bleibe allerdings nicht mehr. Hier stünde doch allerhand Leckeres auf der Speisekarte, nicht solcher Mampf wie in Bitterfeld.’ (S, 45) Often, indirect speech is used along with or as a complement to forms of direct speech, either to maintain the pace of narrative set by the direct speech or to switch perspective, as in the case when Schmolka, surprisingly released from detention on 17 June, rejoins his family:

Umarmung und Kuß und Halbsätze: Komm rein! und: Hab schon den Badeofen geheizt, und, Schnitzel nicht, aber Kotelett, wie denn alles so plötzlich? Er sei ordnungsgemäß entlassen worden, ihm *könne keiner*, wie alles auch ausging. Verrückt, was? (S, 167)

Whereas direct and indirect speech register statements or questions voiced, internal monologue and *erlebte Rede* are narrated expressions of unspoken thought. Loest uses

internal monologue on occasions. When Clara Brücken is told that her husband has, like herself, been apprehended, she reflects on the significance of this news: ‘Wenn Hartmut hier ist, kann ihn keiner auf der Flucht erschießen. Ich werde ihn *sehen*, wissen, daß er gesund ist, werde ihm sagen, *wie* ich ihn liebe, und wenn die Männerchen um uns zehnmahl im Chor blaffen, daß ich das gefälligst zu lassen hätte.’ (S, 258) And, although use of the first person is the normal practice in internal monologue, it is not always so here. When Alfred Mannschatz privately marvels at the splendour of the feast he has been invited to, he says to himself: ‘Genuß, Hochgenuß, Mann, wann hast du zum letzten Mal derartig duftige Knacker zwischen die Kiemen gequetscht, zur Hälfte Speckbrocken, und dir bleiben noch dreißig, vierzig Bissen.’ (S, 5)

Much more prevalent than the use of internal monologue in this novel, is the heavy reliance on *erlebte Rede*. Because, as Cohn explains, the author can ‘recount the characters’ silent thoughts without a break in the narrative thread’,⁶⁷ he is able to keep the narrative action going while at the same time revealing to us the character’s perspective on the topic at hand. Alfred Mannschaft decides to visit his daughter, Clara, at her place of work, to ask for her advice:

Schichtwechsel in einer Viertelstunde. War er hier, um Clara zu informieren, ihre Meinung zu erfragen oder sich eben doch anzulehnen? War er ein Trottel – jeden Tag eine andere Meinung. Mußte ihm ausgerechnet Hemsberger über den Weg laufen? Einmal Offizier, immer Offizier. [...] Er stieg aufs Rad, flach war hier herum alles wie ein Bettlaken. (S, 60)

It is to a considerable degree through these unspoken thoughts that we see the contrasting perspectives on GDR society and on the analysis of 17 June. In the midst of the pandemonium, Pfefferkorn reflects on a Party mantra: ‘Vielleicht war das der wohlvorbereitete Schlag der Imperialisten, der Tag X der CIA, den die Partei immer kommen sah, denn der Klassenkampf verschärfte sich. [...] Würde ihm jemand vorwerfen, die Nester im Bezirk nicht ausgeräuchert zu haben?’ (S, 137) What is illustrated here is the individual and collective fear, paranoia and paralysis the Tag X theory engendered throughout the Party leadership. In Hartmut Brücken’s view, however, it is not conspiracy

⁶⁷ Cohn, 97-98.

but disorganisation and irresolution that have determined the unfolding course of events on 17 June:

Für eine Revolution brauchst du nicht nur deine persönliche Bewachung, sondern auch einen Nachrichtentrupp, du brauchst Zeitungsleute [...] aber wenn der [Beamte] uns bescheißt, merken wir es nicht einmal. Und wenn wir es merken, an die Wand stellen wir ihn trotzdem nicht. (S, 206)

Erna Dorn tells her story in a series of monologues, five in all. Strictly speaking they are not monologues at all, but fictional transcripts of Erna Dorn's part of a series of dialogues. In the first two excerpts, she is in the presence of interrogators in the period leading up to her sentence of fifteen years imprisonment in May 1953. The third conversation takes place in the Evangelical Mission in Halle on 17 June, the fourth in a Stasi interrogation room on 19 June and the final one reflects a conversation with a cellmate in Dresden prison after she has been sentenced to death. Erna Dorn is clearly a petty criminal, unstable and not very bright. But on three points she is adamant throughout: 'Bei mir stimmt überhaupt nusch. Nich mit der Kommandeuse und schon jar nicht mit der Rede aufm Hallmarkt oder daß ich nen Brief an mein Vater nach Hannover jeschrieben haben soll.' (S, 322) She does not deny that she boasted to cellmates of being a *Kommandeuse*, but denies that she ever was one: 'Ich hab ja *zujegem*, daß ich das mit der Kommandeuse *erzählt* hab, aber doch nich, daß ich das in Wirklichkeit *war!*' (S, 203) The existence of a letter to her father is uncertain, but she certainly accuses her prosecutors of fabricating the content: 'Was soll ich in dem Brief jeschriem ham? Dann ziehn wir unsre jeliebte SS-Uniform wieder an? Is Blödsinn. Ich hab nie ne SS-Uniform anjehabt bei Jestapo in Königsbarch, und mein Vater überhaupt nich.' (S, 264) Her flat denial of having been in the Hallmarkt on 17 June is supported in the novel by her visit to and conversation in the Evangelical Mission. The role of Erna Dorn in this novel is to highlight the authorities' cynical and ruthless determination to authenticate the fascist nature of the 17 June Uprising and to demonstrate the total bankruptcy of a narrative whose legitimacy requires the exploitation of an isolated and mentally ill woman.

Realism or Socialist Realism?

Esther Koch, writing in *Deutsche Bücher*, finds *Sommernewitter* overly simplistic, particularly in its characterisations. All the ‘good’ people are saintly, like the Brückens, or naïve, like Erna Dorn; all the ‘bad’ people have a seedy past, like Bruno Pfefferkorn and Hemsberger, or are simply vile, like Thekla Pfefferkorn.⁶⁸ There is a great deal of truth in this observation. Each main character is imbued with the full panoply of appealing or distasteful traits of his or her type. Alfred Mannschatz is an exemplary old SPD man, keen on justice for all and solicitous of his fellow man. Hartmut Brücken is a conscientious worker, seeking the best solutions for both his workers and country. By contrast, Bruno Pfefferkorn, his assistant, Kodelwitz and other Party functionaries are ruthless and self-seeking, and Hemsberger, the ex-Nazi who now spies for the West, is dishonest and cowardly.

The female characters are particularly weakly-drawn. Clara Brücken is improbably virtuous and brave. When she is thrown into a cell by the Stasi, whose officers are maddened by her refusal to co-operate in the matter of her fleeing husband’s whereabouts, she experiences not a trace of resentment against the husband whose actions have been the cause of her incarceration: ‘Die Zelle stank vor Dreck, ein Strohsack hing halbzerfetzt über die Pritsche. Die Hauptsache: Hartmut hatten sie nicht geschnappt.’ (S, 262)

Thekla Pfefferkorn is as consistently unappealing as Clara Brücken is appealing. Marvelling at Anetzperg’s prowess in the bedroom, she is driven to ask: ‘Waren deine Großväter Holzfäller oder so was?’ (S, 248) Anetzperg ‘blieb ernst’ (S, 249), a response that may have prompted Cornelia Geißler’s assertion that this ‘romantisches Gefasel’, in conjunction with other references in the novel to female forms and functions, is sexist.⁶⁹ It could be argued that Loest’s portrayal of Clara Brücken and Thekla Pfefferkorn represents a strand of stereotypical male contrasting of the virtuous wife and the errant one; Clara Brücken would never utter such banalities as Thekla Pfefferkorn does. And also in contrast to Clara Brücken, Thekla Pfefferkorn deserts her lover at the first whiff of danger;

⁶⁸ Esther Koch, ‘Erich Loest, *Sommernewitter*’, in *Deutsche Bücher: Forum für Literatur*, 4 (2005), 309-11 (311).

⁶⁹ Cornelia Geißler, ‘Waren deine Großväter Holzfäller oder so was?’ *Berliner Zeitung*, 6 October 2005.

she continues to profess her love for him, but from a safe distance of several hundred kilometres. I do not, however, think that Loest is being sexist, at least in the case of Thekla Pfefferkorn; it is simply that he wants to portray her and her Party aspirations as ridiculous, insincere and inconsequential.

On closer inspection, a number of other characters are not as stereotypical as might be expected. Two that stand out in particular are Bruno Pfefferkorn and Melchior Anetzperg. Bruno Pfefferkorn is head of the Stasi in Halle, appointed to that position because of his exemplary antifascist past and as ruthless in defence of his country as one would expect from such a character. Yet his antifascist past is not as glorious as his public biography would have us believe. While he was in Buchenwald concentration camp, he was, in fact, a procuror of prostitutes for privileged prisoners. This small difficulty was later smoothed over by the Party in a process that was, as Joachim Feldmann explains, 'repräsentiv für die antifaschistische Legendenbildung der frühen DDR'.⁷⁰ Not only is Loest drawing attention to Party hypocrisy and cynicism here, he is highlighting the vulnerability which govern the life and work of many senior people in a dictatorial regime such as the GDR. Pfefferkorn is also vulnerable in various personal ways. He is being deceived by his wife, Thekla. He lives with the physical pain of a crippled body and the mental pain of the memory of his first wife and daughters, killed in the conflagration in Dresden. Fundamentally, he is a decent man. Meeting Alfred Mannschatz again after some years, he offers help in procuring a place at a recuperation centre for his old comrade-in-arms, and he derives real pleasure from a quiet reflective visit to Mannschatz.

In Melchior Anetzperg, Loest has created the most complex character in the novel, one who in many respects resembles himself. Anetzperg originates from a middle-class family: his father is a University professor and Anetzperg himself was in the SPD until it was forcibly merged with the KPD into the SED. He is, as the novel opens, a young Marxist intellectual with a promising future. He is attached to the *Bezirksparteischule*, as is Thekla Pfefferkorn, with whom he begins an affair. Apart from Thekla, Anetzperg has little in common with Bruno Pfefferkorn, who refers to him contemptuously as a 'Spund aus dem Bürgertum', an 'Überläufer' (S, 107). Much as he dislikes Anetzperg,

⁷⁰ Joachim Feldmann, 'Im Regen der Geschichte', *Freitag*, 24 February 2006.

Pfefferkorn can do little to impede the young man's climb through the Party ranks.

However, on the streets on 17 June, Anetzperg has to confront angry workers for the first time in his life. The young intellectual is forced to ask himself difficult questions: 'Wo hatte er, Anetzperg, denn gelebt, auf einer Insel der Weltfremden, der Theoretiker, die Lenins "Aprilthesen" und das "Manifest" studierten mit heißem Bemühn?' (S, 177) He begins to realise the true nature of the events of 17 June: 'Was war der Aufstand *im Kern*: Die ehrbar ergraute, nun auf einmal gar nicht so abgeschlaffte Sozialdemokratie besann sich auf uralte Kraft, Bebel gegen Lenin, Kautsky gegen Luxemburg?' (S, 179)

In the days following 17 June, Anetzperg begins to notice inconsistencies and untruths in newspaper reports of the events: 'Was die Zentralspinner vorturnen, zappeln die Bezirksluschen nach.' (S, 247) His impatience with the Party mirrors that of a number of intellectuals in those days: 'Wenn wir aus diesem Aufstand nichts lernen, werden wir überhaupt nichts lernen.' (S, 248) His impatience finally drives him to indiscretion. One week after the Uprising, he is invited to present a talk at a Party meeting. Anetzperg's talk is a word-for-word transcript of Loest's 'Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne'. The lecture is, unsurprisingly, received in stony silence. After various sharply critical responses from the floor to Anetzperg's talk, the chairman closes the meeting: 'Mit dem Genossen Anetzperg werde er ein klärendes Gespräch führen.' (S, 315) It is not difficult to imagine what the tenor of that meeting will be, or what fate awaits Anetzperg.

I do not think Loest intends Anetzperg to be an autobiographical figure. There are a number of important differences between himself and Anetzperg. Anetzperg was unmarried, Loest had in 1953 a wife and two children: Anetzperg was a sociologist, Loest a writer and journalist. Yet in many other respects, the similarity in background, actions on 17 June and conversion from functionary to critic of the Party is striking. In attributing to Anetzperg, an intellectual and rational thinker, his own life journey and, particularly, his views as expressed in 'Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne', Loest is asserting that what he said in 1953 was then and has always remained the truth about 17 June. And in this, of course, *Sommengewitter* could never be considered a Socialist Realist novel.

A Response to Socialist Realist Depictions of 17 June?

Indeed, *Sommergewitter* is, in a number of respects, Loest's post-*Wende* response to Socialist Realist accounts of 17 June. One such instance is Loest's interpretation of the Erna Dorn story, totally at odds with the Party's version of events and in stark contrast to an earlier fictional account of the same story, Stephan Hermlin's short story of 1954, 'Die Kommandeuse'.⁷¹ Hermlin tells the story of Erna Dorn (Hedwig Weber in his account) from her own perspective. Released from jail on 17 June by the Western 'Führungstab', she reflects on the painful years since the defeat of fascism and exults that these times are now at an end and fascists, including herself, can resume command: 'Sie mußte lächeln, weil ihre Hand unwillkürlich, vielleicht schon eine ganze Weile, eine ihr seit langem vertraute bestimmte Bewegung vollführte: sie schlug mit einer unsichtbaren Gerte gegen einen unsichtbaren Stiefelschaft.'⁷² Instructed by her Western allies to speak at a rally in the Hallmarkt as representative of the politically-repressed in the GDR, she does so, whilst privately despising her listeners: 'Wer seid ihr denn überhaupt. Verräter und Defätisten wart ihr alle mehr oder weniger. Ihr habt unseren Krieg verloren.'⁷³ But the rally fizzles out, her Western friends slink away and she is re-arrested, tried and executed for her crimes against humanity.

Hermlin's story provoked vigorous and universal condemnation in the West. Klussmann calls it a 'Kuriosum der DDR-Literatur', on the grounds 'dass positive Gegenkräfte oder Aspekte ganz fehlen und dass die zentralen Ereignisse überhaupt nicht in den Blick rücken'.⁷⁴ However, the text did not receive unqualified praise in the GDR either. Its main failing for some GDR critics was its perspective. Rather than telling the story of 17 June from a positive antifascist point of view, it gave voice to a negative, fascist one. One critic wrote that no-one should be interested in the 'Seelenanalyse' of an *SS-Kommandeuse*, and of course, the story was at odds with Party narratives, that all ex-Nazis now lived in the West and only antifascist resistance fighters remained in the GDR.

⁷¹ Stephan Hermlin, 'Die Kommandeuse', in *Arkadien: Gesammelte Erzählungen* (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1983), pp. 178-89. First published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* in 1954.

⁷² Hermlin, p. 181.

⁷³ Hermlin, p. 187.

⁷⁴ Klussmann, 'Volksaufstand und Literatur', pp. 52-53.

In form, too, Hermlin's use of inner monologue violated Socialist Realist prescriptions.

Despite this defiance of GDR cultural norms, Hermlin's 'die Wahrheit verhöhnende Novelle'⁷⁵ did not find favour with Loest. It is therefore interesting that Loest chose a similar form of interior monologue to reveal the Dorn point of view. Of course, the confused, vulnerable woman in *Sommergewitter* could hardly be further removed from Hermlin's scheming, vicious fascist, and it seems possible that Loest chose to challenge the Hermlin portrayal using Hermlin's own forms.

Mention of interior monologues brings to mind, of course, that Heym uses streams of consciousness to convey the thoughts of Gudrun Kaschiske, alias Goodie Cass in *5 Tage im Juni*. In this, and the use of dialogue generally to drive the story forward, as well as in the deployment of real people, places and events, the structure of Loest's novel is very similar to Heym's. However, this is where similarities between the two works begin to fade. Heym does portray a working class cast adrift by its own Party and trade unions, and deprived of many everyday pleasures. Nevertheless, *5 Tage im Juni* has distinctly recognisable Socialist Realist traces: it may question the Party's methods, but the socialist aspirations and Party hegemony are unquestioned, the West is a threatening hotbed of fascism and the GDR is a land for positive heroes, even if they have yet to be recognised as such.

Loest's excellent portrayal of GDR society is much more nuanced and this is where it is strongest and furthest removed from the tenets of Socialist Realism. The grinding misery of everyday life for the people, the toxic mixture of incompetence and ruthlessness shown by the Party and its functionaries and the chaos and confusion on 17 June itself are all finely and convincingly drawn. There are no positive heroes. Indeed, the candidates for the position of positive hero, Hartmut Brücken and Melchior Anetzperg, take no journey of self-discovery to a socialist utopia; for both the journey is in the opposite direction. There is no wise and solicitous Party, only cynicism and betrayal of the people's aspirations. There is no grand Western plot to undermine the GDR, only a few opportunistic hooligans, official Western indifference and a fortuitous thunderstorm.

⁷⁵ Loest, "'Sommergewitter'", Leipzig', in *Einmal Exil und zurück*, pp. 172-74 (p. 173).

Conclusion

Loest wrote 'Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne' in 1953. His only other significantly oppositional text published while he still lived in the GDR was the novel, *Es geht seinen Gang*, which appeared in the GDR in 1978 (but was denied a reprint there for many years). Yet in 1957 Loest was sentenced to seven years in prison, suffering the same fate as Walter Janka, Wolfgang Harich and Gustav Just. Why was Loest more heavily-punished than other GDR writers, who wrote considerably more work to which the regime took exception, and to what extent can he really be regarded as an oppositional writer?

The answer to the first of these questions has less to do, I think, with literary texts than with political factors. 'Elfenbeinturm und Rote Fahne' was certainly seen as inflammatory and it stored up a well of anger and resentment against Loest among some very powerful cultural functionaries in Leipzig. But there was a deeper problem. The authorities believed that Loest was a traitor. A Stasi note of March 1957 includes a very ominous remark: 'Wie aus einem Artikel der Westpresse hervorgeht, war er am 17. Juni 1953 aktiv an den Unruhen und faschistischen Provokationen in Leipzig beteiligt.'⁷⁶ It was irrational, given that Loest spent the day in Berlin, but it comes as no surprise to learn that, when he was arrested in 1957, it was for 'die Bildung einer staats- und parteifeindlichen Gruppe, die sich als Ziel gesetzt hatte, die Regierung der DDR zu stürzen und ein antisozialistisches System an ihre Stelle zu setzen' (D, 319). Paranoid dictatorships such as that of the GDR are terrified of conspiracies and will take all steps they feel are necessary to expose and crush them. In the GDR in the 1950s, these steps frequently included imprisonment.

As regards Loest's place in the pantheon of oppositional writers, it must first be borne in mind that he had no opportunity to write anything at all between 1957 and 1964. He spent a few years after release from prison quietly writing largely nondescript material under assumed names, but from the early 1970s, he found himself once more in conflict with the authorities. The primary source of this conflict was his novel, *Es geht seinen Gang*, and Loest tells the story of his struggles over this book in *Der vierte Zensor*. Over this same period, however, another book, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, was taking shape with

⁷⁶ Note in Stasi file MfS AOP 1958/71, Band 1: HA V/1, Berlin 26.3 1957, in BStU Archive, Berlin.

potential to add to the conflict. Loest nurtured a deep conviction that his views on 17 June and GDR society had been unjustly dismissed: ‘Ich dachte immer, ich sei zu Unrecht verurteilt worden. Ich musste rehabilitiert werden. Und da andere nicht dargestellt haben, wie es wirklich war, musste ich es eben selber tun.’⁷⁷ He had hoped that the accession of Honecker would usher in a new more liberal atmosphere, in which he could publish his version of events. These hopes soon faded, however. By the late 1970s, by which time the authorities had managed to get hold of a copy of the manuscript, it was clear that the autobiography would never be published in the GDR. What worried the authorities most was its engagement with 17 June. A Stasi note of February 1979 refers to the book’s ‘Auseinandersetzungen [...] im Zusammenhang mit dem 17.6.1953’ and a further note a month later refers to Loest’s ‘Juni-Buch’.⁷⁸ His friend and publisher, Dr. Eberhard Günther, returned a manuscript to Loest with the words: ‘Ich warne dich, Erich. Über eines mußt du dir im klaren sein. Wenn du das etwa im Westen herausbringst, ist hier für dich kein Platz mehr.’⁷⁹ This was a prophecy of sorts. Loest did leave the GDR and published the book in the West in 1981. It was not, however, without a decade-long fight and that, coupled with his courage in 1953, establishes Loest’s position as an oppositional writer in the GDR.

Durch die Erde ein Riß accords a place of central importance to 17 June; it is therefore odd that Loest would not return to the topic for another quarter of a century. There may be a clue in a story Heinrich Mohr tells. An invitation was extended by the Cologne-based Deutschlandfunk in 1981 to Loest to read passages of his own choosing from his autobiography, any passages, that is, apart from the chapter on 17 June. It was a stipulation laid down ‘von einer übergeordnete Instanz. [...] Es ist dies Erich Loests erste Erfahrung mit Zensur in der Bundesrepublik gewesen.’⁸⁰

Very possibly, this double East-and-West rejection of his wish to tell the truth about 17 June inclined him to steer clear of the subject, despite its central importance in his own life. In 2003, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of 17 June, it became a hot topic

⁷⁷ Erich Loest, ‘Ich musste die Wahrheit schreiben’, *Femina*, 12 May 1982.

⁷⁸ Both in copies of Stasi file BStU 000119-000134 held in Erich-Loest-Archiv in Leipzig.

⁷⁹ Cited by Loest himself in *Der Zorn des Schafes*, p. 101.

⁸⁰ Mohr, ‘Spurensicherung’, p. 4.

again. Scores of books and articles were published, some leaning towards the old GDR narrative, but mostly positing the events of the day as a *Volksaufstand*. Only then did Loest return to the subject in *Sommergewitter*. Published in 2005, the novel is not, of course, oppositional writing in the sense I have used the term in this thesis; there was no longer a GDR regime to oppose. It is oppositional in a different, if much less dangerous sense. Loest has always vehemently rejected both common interpretations and, in *Sommergewitter*, as in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, he proposes his own. It is difficult to dismiss Loest's case. He was an eye-witness to the events of 17 June, with a keen sense of and interest in social history. 'Keine Sekunde lang bereute er, nicht taktisch klug geheuchelt zu haben.' (D, 399) This reflection, just before he was released in 1964 after seven years in prison provides a pointer to his integrity in constantly refusing to come to any accommodation with the GDR regime. In his account of 17 June, Loest stands on a high factual and moral ground that few others can challenge.

CONCLUSION

How, then, are we to assess Brecht, Müller, Heym and Loest on a scale of literary opposition? The charge is frequently made that they, with the vast majority of their fellow writers, refused to support the people's attempt to overthrow the SED regime, preferring to defend their own personal interests in preserving an illegitimate system. However, whether the people of the GDR actually wanted to overthrow the regime and be incorporated into the West German state is by no means proven and what the GDR workers expected of the writers in the 1950s is far from clearcut. It is certainly not as simple as the situation presented by Grass, for example, in his *Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand*, where the striking workers try, but fail, to enlist Brecht's active support. Nevertheless, the charge remains and must be either rebutted or accepted.

It is important to recall that the essential criterion in my definition of oppositional writing is the writer's intention to question or challenge the status quo, although due consideration must be accorded to other factors which may impact how the oppositional act is viewed, such as the writer's decision to delay publication, his place of residence or the vigour of the regime's response to the offending text. In challenging the Party, my quartet of writers did not call for its demise or overthrow; quite the reverse, they believed passionately in socialism and the socialist state. They belonged to two generations of antifascist writers who had lived in or escaped from the Nazi state, and whose antifascism went hand in hand with the belief that only socialism stood between Germany and a return to fascism. None of the four ever criticised socialism or the socialist state. Indeed, the three who were still alive when the GDR collapsed, vigorously protested the end of the socialist state and deplored what they regarded as its incorporation into Western capitalism, incurring in the process the anger of many in both East and West.¹ It was this steadfast defence of socialism, allied to a willingness to seek

¹ See, for example, Stefan Heym's 'Aschermittwoch', which appeared in *Der Spiegel* in December 1989; reprinted in Stefan Heym, *Einmischung* (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1990), pp. 265-70, and Monika Maron's response, 'Die Schriftsteller und das Volk'.

compromise and accommodation with the regime, that prompted critics in the West to dismiss Brecht, Müller, Heym and Loest as oppositional writers and to label them instead as supporters of a corrupt and undemocratic system. It cannot be denied that all four writers were solid in their support of the state on 17 June 1953. Yet they held and expressed views on the events of 17 June that clashed with the narratives promulgated by the SED party and government. Each of the four drew on his literary and creative talents to advance his views, both in the immediate aftermath of 17 June and in subsequent months and years. In this thesis, I have identified texts of varying styles and genres, compiled over prolonged periods of time, containing uncomfortable, unpalatable messages, and providing a direct challenge to a repressive regime, which responded by visiting upon the offenders frequent and substantial punishments and preclusions.

There can be no doubt, therefore: my four chosen writers were in conflict with the SED, in both the short and long term, over the causes, meaning and lessons of 17 June 1953. Each gave literary expression to the conflict in his own way and each met with varied responses, in both East and West, to his acts of opposition. In conclusion, I will draw together the strands that united the four writers in opposition to the SED regime and assess whether the diversity in the writers' approaches and in the reception of their texts permits any differentiation between their respective oppositional stances.

United in Opposition

What has become clear in analysing the 17 June texts of the four writers is that they manifest a remarkable consistency of view. Initially, Müller had little to say, or at least little that has made its way into print, concerning 17 June, but the immediate reaction of the other three was that the events of the day were the result of a Western attempt to overthrow the GDR; the people's apathy towards, or even connivance with the enemies of socialism, made the plotters' task potentially easier and only a watchful Soviet presence had averted disaster. Brecht's letter of 17 June to Ulbricht, Heym's remarks to the Soviet commander Sokolow on 21 June and Loest's articles in *Neues Deutschland* and the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 21 June and 23 June respectively, all reveal this line

of thinking.² Within the space of a few days, however, this had been replaced by a more reflective analysis, virtually identical between the four, which would henceforth inform all their texts relating to 17 June, thereby creating a clearly discernible and enduring union between them.

All four continued to draw attention in their texts to the presence of Western elements in East Berlin on 17 June, persisting with a smattering of anti-Western and pro-Soviet sentiments, but in essence their common analysis reduces to two strands of criticism. Firstly, there were indeed serious problems within GDR society. These included popular apathy, or even hostility, to socialist principles and the most dangerous manifestation of this condition was fascism, latent in the GDR and nourished by a neo-fascist West. Just as critical, however, was the parlous state and abysmal performance of the Party. It should have been the Party's mission to lead and inspire the people; instead, its adherence to Stalinist methods of governance had rendered it distant, inflexible and incompetent.

Brecht, Heym and Loest all expressed these views in their texts of July and August 1953, as did Müller to a lesser extent. The texts were largely journalistic in style; even Brecht's poems, 'Das Amt für Literatur' and 'Nicht feststellbare Fehler der Kunstkommission', were written for publication in a newspaper. The language used was therefore matter-of-fact and unambivalent. A number of key words and phrases appear over and over again in the texts; 'die Fehler der Regierung', 'die berechtigte Unzufriedenheit der Arbeiter', 'die große Aussprache', and so on. In these early days, however, the four writers chose not to attack the Party leadership directly, but rather through its various organs. A failure of communication at the heart of the Party's lack of direction was identified. Signalling their respective backgrounds in the spheres of the spoken and written word, Brecht and Müller focused on the shortcomings of the broadcasting authorities, whilst Heym and Loest were heavily critical of the press. It may not have been an open attack on Ulbricht and the leadership, but, given the iron grip

² Brecht, *BFA*, XXX, 1998, p. 178; Heym, *Wege*, pp. 201-8; Loest, *Neues Deutschland*, 21 June 1953 and the *Leipziger Volkzeitung*, 23 June 1953.

the political leadership maintained on radio and press, it was tantamount to direct and personal criticism.

Allied to this criticism of the Party, however, was a clearly-expressed view that GDR society was deeply flawed. Brecht's letter of 1 July 1953 to Peter Suhrkamp, Müller's condemnation of a fascist's murderous action in a prison and Heym's warning, in his note to Sokolow, of the dangerous state of mind among GDR workers all underlined the sinister fascism that pervaded GDR society.³ Even Loest acknowledged, albeit more weakly than the others, the toxic inheritance from the Third Reich: 'Die vorangegangene Zeit des Faschismus hat nicht dazu beigetragen, die Menschen klüger zu machen.'⁴

The same sentiments expressed in these texts of July and August 1953 surface again in the life narratives from Brecht's *Journale* of 1953/54 to Müller's *Krieg ohne Schlacht* in 1992, and in the poetry, drama and novels, from the *Elegien*, written in the late summer and autumn of 1953 to *Sommergewitter*, published in 2005. As we have seen, life narrative is subject to a number of reservations, including the effect of temporal distance on the writers' perceptions and recollections. We would expect Brecht's *Journale* entries to mirror the sentiments he expressed elsewhere at this time, but even at a distance of decades, the other three writers' autobiographical texts reflect their anger and anguish of those June days and their resolve to challenge the Party to reform itself.

The use of image and symbolism in fiction, along with the lack of an implicit 'pact' to tell the truth, as the author sees it, mean fictional works are open to differing readings, and an element of ambivalence is introduced. Nevertheless, we have seen that the intertextual links between the journalistic texts of 1953 and the four works of fiction explored here are very clear. This is not surprising in the case of Brecht's *Elegien*, composed in 1953, nor even in Müller's *Germania Tod in Berlin* and Heym's *5 Tage im Juni*, both started within months of 17 June. In the case of Loest's *Sommergewitter*,

³ Brecht, 'An Peter Suhrkamp'; Müller, 'Schotterbek'; Heym, 'Memorandum an Sokolow'.

⁴ Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne'.

published in 2005, the link is formed very explicitly by the full and literal transcription into the novel of the author's inflammatory call in 1953 for Party reform.

The twin strands of criticism, of the people and the Party, which underpin the journalistic texts in 1953, flow through into the fictional work. All four authors portray a Party totally alienated from and indifferent to the downtrodden populace. In the *Elegien*, Brecht deals with this issue at a somewhat elevated level, in keeping with his generally distanced stance from everyday life and people in the GDR. He urges the Party to engage honestly in a grand dialogue with the people and to abandon inflexible Stalinist practices in 'Die Wahrheit einigt', 'Eisen' and other poems.⁵ The alienation between the Party and the people is depicted in much more prosaic terms by the other three. Heym and Loest, and to a lesser extent Müller, use dialogue to illustrate the gaps that exist. Party members are wont to talk in jargon; it often sounds like gibberish to the uncomprehending people who by contrast talk in much more earthy and matter-of-fact terms. In words and deeds, the Party condemns itself; in the empty sentiments of Ulbricht's and Grotewohl's speeches on 16 June, transcribed in *5 Tage im Juni*; in the intolerant imprisonment of a non-conforming communist in *Germania Tod in Berlin*; and in the cynical execution of a vulnerable misfit in *Sommergewitter*. It is interesting that all four use the theme of food, that most basic of human requirements, to highlight the misery of the ordinary man's existence. In 'Lebensmittel zum Zweck', Brecht accuses the West of seducing the hungry people of the GDR with food; implicitly he is criticising the GDR's leaders for failing to feed their own people.⁶ A Party official in *Germania Tod in Berlin* goes off to a banquet, whilst the worker, unused to rich food makes do with a beer and some meat. In *5 Tage im Juni*, Witte and Anna eat grey sausage in a grey restaurant, whilst plenty of good food and beer are available at an officially-organised works outing. In *Sommergewitter*, tables groan under the weight of fine food and drink at a Party function, but outside the function room, people are starving.

⁵ Brecht, *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 315.

⁶ Brecht, *BFA*, XII, 1988, p. 31.

The same concerns over GDR society's exposure to residual fascism expressed in the non-fictional work surface here too. In the *Elegien*, Brecht reflects on the fascist threat in a number of poems, including 'Der Einarmige im Geholz', where, in an image from everyday life in the GDR, a one-armed man holds his arm aloft, as in a Nazi salute. In *Germania Tod in Berlin*, a Nazi describes a meeting with an old army colleague, now in the upper echelons of the GDR government: the two fondly speculate on the return to a fascist Germany. In *5 Tage im Juni*, a fascist returns to his home in East Berlin to organise mayhem on the streets on 17 June. Loest, writing over half a century later, depicts old Nazis at work, contriving to undermine the GDR.

This dual criticism of the people and Party provides a key to the apparent dichotomy between my contention that the writers were courageous opponents of the SED and the popular, particularly Western, opinion that they were the self-serving lackeys of the regime. That the writers were in conflict with the Party and that they paid a price for this is surely beyond dispute. The conflict, however, was always focussed on the restrictions imposed by the regime in the area of cultural and not social politics. This, I think, explains why writers, even those as troublesome as my quartet, were not prepared to confront the social consequences of 17 June. Peter Brooker points out that we hear nothing from Brecht of the appalling and repressive consequences of 17 June, the multiple executions and heavy prison sentences, often served in harsh Soviet jails, the reversal of the New Course concessions or the re-imposition of productivity norm increases.⁷ This is equally true of the others. Nowhere in their non-fictional texts, in 1953 or later, do any of the four writers deal with this issue. And the reticence is largely reflected in the fictional texts. In total, one person, Clara Brucken, is imprisoned and five characters die; of these, two communists in *Germania Tod in Berlin* and a Party worker in *5 Tage im Juni* were Party loyalists, opposed to the workers' actions. Only Loest takes any cognizance of the suffering of innocent people and even his single fatality is a social misfit. Brecht made few claims regarding his relationship with the masses, but it does seem strange that the other three steered well clear of this harsh outcome to 17 June. To have highlighted the plight of ordinary people after 17 June

⁷ Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht: Dialectics, Poetry, Politics* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 223.

would not have been to ally themselves with the enemies of socialism, but rather with the working classes, to whom all three offered their solidarity and concern. The conclusion must be that, even amongst the most oppositional of GDR antifascist writers, '17 June of the intellectuals' was indeed quite separate from that of the masses.

It is perhaps understandable that this indifference to the ordinary people is taken in some circles to demonstrate that GDR writers cannot merit the label of oppositionist or dissident accorded to other Soviet bloc intellectuals. It is in my opinion, however, invalid to contrast the relationship between people and writers in the GDR unfavourably with that which obtained in Poland or Czechoslovakia.⁸ As Bathrick notes, GDR writers' avoidance of the nationalist and religious discourses of other eastern European countries in favour of a Marxist discourse was predicated on their association of nationalism with the ideology and criminality of fascism.⁹ Rightly or wrongly, East German writers of the antifascist generations felt themselves justified in distrusting the German people, whose nationalism had allowed fascism to flourish. Any oppositional activity which included nationalist or anticommunist elements was for the writers out of the question, an important factor in the arms-length relationship between them and the people. But the writers' disregard of the people's plight does not alter the fact of the forthright and courageous indictment of an incompetent, Stalinist Party leadership, criticism marked by what Mark R. Thompson refers to as East German 'exceptionalism' resulting from the opposition's anti-regime but pro-GDR stance, in contrast to the pro-Western 'dissident' model favoured in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.¹⁰

Contrasting Receptions

The GDR writers' intention to challenge the GDR regime is the pivotal criterion in my definition of oppositional writing. Clearly, though, official response to any text measures the extent to which the regime regards the text as oppositional. In a predictable, unchanging world, the vigour of official response would provide a perfect

⁸ See, for example, Christian Joppke, 'Intellectuals, Nationalism and the Exit from Communism: The Case of East Germany', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995), No. 2, 213-41 (215).

⁹ Bathrick, p. 228.

¹⁰ Mark R. Thompson, 'Why and how East Germans rebelled', *Theory and Society*, 25 (1996), No. 2, 263-99 (265).

gauge with which to rank texts in order of strength of opposition. However, in the very unpredictable world of GDR cultural politics, any attempt to compare the relative strength of opposition between the four writers by reference to the punishment meted out to each is fraught with difficulty. Official responses to the writers varied between individuals and over time, and was determined by a complex matrix of perceptions and motivating forces within the Party, fluidity of relationships between the Party and troublesome intellectuals and the personal behaviour and standing of individual writers.

The existence and application of censorship was a constant in the GDR from its founding to its collapse, as was the loss of access to privileges and benefits through exclusion from the Writers' Union. All four writers had their work continually censored. Brecht was never a member of the Writers' Union, but the other three were all expelled from the organisation, Müller in 1961, Heym and Loest in 1979.¹¹ These constant features apart, the nature of state response to opposition changed over the years in a number of ways.

Brecht died in 1956; Heym, Müller and Loest all lived through the great events of the next forty years: the Khrushchev revelations and Hungarian Uprising of 1956,¹² the erection of the Wall in 1961, the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968, Honecker's war with the intellectuals in the later 1970s and the collapse of the GDR and subsequent *Wende* from 1989 onwards. It is fruitless to speculate on how Brecht would have behaved had he lived longer; we can only compare his experience with those of the others up to the time of his death. The year of Brecht's death is, though, a convenient watershed. It brings to a close the first, immediate responses to 17 June, which were largely journalistic texts reflecting the heady reactions of the immediate aftermath, but included, of course, the entire body of Brecht's more reflective work. The remaining texts were written at varying distances from 17 June and are inevitably coloured by the

¹¹ Strictly speaking, Loest resigned from the Writers' Union, but the effects were the same as for expulsion. He was, of course, *de facto*, excluded from the organisation during his time in prison.

¹² Brecht died in August 1956 and therefore after the Twentieth Party Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956. The details of Khrushchev's speech and its significance for the GDR only became apparent later in the year, when Brecht was ill and dying.

events mentioned above as well as by the evolving nature of intellectual opposition and state response.

It is interesting to note that the journalistic texts and essays of July and August 1953 were subject to far less censorship than the writers' subsequent fictional and life narrative work. As we have seen, censorship and repression already existed: Brecht's work had already been censored and he was subjected to a sustained attack in the *Mittwoch-Gesellschaften* of May and June, 1953. Loest had been punished for his insufficiently Socialist Realist novel, *Jungen, die übrigblieben*, published in 1949. Both however, along with Heym, published a number of articles, highly critical of official attitudes to 17 June. There were a number of reasons why the press articles might have escaped close attention from the cultural police. Press deadlines generally precluded leisurely inspection of article content and the Stasi organisation, which was to become the chief mechanism of repression, was still small and unsophisticated. Most of all, in the immediate aftermath of 17 June, political power and control of the Party hung in a very uncertain balance.

Of our four writers, Müller was the one with least to fear from the authorities in the months after 17 June. His public contributions, limited to a few innocuous pieces in *Sonntag*, revealed how little the events of 17 June seemed to concern him at this time. Apart from a note in Stasi files in 1956 that he was a member of a short-lived *Donnerstagkreis* set up by Wolfgang Harich, Müller seems to have done little in this period to bring attention to himself.¹³ Brecht was circumspect as to when and where to raise his head above the parapet. He wrote a number of articles and poems for publication in the press in July and August 1953, which were certainly critical of official policy. However, Brecht's main concern was cultural policy and, in positioning himself as a cultural spokesman for the Academy, he deflected some attention from himself. And, of course, he elected not to publish much of the sociopolitical criticism in his *Elegien, Journale* and *Schriften*. Heym was more direct. His series of articles, written mostly for the *Berliner Zeitung* in June and July 1953 were critical of the Party, press,

¹³ The note in Stasi file MtS AOP1958/71, Band 1, 19.12.1956 in BSTu Archive, Berlin actually focuses on Müller's wife, Inge, more than on Müller himself.

trades unions and other elements of the Party machine. His direct attacks on the Party leadership cannot have made for pleasant reading for Ulbricht and his circle, yet there is no evidence that the Party moved to muzzle Heym. Indeed, Heym seems to have been in Ulbricht's good graces around this time.

It was Loest who was heavily punished in this initial phase. Along with Harich's 'Es geht um den Realismus', Loest's 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' was the most mutinous text to appear after 17 June. It brought upon his head the fury of the cultural and political leadership in Leipzig, who mounted a sustained and vicious attack on him between August and October 1953. He lost his position as chairman of the Leipzig branch of the Writers' Union. Only Kuba's intervention saved him from expulsion from the Writers' Union, but Loest was seriously damaged and henceforth a marked man. When he was arrested and imprisoned in 1957, his *Börsenblatt* article was hugely instrumental in his downfall. There is little doubt, then, that the bluntness of Loest's opposition and the ferocity of the state's response make Loest the clear leader in the early oppositional ranking.

Between 1956 and the early 1970s, Müller and Heym were continual thorns in the Party's flesh. During this time, Loest languished in jail and then maintained a very low profile while his rebellious spirit revived. By the 1970s, all three were ready again to confront the establishment with critical assessment of 17 June and its causes. *Germania Tod in Berlin* appeared in 1971, *5 Tage im Juni* in 1974 and Loest spent the decade working on *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, with its central focus on 17 June: it was published in 1981. These texts confirmed their authors' status as critics of the regime, something they had been very visibly and openly promoting via Western television and press exposure. It was a defiance the Party could not ignore. Heavy prison sentences for troublesome writers were no longer politically feasible, but a range of other measures were now in place, in particular, pervasive Stasi surveillance and harassment, draconian financial penalties and, as a last resort, expatriation. Strict censorship and expulsion from the Writers' Union remained as available options.

All three texts were banned from publication or circulation in the GDR. All three authors were harried by the Stasi, although the situation is clouded somewhat in

Müller's case because of his co-operation with them. Heym was heavily fined under a law designed to discourage writers from publishing their work in the West. Loest left the GDR in 1981 when it became clear he would never again be allowed to publish anything meaningful in the GDR. It was not enforced expatriation, but to Loest, who loved Leipzig dearly, it must have felt very close to it.

Amid all this exclusion and repression, another factor stands out. The relationship between the Party and each of the four writers was complex and by no means always repressive. Brecht and Heym, neither of whom ever joined the Party, were internationally recognised cultural figures; their decision to return to the GDR had significant propaganda value for the regime. Both took advantage of this situation. Brecht lived a life of considerable privilege and it is perplexing to read in Heym's *Nachruf* of his long and bitter battle to have *5 Tage im Juni* published running in parallel with cosy arrangements between himself and Ulbricht and Honecker. Müller was punished in 1961 for staging *Die Umsiedlerin*, but there were indications that the Party did not intend to gag him completely. Similarly, *Germania Tod in Berlin* was much too dangerous to be permitted a staging in the GDR, but Müller's links with the Stasi and his international reputation afforded him a degree of protection from the reprisals his play might otherwise have provoked.

Only Loest resisted the temptation to reach an accommodation with the regime and he paid dearly for this show of principle, first in 1957, then again in 1981. In the context of 17 June, however, Loest has written much less than the others, certainly while he lived in the GDR. Heym and Brecht wrote many more texts in 1953 than Loest's solitary 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', although, of course, Brecht left much of his work unpublished. Müller, who otherwise professed a cynical insouciance about the whole affair, has produced in *Germania Tod in Berlin* the most powerfully critical commentary on GDR society in 1953 and Brecht's *Elegien* provide the most lyrically critical observations. Heym's sheer persistence over twenty years in his efforts to get *5 Tage im Juni* published was heroic. In comparison to these three works, Loest's *Sommergewitter* is simply a historical novel, written long after the demise of the GDR and its repressive regime, whereas Brecht, Müller and Heym were all trying to point

towards a better future. They might therefore be regarded as having created the more truly oppositional fictional works.

Quantity and quality of oppositional texts created, or punishment endured? The world of GDR cultural politics is far too complex and elusive to allow simplistic or reductive answers. All four writers were men of deep conviction, who held views that conflicted with those held by their political masters, and who had the courage to confront and criticise their opponents. They were also, without doubt, men of great, indeed outstanding literary skill. That they combined conviction with skill is their legacy to GDR and German literature.

Appendix I: Works of Fiction Featuring 17 June 1953 as a Theme

Listed here are the most significant works of fiction, in which 17 June 1953 features to some extent. I do not claim that the list is definitive; there may be other fictional works in which 17 June plays a part. However, if there are any such texts, the 17 June connection is likely to be nebulous. Locating time and place of creation and publication of texts written by GDR writers is often fraught with difficulty and some may argue with my categorisations. For example, twelve of Brecht's *Buckower Elegien* were published in the GDR between 1954 and 1957. My reason for categorising them as a whole where I have is that the remaining eleven, which include, in my opinion, most of the 'oppositional' texts, were published only between 1964 and 1980.

Written in the GDR, published in the GDR

Kurt Barthel (Kuba)	<i>Wie ich mich schäme</i>	(1953)
Jurek Becker	<i>Der Boxer</i>	(1976)
Uwe Berger	<i>Strobel und der andere</i>	(1955)
Volker Braun	<i>Hinze und Kunze</i>	(1977)
Eduard Claudius	<i>Von der Liebe soll man nicht nur sprechen</i>	(1957)
Karl Jakob Danziger	<i>Die Partei hat immer Recht</i>	(1976)
Helmut Hauptmann	<i>Das komplexe Abenteuer Schwedt</i>	(1964)
	<i>Der Kreis der Familie</i>	(1964)
	<i>Über: Kostoff und unser Gewissen</i>	(1965)
Christoph Hein	<i>Der fremde Freund/Drachenblut</i>	(1982)
Stephan Hermlin	<i>Die Kommandeuse</i>	(1954)
Karl-Heinz Jakobs	<i>Beschreibung eines Sommers</i>	(1961)
Hermann Kant	<i>Das Impressum</i>	(1972)
Reiner Kerndl	<i>Die seltsame Reise und lange Ankunft des Alois</i>	(1979)
Joachim Knappe	<i>Mein namenloses Land</i>	(1965)
Erwin Lademann	<i>Der Anruf</i>	(1958)

Helmut Meyer	<i>Lena in Berlin</i>	(1962)
Heiner Müller	<i>Der Lohndrucker</i>	(1958)
	<i>Wolokolamsker Chaussee III (Das Duell)</i>	(1986)
Eric Neutsch	<i>Spur der Steine</i>	(1964)
	<i>Auf der Suche nach Gatt</i>	(1973)
	<i>Der Friede im Osten</i>	(1979)
Siegfried Pitschmann	<i>Fünf Versuche über Uwe</i>	(1968)
Brigitte Reimann	<i>Das Geständnis</i>	(1960)
Werner Reinowski	<i>Die Versuchung</i>	(1956)
Anna Seghers	<i>Das Vertrauen</i>	(1968)
Fritz Selbmann	<i>Die Söhne der Wölfe</i>	(1966)
	<i>Anhang den Tag vorher betreffend</i>	(1974)
Kurt Steiniger	<i>Die Schöpfungstage sind nicht sechs</i>	(1965)
Inge von Wangenheim	<i>Am Morgen ist der Tag ein Kind</i>	(1957)
Christa Wolf	<i>Nachdenken über Christa T</i>	(1969)

Written in the GDR, suppressed or published only in the West (at least initially)

Kurt Bartsch	<i>Kaderakte</i>	(1979)
	<i>Wadzeck</i>	(1980)
Thomas Brasch	<i>Rotter</i>	(1977)
Werner Bräunig	<i>Rummelplatz</i>	(1965)
Bertolt Brecht	<i>Buckower Elegien</i>	(1953)
Peter Hacks	<i>Die Sorgen und die Macht</i>	(1960)
Werner Heiduczek	<i>Tod am Meer</i>	(1977)
Stefan Heym	<i>5 Tage im Juni</i>	(1974)
Uwe Johnson	<i>Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953</i>	(1953-6)
Heiner Müller	<i>Germania Tod in Berlin</i>	(1956-71)

Written in West Germany, published in West Germany

Martin Gregor-Dellin	<i>Der Kandelaber</i>	(1962)
Uwe Johnson	<i>Das dritte Buch über Achim</i>	(1961)
Hans Christian Kirsch	<i>Deutschlandlied</i>	(1969)
Erich Loest	<i>Zwiebelmuster</i>	(1985)
Theodor Plievier	<i>Berlin</i>	(1954)
G.J. Schilling-Werra	<i>Im Osten wird es hell</i>	(1983)
Jochim Ziem	<i>Aufruhr</i>	(1968)
Gerhard Zwerenz	<i>Die Liebe der toten Männer</i>	(1959)

Written by West German authors

Günter Grass	<i>Die Plebejer proben den Aufstand</i>	(1966)
Stefan Olivier	<i>Jedem das Seine</i>	(1961)
Friedemann Schuster	<i>Der Tag X, der nicht stattfand</i>	(1980)

Written post-Wende by ex-GDR authors

Christoph Hein	<i>Landnahme</i>	(2003)
Erich Loest	<i>Sommergewitter</i>	(2005)
	<i>Die Prahlerin</i>	(2008)
Eberhard Panitz	<i>Villasonnenschein und der siebzehnte Juni</i>	(1998)
G. J. Schilling-Werra	<i>Steine gegen Panzer</i>	(1993)

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