

Individuality and Collectivism: The evolving Theory  
and Practice of Socialist Realism in East Germany  
reflected in three novels of the 1960's

by

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## ABSTRACT

During the 1960's a distinct change of emphasis took place in the manner in which East German novels reflected the relationship between individual and collective. Using three of the best known works of the period (E.Strittmatter's Ole Bienkopp, H.Kant's Die Aula and Christa Wolf's Nachdenken über Christa T.), this study attempts to describe the change and to consider its implications for the theory of socialist realism. Because each of the novels represents an individual author's contribution to a body of literature which must serve a collective function, his position vis-a-vis society is revealed not only in the social content of his work but also by the form in which it is presented. The central concern of this discussion is the way in which both the content and the form of East German socialist realist literature increasingly, in the course of the 1960's, reflect the potential contradictions and creative tensions inherent in the relationship between individuality and collectivism.

Having in the initial, formative stages emphasized the unity of individual and collective aspirations, socialist realist literature began in the 1960's to move away from the programmatic, normative view of social relationships which had first evolved under foreign (Soviet Russian) conditions and become entrenched during the ideological confrontations of the 1950's. The work of Erwin Strittmatter, whose earlier writing typifies the perspectives and style of the 1950's, serves to introduce these changes. His novel Ole Bienkopp is generally recognized to be the first major work to deal principally with relationships within the GDR, rather than the broader issues of internal or external threats to the social structure. The major innovation of Ole Bienkopp is that its

narrative interest derives from so-called "non-antagonistic conflicts." This clearly requires much more realistic differentiation of the individual characters than the simplistic, black-white confrontations of earlier works. Strittmatter's characterization is examined both from the point of view of its realism and also to assess the social perspective which it reflects.

In contrast to Strittmatter's relatively conservative style and aggressive argumentation, Hermann Kant's Die Aula consistently introduces to East German prose many of the techniques of modern bourgeois novels, corresponding to its more reflective, questioning approach to life. Like Strittmatter and the third author, Christa Wolf, Kant undertakes a retrospective reassessment of the formative years of the GDR, when individual and collective attitudes towards the new society were first established. Although he hints at the importance of this undertaking for finding a satisfactory role for the individual in contemporary society, one of the great flaws of the novel is that he fails to follow this point through. However, many of the literary techniques which made Die Aula so popular and the social attitudes it revealed reappeared to much greater effect in Christa Wolf's Nachdenken über Christa T. Because of its subtle use of style and language and very "open" form and highly reflective, introspective approach to life in the GDR, this novel represents in many ways the apotheosis of the changes in both the content and the form of socialist prose in East Germany during the 1960's. The history of the reception of the novel alone suggests that Wolf had reached hitherto undefined boundaries of socialist realism. Bearing in mind the innovations of perspective and form introduced by Ole Bienkopp and Die Aula, the final chapter examines Wolf's concern that each individual--whether author or ordinary citizen--find fulfilment in the collective.



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## Introduction

Western critics of East German literature, or socialist realism in general, now usually agree that the only valid critical approach is to attempt to judge socialist realist literature as far as possible according to its own self-proclaimed standards. As Hans Mayer wrote in 1967, it is pointless to use the criteria of bourgeois literary norms to try to understand the literature of a state whose constitution aims at the defeat of bourgeois society and the capitalist economy.<sup>1</sup> The result is most often a catalogue of the differences between bourgeois and socialist realist literature and at worst criticism devolves into polemic. Because of this, some of the earliest attempts by critics in the West to describe the literature in East Germany were severely marred (Balluseck, Rühle).<sup>2</sup>

In one of the earliest attempts to approach East German literature according to its own standards, H.P. Anderle comments on fifteen years of "Indolenz und Intoleranz" in West Germany towards the literature of the GDR.<sup>3</sup> He mentions both external reasons (the cold war of the 1950's) and suggests internal explanations, such as the "biblische Vergeltungstaktik" of East German cultural officials in not allowing their literature to be tainted by Western influences, which made it less readable for Western tastes.<sup>4</sup> However, from about 1963 onwards, this situation changed: Certain East German works seemed to appeal to a broader reading public in West Germany, and within a short time literary critics began to pay more attention to the "other" German literature, where previously their lack of knowledge and of interest

had been "erschreckend groß."<sup>5</sup> In the main, these works were novels, such as Der geteilte Himmel by Christa Wolf (1963), Spur der Steine by Erik Neutsch (1964) and Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt by Dieter Noll (1963) (which was reprinted in the magazine Stern).

In a survey of this sudden awakening of interest K.O. Conrady suggested that the major attraction of these East German works lay in their choice of theme, which was no longer the black-white conflict between ideologies, nor the song of praise to socialist achievements, but was rather conflict arising within socialist society itself, affecting figures, "die noch auf der Suche nach dem richtigen gesellschaftlichen Verhalten sind."<sup>6</sup>

The more innovative form of many of the works may also have lent them a greater appeal in the West, although by Western standards, they were still in this respect relatively conservative. However, Conrady also felt that the implications of these changes in form and particularly the introduction of the new theme were such that eventually some basic tenets of the East German hierarchy would be called in question. He noted that in 1965 and early 1966 there were already distinct signs in the GDR of political discomfort at the "schädliche Tendenzen" of modern literature.<sup>7</sup>

It might appear from this that the very aspects of the works which appealed to Western readers--more innovative style and more concern for the individual's role in society--were also the main reason for the renewed hard line which Conrady correctly foresaw. In a sense this is true, but, as Hans Mayer has also pointed out, there is no causal connection: East German writers are not concerned with either the form of their work or the theme of individual and society for the same reasons as Western writers

and it is therefore misleading to look for common ground between certain radical socialist writers and unorthodox, leftist Western writers.<sup>8</sup>

The theme of the individual and society is central to the whole method of socialist realism in that it determines both the content and the form of socialist literature. The traditional image of social relationships under socialism cannot be changed in any important respect without also changing the function of literature, which in turn would affect the role of the Party.

When Zhdanov first publicly defined socialist realism in 1934, he said that literature should convey reality "in ihrer revolutionären Entwicklung."<sup>9</sup> As a Soviet study has shown, his definition prescribes three basic functions for socialist realist literature: Firstly, it must be critical of social flaws (e.g., remnants of bourgeois ideas); secondly, it must "assert" the revolutionary truth about society; and thirdly, it must be analytical, that is, it must foreshadow the future ideal of communism.<sup>10</sup> But, as the article also admits, the necessities of the early phases tended to favour the first two criteria at the expense of the third.<sup>11</sup> In other words, in the course of criticizing unacceptable aspects of society and proclaiming the ideal, authors tended to neglect the bridge between present reality and future ideal, in effect ceding to the Party the right to determine the path towards the ideal.

Although there is no direct comparison between political conditions in the later 1930's and early 1940's in the Soviet Union and conditions in the GDR, socialist realism followed a very similar devolution, once it was introduced into East Germany in 1950-51, with far-reaching results.

After the initial period of "tactical tolerance," designed to

encourage humanist authors to settle in the Soviet Zone, socialist realism on the Soviet model was very quickly introduced in East Germany, once the division of Germany became inevitable.<sup>12</sup> Following a general declaration of principle in March 1950, the Party officially proclaimed the "Struggle against Formalism in Art and Literature" in March 1951. In this, all forms of experimentation which did not meet the conservative standards of the regime were declared taboo. American literature was specifically mentioned as being decadent because of its fondness for formal experimentation. Literature was to reflect the contemporary struggle of the regime to build a new society,<sup>13</sup> and the forms of literature were to reflect this strictly practical function: "Eine Formgebung in der Kunst, die nicht vom Inhalt des Kunstwerkes bestimmt wird, führt in die Abstraktion."<sup>14</sup> By the time socialist realism was officially proclaimed as the requisite criterion of East German literature in June 1952, most of the effective decrees had already been made. Both in form and in content, East German literature was to be essentially determined by political criteria, that is, according to the standards of the collective authority.<sup>15</sup> In this way, it was relieved of its analytical function, as far as contemporary life was concerned and was limited largely to "asserting" the Party line. Since innovative forms (such as flashbacks or "stream-of-consciousness"), which tend to emphasize variety of perspective and the individual viewpoint, were vehemently opposed, literature was forced even more into the role of reporting and affirming the officially acceptable view.

Whether because of these normative pressures or because of their background in pre-socialist times, many of the established, influential authors in the GDR did not deal with contemporary society at all during these vital formative years.<sup>16</sup> Instead, they wrote about the ideologically

safe period of the past, when loyalties were clear-cut. Similarly, those who did try to deal with more-or-less contemporary society also avoided any potential ideological quicksands, with the result that the positive characters embraced the official line and negative characters were clearly bourgeois in their attitudes.<sup>17</sup> For these reasons, only the broad outline of official policy was reflected and the perspective of the individual ("die ganze Kompliziertheit und Widersprüchlichkeit der Entwicklung literarischer Gestalten")<sup>18</sup> was scarcely represented.

Thus, in the vital period when socialist realist criteria were being established for East German literature, a pattern was set which would be very hard to break, given the autocratic nature of Ulbricht's rule: Authors might well "assert" an orthodox position, but if they were at all critical, it was not of contemporary society, only of remnants of bourgeois ideas or of the past. As for the third criterion of socialist realism, that never really gained a foothold; the literature of these formative years never seriously began to analyze the nature of the growing state or consider its future--whether for example the tensions of the German situation required a different route to be followed to the Communist utopia from that imposed by the Russians and generally upheld by the regime. Since the authors were either reluctant or unable to consider this sort of problem, there was little or no effective balance, in the field of imaginative writing, to the mythical aura of infallibility surrounding the idea of collective solidarity. Anna Seghers, for example, complained during the short "thaw" of 1956, that too many authors viewed reality only as a means of illustrating "the inevitable dogma."<sup>19</sup> Literature, and especially (as will be seen) prose, was thus overwhelmingly associated with the cause of the collective.

By 1959, at the Bitterfeld Conference, it had become clear even to the political leaders that both the form and the content of literature in the GDR was stagnating. In his closing address at the conference, Ulbricht specifically emphasized the lack of a realistic individual (but not individualistic) perspective in, for example, the "Industrieroman": "Es wird nicht gezeigt, wie die Menschen in ihrer täglichen Arbeit wachsen, wie die Arbeiter unter Führung der Partei die Aufgaben lösen, wie sich neue Beziehungen zwischen den Menschen entwickeln, wie sich der neue Mensch formt."<sup>20</sup> But, although such things can hardly be measured objectively, the direct influence of Bitterfeld seems to have been marginal.<sup>21</sup> Even the so-called "Ankunftsliteratur" which could be said to have grown indirectly from the conference, did not break the traditional pattern of affirmative literature. As the name implies, this group of stories and novels dealt with a "process of integration" in which the apparent goal was for the individual to be assimilated into the collective.<sup>22</sup> Typically, they tended to end, like the original model, Ankunft im Alltag by B. Reimann (1961), at this moment of "arrival."

The "Ankunftsliteratur" made its appearance at a time when the GDR underwent what might be called a process of consolidation. Not only the construction of the Berlin Wall, but the signs of very real economic strength which were becoming apparent at that time, helped to encourage a stronger sense of national identity.<sup>23</sup> The authors whose works tend to reflect this atmosphere were for the most part of a different generation from the pre-Bitterfeld writers. Reimann, Christa Wolf and K.-H. Jakobs and others were to a great extent products of the system, which in itself may have given them a greater degree of freedom. They were less concerned with real or imagined external threats than with the actual

reality of life within the GDR, therefore the theme of ideological conflict (upholding the idea of collective solidarity against outside influences) tends to become less important in their work than that of achieving an individual commitment. Hence, for example, as Bilke points out, West Germany now takes on a largely emblematical role in their work.<sup>24</sup> To the extent that they do deal primarily with the lives and concerns of individuals within the GDR, these works are more realistic than their predecessors. But to the extent that they emphasize the primacy of the collective over individual concerns, they remain in the tradition of the earlier "affirmative" literature of the 1950's.

Possibly because the Berlin Wall made the question superfluous, but possibly also because the new generation of writers considered themselves East German rather than simply Germans of one particular ideology, the question of reaching a commitment to the collective state was soon superseded by a more realistic problem--namely the nature or quality of that commitment. It is at this point that the potentially disruptive progression foreseen by Conrad begins: Having been accustomed to seeing their own society represented as "white," by comparison with the "black" bourgeois, Western alternative, East German authors began to consider various shades within the white spectrum. Clearly the mere fact of "arriving" in or accepting the principle of socialist society did not remove all social distinctions. The problem of how to represent these distinctions without questioning the principle of collectivity became increasingly acute, not only for literary theoreticians but also for politicians, who must obviously have been aware of the implications. On the one hand, the politicians would bemoan the apparent inability of authors to handle the question of the individual "der seine unwiderrufliche Ent-



scheidung für den Sozialismus längst getroffen hat," as Ulbricht did, even in 1967.<sup>25</sup> But on the other, the reception accorded those few works which did take the risk, was evidence that the line between acceptance and disapproval was very fine indeed. The "leidenschaftliche Auseinandersetzungen" which broke out over Wolf's Der geteilte Himmel and Strittmatter's Ole Bienkopp in 1963-64 were always more political than literary.<sup>26</sup>

Between these two positions, the literary theoreticians attempted to construct various bridges, aimed at showing the common cause underlying the tension between individual goals (and their expression in literature) and collective. The weakness of these arguments usually occurs over who shall have the right to determine the common goal--i.e., the Communist ideal. Thus, in an article on Kant's Die Aula, A. Hiersche makes a careful distinction between everyday, circumstantial reality and the "großen gesellschaftlichen Gesetzmäßigkeiten" which underlie it. He says that, as far as the individual is concerned, the everyday, often temporarily, may overshadow the historical reality, but the artist must possess the ability "über die Umstände zu dem Kausalkomplex vorzudringen."<sup>27</sup> He therefore, obliquely, criticizes Kant, as Christa Wolf was later to be criticized too, for avoiding the overall social perspective ("das Gesamtgesellschaftliche").<sup>28</sup> It appears that where authors such as these attempt to consider reality from the point of view of one who has "arrived" and who is trying to claim a "right to a worthy place in everyday socialist life" they will be criticized for disregarding the collective viewpoint.<sup>29</sup>

To review this situation in terms of the original three basic functions of socialist realism: It seems that during the 1960's certain authors began to escape from the deadening legacy of the "assertive" or affirmative principle, which had been so firmly established in the 1950's.

Beginning with the "Ankunftsliteratur" their work came closer to the day to day reality of life in the GDR. This was true not only of the choice of theme and subject matter but also of the language they used: Novels such as Beschreibung eines Sommers by K.-H. Jakobs or, to a slightly lesser degree, Ankunft im Alltag itself, contain some very forceful colloquial language. The perspective is not any more solely that of the collective, even if, in the "Ankunftsliteratur," the ideal is a collective one; thus the doubts and scepticism of a protagonist like Tom Breitsprecher (Beschreibung eines Sommers) can be expressed in a very personal, robust fashion; in this way, when he is eventually converted to the collective cause, there is a greater ring of truth. Because of this kind of shift in perspective, the works of the 1960's virtually introduced into East German socialist realism, for the first time, the missing, analytical element (with the relegation of the theme of ideological conflict to a historical role, the critical element had now outlived its usefulness). But at this point the authors begin to impinge on what had become the traditional, unchallengeable authority of the collective (the Party).

It has been said that the principal weakness of East German literature has been its inability to bridge the gap between present reality and future ideal, to create what seemed to be implicit in the original descriptions of socialist realism, namely "ein produktives Spannungsverhältnis zwischen erreichter sozialistischer Wirklichkeit und sozialistischen Wunsch- und Zielvorstellungen."<sup>30</sup> While this is clearly an overstatement, since several works in the 1960's do take up the conflict between individual perspective and social ideal, it is obvious that the Party and orthodox theoreticians have continued to play down the importance of this gulf, as if there is no division of any lasting or real significance

between reality as the individual perceives it and the ideal as history (with the aid of the Party) will bring it about: "Die sozialistische Entwicklung löst nicht automatisch jeden Widerspruch zwischen Individuum und Gesellschaft. Unsere sozialistische Gesellschaft bietet aber die objektive Möglichkeit, diese Widersprüche in historischer Progression zu lösen. Es ist der gesellschaftliche Auftrag des Schriftstellers, Einsicht in diesen Entwicklungsprozess zu gewinnen und so mit seinem künstlerischen Werk zur schöpferisch-produktiven Veränderung der Gesellschaft beizutragen."<sup>31</sup>

On the other side of the coin, the more progressive critics, like the authors themselves apparently, tend to place greater importance on the present reality, rather than pointing to the primacy of the future ideal. H. Redeker, for example, speaks of the importance of the conflict between individual and community ("Gemeinschaft") for the literature of socialist realism, that is, not the clash between individual and collective goals, but the immediate difficulties of adapting to society.<sup>32</sup> As an example of how this theme was enriched during the 1960's, he points specifically to Ole Bienkopp by E. Strittmatter because it goes beyond the point of "arrival" ("Ankunft") to show the individual's basic need to take part in and fulfil himself in the community ("sich als schöpferisches Mitglied der Gemeinschaft fortschreitend zu betätigen und zu bestätigen.");<sup>33</sup> and he also cites H. Kant's Die Aula because of the way it shows individuals finding their way more and more in society, as man is gradually growing towards greater self-determination.<sup>34</sup> Redeker concludes this article by re-iterating his argument that the relationship between individual and society determines both the form and the function of socialist realist literature; but he specifically states that it is the present nature of that relationship, not its ultimate goal, which is important: "...das

Verhältnis von Individuum und Gemeinschaft in der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit [bestimmt] die Literatur ebenso in ihrem spezifischen Wesen und ihrer sozialen Funktion, wie es Gegenstand und Thema der Werke ist."<sup>35</sup>

Unlike his more orthodox colleagues and the political critics, Redeker is more concerned with the actual life in the GDR than with the future ideal; for this reason, he describes the new emphasis on how individuals actually do adapt to society as potentially very influential for the development of socialist realism: "Hier werden literarische Entwicklungslinien sichtbar, die in gewisser Weise zukunftsbestimmend sein können."<sup>36</sup>

The reasons for choosing the topic of the individual and the collective for this study are essentially twofold and are derived from the dual nature of socialist realism itself, the political and the aesthetic: Firstly, because East Germany, as a socialist state, has traditionally perceived itself as a transitional stage between the rank individualism of bourgeois ethics and the collective utopia of Communism, and has assigned to literature the role of both reflecting and hastening this process of transition,<sup>37</sup> the theme of how the individual adapts to society, and vice versa, touches on the central idea underlying both the state and its literature. Secondly, the future of literature in the GDR depends to a very great extent on how the apparent conflict is resolved which led to the stagnation of the late 1950's and the obvious tension between individual and collective which seems to be inherent in socialist realism: Johannes R. Becher himself pointed out that a work of art derives from, and largely appeals to, the individual in man; he spoke of the "trinity" of individual personalities evoked by art--the author, the characters, and through them, the individual reader.<sup>38</sup> But socialist realist art is judged to be good (effective) only to the extent to which it has a collective influence.

There is therefore a potentially destructive conflict of interest between the aesthetic, individualistic, aspect of socialist art and the political, collective role it is supposed to perform. As long as the state insists upon a normative, collective art, devoid of individuality in form or content, as was almost the case in the 1950's, the artistic quality will inevitably suffer. But equally, when artists attempt to introduce the individual perspective, as they did in the 1960's, they run the risk of questioning not only literary priorities but social ones too. The question of the relationship between the individual and the collective therefore raises fundamental points about the nature of East German society and the actual as well as the potential role of literature there, as well as being the single most important theme of the literature itself.<sup>39</sup>

The works to be considered in this study were written during a relatively short period (ca. 1962-68) but they were selected because it was then that this central importance of the relationship of individual and collective for both the political role and the aesthetic quality of socialist realism became most evident. At that point, literature in the GDR first began to evolve a specifically East German note, as opposed to reflecting Soviet Russian standards, evolved under very different social conditions.<sup>40</sup> Because of the works which appeared during the 1960's and because of the critical and political response to them, it became possible to recognize a distinctive emphasis in the theory and practice of literature in East Germany; and much of this process of self-definition took place in the course of debate over the literary picture of man in society, or the so-called socialist image of man ("das sozialistische Menschenbild").

H.-J. Geerdts pointed out in introducing a volume of East German monographs to a Western audience, that the term "Menschenbild" which became

so popular in the 1960's "very aptly" represents the relationship between reality and its artistic reflection, which he says explains its sudden vogue.<sup>41</sup> The reason it is so apt, according to him, is that it refers both to the image of mankind as a whole and to the image of the individual man. But the terms used to describe this dual function betray some interesting assumptions. Geerdts writes: "Literarisches Menschenbild--das meint den ästhetischen Ausdruck der im einzelnen Werk, in der Literaturbewegung objektiv erscheinenden Ansicht vom Menschen, seiner geschichtlichen Lage, seiner Perspektive, meint über den künstlerisch-ethischen Entwurf einer individuellen Persönlichkeit hinaus deren menschheitliche Repräsentanz."<sup>42</sup> In this definition, Geerdts, automatically it seems, correlates the individual work with the general "literary" movement--i.e., a work is considered in this context largely only as part of a general body of literature; secondly, the individual figures created by an author are considered significant only as representatives of general human qualities. The emphasis is obvious: The individual work or character is considered important in the eyes of a leading critic such as Geerdts (examples from other critics are legion) primarily only insofar as they represent general qualities. But, as Trommler has pointed out, this does not mean the orthodox critics, or Party officials, were intent on preventing the rise of individuality in the literature of the 1960's--on the contrary, they tended to see the increasing individual content of literature as a means of relating individual concerns even more closely to the ideals of socialism: "Die Partei suchte das Individuelle als Träger der 'poetischen Gestalt' des Zeitalters zu erhöhen."<sup>43</sup> The most recent and most thorough work on the theory of socialist realism bears this out, by continuing to insist that individuality is only important insofar as it reveals how

society conditions individual behaviour: [By probing more deeply into the inner workings of the individual, partisan socialist art will confront] "neue Aspekte der gesellschaftlichen und klassenmäßigen Bedingtheit individuellen Verhaltens, Denkens und Empfindens."<sup>44</sup> Official definitions of socialist realism persistently contain the same implications as Geerds makes, namely that the norm is the collective, the individual must therefore always submit to the group: "Das Einordnen der Einzelercheinungen in größere Zusammenhänge [ist] Voraussetzung für jede künstlerische Lösung."<sup>45</sup>

Superficially, the orthodox position may not appear to have changed much since the priority of collective over individual was firmly established in the 1950's. From the point of view of the theory of socialist art, the main difference seems only to be one of degree; there is more acceptance of individuality in style or characterization, apparently, as long as the principle of collective authority is upheld. One reason for selecting works from the 1960's therefore is to examine the change in the view of individual and collective as the works themselves show it. The interest shown in these works outside the GDR and the very lively debates within the country suggest that the actual works of socialist art at that time were not as conservative as the theory seems to imply.

The reason for selecting three novels, as opposed to dramas or verse, is that prose has traditionally been more concerned with the broad social questions than the other genres. As was the case in the Soviet Union,<sup>46</sup> in East Germany too this led to theories of socialist realist art being directed first and foremost at prose literature. The more general appeal, the greater scope for character development and social comment and also the didactic tradition of realist prose all tended to

make it more susceptible to intervention than other more private or esoteric art forms. In a retrospective review of the situation in the GDR in the 1950's, Demetz wrote: "The novel . . . has been the prime target of official censorship and supervision and as a consequence has suffered most."<sup>47</sup> But, perhaps for the very reasons that attracted political attention in the first place, the novel was also the genre which substantially ended the deadening, affirmative, "assertive," tradition established in the 1950's. Rather than being aligned with the collective authority, echoing safe political views, writers of prose (the "Ankunftsliteratur") began to reflect an individual perspective and so establish a link with the reader as an individual: "In der Befolgung des 'Bitterfelder Weges' wird der Roman in der DDR zum geistigen Mittel der Kommunikation zwischen Autor und Leser . . . wie auch zwischen Individuum und Gesellschaft."<sup>48</sup> Seen from this perspective, as a private dialogue, the new prose works clearly threatened to undermine the official position, making prose into a potential source of resistance to collective authority, unless the official stand could somehow be adapted to accept the sudden, spontaneous flood of more individualistic prose.

In addition to the choice of prose, as the most sensitive weather-vane for the state of socialist realism in the GDR, one other factor guided the specific choice of works for this study: that is the fact that they all contain elements of the "Entwicklungsroman." Not only does this seem to create a link between modern socialist art and a specifically German tradition of the novel, but it is frequently pointed out that this kind of novel is also linked to the beginnings of socialist realist literature per se, and not only in East Germany: the Soviet author "Abram Tertz" (Andrei Sinyavsky?) for instance is very critical of the purposefulness



of Soviet art, which, he says, led among other things to the typical, psychological "'educational novel,' which shows the Communist metamorphosis of individuals and communities . . . [and aims at] producing the ideal man of the future."<sup>49</sup> The East German critic H.-J. Geerdts has also suggested that, apart from this inherent tendency of socialist prose, the "Entwicklungsroman" was well-suited to reflect the specific conditions in East Germany after 1945;<sup>50</sup> but he also says that it did have limitations as far as the subject of the early building of the GDR was concerned, which would bear further examination.

However, it is not the intention in this study to compare the theory and East German practice of the genre. The reason for raising the subject of the "Entwicklungsroman," and one of the reasons for choosing the three novels to be examined here, is that they all bear strong similarities to that species of novel: Ole Bienkopp, Die Aula and Nachdenken über Christa T. all involve a central character who is in some way an outsider and whose life often reflects the evolution of society, and all follow the efforts of this character to fulfil a satisfying social role. In this respect they reflect both the local tradition of East Germany,<sup>51</sup> and what Tertz and others have called the overweening urge of socialist realist theoreticians to follow the "classical" tradition.<sup>52</sup> But the appearance is deceptive; like many other novels of the 1960's, they seem to take up the tradition only to break with it. Both Bienkopp and Christa T. for example die prematurely, without finding a satisfactory role in society. The death of Bienkopp in particular, which leaves the novel with an "open" form,<sup>53</sup> provoking, rather than answering questions, contradicts the tendency among orthodox socialist realists for the "closed" form. They evidently prefer this form because it draws the individual

into the all-encompassing fold of an ordered universe:

In der Literatur geht der ästhetische Reiz vor allem von der einheitlichen, abgerundeten Geschichte aus, die ihrerseits von einer in sich geschlossenen Fabel mit erkennbarem Anfang und Ende getragen wird. . . . Nur die Wahl einer vollen, runden Geschichte ergibt die Möglichkeit, die Wechselwirkung zwischen Individuum und Gruppe einerseits und den gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen andererseits einleuchtend und überzeugend in der Kausal-Kette Ursache-Wirkung-Ursache darzustellen.<sup>54</sup>

Despite quite significant differences of style and approach, the three novels in this study do share a common general purpose. The extent to which they adopt an established East German form of the novel (the "Entwicklungsroman," linking the personal development of the individual with the historical development of society) reflects their roots in the national tradition and its desire to follow the classical, humanist tradition. But each, in a decisive characteristic way, also breaks with tradition, by "opening" the form of the novel, introducing a different, more analytical approach to the central problem of individual and society.

Thus, although the three works involved here were among those which first brought, then sustained and then increased, Western interest in East German literature, they were not selected because of any supposedly "Western" elements they might contain. They were all written for East German readers and any appeal beyond that must be considered incidental, although it might imply that they have a certain general aesthetic appeal. Ole Bienkopp and Die Aula were chosen because, after an initial period of official adjustment, they have now become classics of socialist realism, to be counted among the relatively few works, such as Claudius' Menschen an unserer Seite (1951), which are said to epitomize a particular stage in the evolution of East German literature. The nature of that contribution will be assessed in part by looking at the critical reception they met in

their own country but principally by measuring them against the most reliable yardstick of socialist art, the question of the relationship between individual and collective. This will involve assessing both how the various authors treat it as a theme, and how the work itself, as the individual statement of an author, contributes to the development of the socialist realist (collective) approach to art.

Nachdenken über Christa T. cannot be considered in quite the same vein, since, although it received great critical acclaim in the West and has apparently gone into two editions in East Germany,<sup>55</sup> it has never been accepted among orthodox critics there. It is rarely mentioned in theoretical articles, unless negatively, and is not mentioned at all in the recent exhaustive analysis of socialist realist theory published in the GDR.<sup>56</sup> It was rather chosen partly because of Christa Wolf's unique background in the literary apparatus of the GDR which enabled her to rise to a high position of respect as a critic and author, until in 1967 she resisted a new "freeze" and then produced in 1968 an important essay and her controversial novel, at which point the official blessing was rapidly withdrawn. In this novel Wolf deals with questions which go right to the heart of the debate over individual and collective and typically she does it in a form which is more radically "open" than any previous work. The other, and more important, reason for choosing to examine her novel is therefore that she seems to crystallize those tendencies which began in the wake of Bitterfeld and the "Ankunftsliteratur." As Conrady had suggested, these tendencies ultimately concerned the basic priorities of both literature and the East German state. In a sense, Wolf's novel seems to represent a culmination, and the effect of the official reaction to it seems to have been to halt, at least temporarily, the very rapid develop-

ments which took place in the 1960's.

The three works do not bear any obvious direct relationship, in the sense of having influenced each other; and they deliberately represent very different facets of East German society, in order to emphasize how broad and spontaneous the developments of the 1960's were. They range in general from the forthright peasant novel of Strittmatter, to the more intellectual, subtle virtuosity of Kant, and finally to the very complex, elusive and allusive style of Christa Wolf. But they all are concerned above all with the still unanswered and therefore still pressing problem of how to reconcile the individual contribution to the collective purpose.

# I. Erwin Strittmatter: Ole Bienkopp

## a. Strittmatter and the GDR

Few East German authors have been as closely identified with the official line on Kulturpolitik in the GDR as Erwin Strittmatter. Yet he was thirty-five years old before he joined the S.E.D. in 1947, and has himself called what writing he did before that time politically confused.<sup>57</sup> Unlike other worker-writers such as Bredel or Marchwitz, he did not learn his art in the turmoils of the 1920's and 1930's, but in the years after the Second World War, under very different political conditions. This led Brecht to make his often quoted and suitably ambivalent statement that without the existence of the GDR it was virtually unthinkable that Strittmatter should be an author:

Erwin Strittmatter gehört zu den neuen Schriftstellern, die nicht aus dem Proletariat aufstiegen, sondern mit dem Proletariat. . . . Ohne die Deutsche Demokratische Republik wäre er nicht nur nicht der Schriftsteller geworden, der er ist, sondern vermutlich überhaupt kein Schriftsteller.<sup>58</sup>

Strittmatter himself has always freely acknowledged his debt to "Marxism and to our Republic."<sup>59</sup> And, in terms of the official approbation and prestige he has received, that debt is considerable: In addition to his many national literary prizes, he became in 1959 nominal leader of all East German writers as President of the Schriftstellerverband. Because of this rapid rise from relative obscurity to the pinnacle of the East German literary establishment, one Western critic has dubbed Stritt-

matter the "Prototyp des von der Partei geförderten Arbeiterschriftstellers."<sup>60</sup>

From an ideological standpoint, Strittmatter's life seems to have followed an almost ideal course, from rural proletarian beginnings to political involvement and social activism. After a chequered, and apparently apolitical career, working as a baker, waiter, agricultural labourer and fur-farm worker,<sup>61</sup> he became involved in various ways in the agrarian reforms carried out in the Soviet Zone of Occupation, and so with politics. As the "Amtsvorsteher" for seven small communities, he was responsible at the local level for the practical application of new policies, such as the cooperative farming system and crop quotas, persuading the traditionally conservative farmers that the new methods were in the best interest of all. At the same time he was a "Volkskorrespondent," reporting for Party newspapers, and later became editor of the Märkische Volksstimme.<sup>62</sup> Here too, he would be expected to publicize, but also to observe, the effects of the early phases of the Socialist agrarian reforms.

Strittmatter's involvement in these reforms was not limited to observing and administering, since he was himself increasingly involved in farming at the practical level, beginning when he received an allotment of land as a result of the break-up of all estates over 100 hectares in 1945. He was an early and enthusiastic supporter of collectivization, when that policy was introduced in 1952 and became president of his local collective for a time. Even now, after becoming a doyen among East German authors, he is still active in the collective in his home village of Dollgow, as a pony-breeder.<sup>63</sup> He views his long association with collective farming with considerable pride, especially the fact that he worked from

the outset to implement what at first had been an unpopular policy: "In einer Zeit, da die jungen Genossenschaften noch manchen Schwierigkeiten und Anfeindungen ausgesetzt waren, . . . packte ich zu und versuchte zu helfen, wenn die Genossenschaftsbewegung ins Stocken geriet."<sup>64</sup>

From a purely practical point of view, Strittmatter thus obviously possessed both a thorough acquaintance with rural life and the effects of the agrarian reforms on rural society and a high degree of political conviction, which, when he began to write about the GDR, determined respectively his choice of setting and theme.

As an author, Strittmatter first became known to a wide audience in 1954, although he had previously published one novel, Der Ochsenkutscher, in 1950 and some short stories, Eine Mauer fällt (1953). His reputation was given a considerable boost when Brecht began collaborating with him in 1953 on his first drama, Katzgraben.<sup>65</sup> For this and the novel Tinko (1954), Strittmatter was awarded the National Prize for Art and Literature in 1953 and 1955. He was later elected a member of the Akademie der Künste as a further sign of official recognition.

Strittmatter's involvement in the political aspects of East German cultural life began in earnest in the aftermath of the so-called "thaw" of 1955-56. When the Party started to reassert its authority in cultural matters, at the cultural conference held by the Central Committee in October 1957, the Party spokesman, Alexander Abusch, took the traditional position that the Party was the sole representative of the collective socialist consciousness of the people and that therefore an author could only incorporate this consciousness in his work, "wenn er ein allezeit ergebener, selbstloser, opferbereiter Kämpfer im großen Kollektiv unserer Partei ist."<sup>66</sup>

In the following year the Schriftstellerverband held a theoretical conference at which the Party's new, firm stand was to be consolidated among the writers themselves. At this conference, Strittmatter clearly and unequivocally aligned himself with the Party's position: He felt it necessary to respond to the accusation that he was a Party hack, insisting that he only wrote about the problems people wanted to read about, "Und nun kommt das Verrückte: Das, was ich da aufgreife, ist merkwürdigerweise immer das, was die Partei von mir will."<sup>67</sup> Therefore, he argued, the Party's claim to be sole arbiter of the popular will, and hence also of cultural policy, must be justified. One year later, in his new capacity as President of the Schriftstellerverband, Strittmatter used more official terminology to tell his fellow writers that the only way to write well was to follow the Party's leadership: ". . . die Hilfe der Partei in Anspruch nehmen, . . . uns von ihrer kollektiven Weisheit den Weg weisen lassen."<sup>68</sup>

In 1959, the year of the First Bitterfeld Conference, Strittmatter, as President of the Schriftstellerverband, was the epitome of the type of writer that conference was intended to foster. As a "schreibender Arbeiter" he had written popular works about workers and peasants; he was openly committed to the Party's role in cultural affairs and, far from losing contact with his working class origins, he had lived and worked for years on a collective farm, that is, at one of the "Brennpunkten des neuen Lebens," as Ulbricht at Bitterfeld recommended all serious artists should do.<sup>69</sup>

Very clearly, at this high point in his public life, Strittmatter was strongly committed to the principle of collective rule. And in his private life too, as a farmer, he actively supported the same principle. But at the same time, he had already in 1958 begun work on what was to be-



come his best-known, but most controversial work, which for many months after its publication in 1963 was to cause an unprecedented "Flut von Auseinandersetzungen und Meinungsverschiedenheiten."<sup>70</sup>

As an author who had enjoyed both considerable popular success and the favour of the regime, and as a former President of the Schriftstellerverband (he resigned that position in 1961, for personal reasons), Strittmatter was potentially one of the most influential writers in the GDR during the early 1960's. Thus, the publication of a major new novel, particularly one which dealt with the recent past, was an event of considerable importance, and when Ole Bienkopp proved to be politically controversial as well, it could not simply be dismissed as the iconoclastic work of a novice in the literary order, but required a definite response on the part of the arbiters of literary orthodoxy.

An early measure of the importance attached to Strittmatter's novel may be seen in the fact that the plenary meeting of the Schriftstellerverband in 1963 became virtually a forum for discussion of Ole Bienkopp. There, and in the ensuing debate in print, the discussion involved not only authors and critics, but theoreticians, such as Hans Koch, and politicians, such as Alexander Abusch.<sup>71</sup>

From the very outset, the controversy over Ole Bienkopp involved basic questions of theory, so that at times the debate appeared more political than aesthetic. This led one Western critic to comment that, to judge by the level of the response to his novel, Strittmatter might have held "eine unbequeme Rede auf einem Bauernkongreß."<sup>72</sup> But since by definition the ultimate purpose of socialist realist literature is political, any theoretical discussion is bound to be political, at least in part. And the discussion was indeed very basic, involving the definitions of

realism itself and of what is "typical" in the Socialist Realist meaning of the word: "Gestritten wird vor allem darum, ob Strittmatters Darstellung der Wirklichkeit gerecht wird und ob und wie weit seine Helden und ihr Schicksal typisch sind."<sup>73</sup> The specific causes of the debate were Strittmatter's hero Bienkopp, who, as the nickname suggests, has a stubbornly independent nature, and the local Party officials, who represent the central authority of the State. The discussion arose over the relative significance of the individual and the collective presented through these characters.

b. The individualist and the collective society: Bienkopp and the Party

The year 1963, in which Ole Bienkopp was published, was for many reasons a critical year in the political and social development of the GDR. The building of the Wall and the completion of the collectivization of agriculture and industry had permitted the regime to take a more liberal approach. In January 1963 Ulbricht began to encourage the "younger, pragmatically-minded generation of party cadres" against the old-line dogmatists;<sup>74</sup> and in the same year, the GDR was the "first . . . and most consistent" Soviet Bloc country to introduce the new economic system, based on the ideas of the Russian economist Libermann. This system retains the idea of a centrally planned economy, but by its controlled use of the profit motive gives "wider scope for initiative on the part of industrial concerns, of those who work in them, and of society as a whole, the aim being to achieve a permanent balance between government policy and social requirements."<sup>75</sup> Such symptoms at the political level of a more liberal approach also had a noticeable effect socially: ". . . everyone--writers, scientists, white collar employees, workers, those who are for and those

who are against the regime--all look spellbound to the new economic policy. Some hope for more liberalization or, rather, less dogmatization from it; others hope their regime will thereby become more efficient and hence more popular."<sup>76</sup>

Culturally, however, the situation was much more complex and contradictory. On the one hand there were signs of a greater tolerance for dissenting views: In June 1963 Wolf Biermann was allowed, after an enforced silence of two years, to perform his iconoclastic ballads. And in October of that year, Robert Havemann began his famous series of public lectures on philosophy and science, in which he argued a priori the case for a more liberal, democratic form of Socialism: ". . . wenn alle Mitglieder der Gesellschaft . . . ihr Handeln vollständig nach den gesellschaftlichen Interessen richten würden, dann würde das geradezu das Ende der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung bedeuten."<sup>77</sup>

But on the other hand, East Germany, possibly because of its peculiar position as part of an ideologically divided nation, was still intellectually the least liberal of the Eastern bloc countries. In March 1963 for example, Ulbricht was severely critical of the more liberal approach then being taken in the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> Even the few signs of a relaxation in cultural affairs in the GDR were not always as liberal as they seemed. Although Biermann was allowed to perform in public, his candidacy for Party membership was revoked;<sup>79</sup> and the debate in print over Havemann's lectures was abruptly stopped after the first of his two lectures on freedom in the Socialist society.<sup>80</sup>

The publication of Ole Bienkopp thus came at a time when the issue of individual freedoms within the collective society was a matter of considerable public debate, with some indication of a more liberal po-

litical and social atmosphere, but a less clearly defined official approach towards intellectual and cultural freedom of expression.

Both Biermann and Havemann took advantage of the signs of greater liberality to put forward a direct argument in favour of increased individual freedoms on social or political grounds. For example in the "Ballad of Fredi Rohsmeisl" (1962) Biermann criticized the petty and arbitrary authority of local officials which alienates otherwise committed citizens; and in the "Ballad of the Man" (1963) he ridiculed the Party which, in the zeal to remove dissidents, crippled itself.<sup>81</sup> Havemann was similarly critical of "certain people in authority" who try to enforce one mechanistic interpretation of the course of social development over all others and so eradicate the creative tension between individual and society, which in his view alone keeps society evolving.<sup>82</sup>

Strittmatter has said that in writing Ole Bienkopp, which also deals with the question of individual initiative versus collective authority, he had no idea of forcing the issue, he simply wanted to raise a central question which he believes will be solved "in time":

Meine Frage war: Wie bringen wir in unserer Gesellschaft den Neuerer, den Vorwärtsdränger, gut unter, so daß wir ihm nicht seinen Tatendrang beschneiden, aber auch so, daß wir ihn nicht nach der anarchistischen Seite ausscheren lassen.<sup>83</sup>

According to this, he was not out to question the sovereign power of the collective, as Biermann and Havemann were to be accused of doing, but he does imply, like them, that individual and collective interests may not, or even should not, be identical, when he suggests that the innovative, progressive individual should not be inhibited from making his contribution to society. D. Schlenstedt has shown that this was in itself a major innovation in East German literature. Previously, the emphasis had been on

the need for collective solidarity, which, in literature at least, had created the impression that the individual in the GDR was to become totally "assimilated" into the collective.<sup>84</sup>

Despite the rather tentative, conservative tone of his "question" in comparison with the outspoken criticism of others at the time, Strittmatter's theme, and particularly his choice of hero, were potentially very provocative. The term "Neuerer" is usually associated with the Stakhanovite hero of labour of the 1950's, who was exemplified in literature by the figure of Hans Aehre in Eduard Claudius' Menschen an unserer Seite (1951) and its many imitations. But as Strittmatter uses it here, he clearly means the individual who is innovative in the social sense, one who does not accept the status quo but has somewhat unconventional, possibly unorthodox, ideas, which, if frustrated absolutely, might lead to anarchy.

Ole Bienkopp is divided into two distinct parts, which cover respectively Bienkopp's life up to 1949 and the period from then until his death in 1958 or 1959. But Bienkopp is not at all the Socialist "Vorwärtsdränger" from the beginning--like his creator, he does not even become a Party member until after the War. In Part I Strittmatter describes the background reasons why Bienkopp should become a social pioneer under Socialism after spending the majority of his life politically uncommitted. Part II then concentrates on his struggle to introduce his individual ideas of reform into a collective, centralized society. Not surprisingly, the majority of the East German criticism of the novel has tended to dwell on this second part, since it deals with the more contemporary issue of the nature of the Socialist state itself. However, it is in Part I, in describing Bienkopp's youth and earlier adulthood, that Strittmatter sets

out the major points of his argument on the role of the individual in society. In keeping with the dialectics of the Marxist philosophy of history, Bienkopp's experiences in the capitalist society largely determine his attitudes towards Socialism.

There are many symbolic elements in the description of Bienkopp's early life, implying that, although he is an individualist, as his nickname implies, he is in many respects also representative of the individual per se. His most obvious characteristic is a naive and stubborn faith in his own instinct, which is tempered only by experience. He is cast as an innocent who learns laboriously from the experience of life, nature and society. As a child, Bienkopp learns from Nature, for example that flying is not a natural human ability (31). Characteristically, he prefers the forest to the book-learning of school (32). Gradually, society, in the form of the local baron, encroaches on his life: he learns that nature is "owned" by men, who guard their property jealously (32). But Bienkopp is also a dreamer with ideas that do not necessarily fit into the regulated order of a hierarchical society. In his youth, he escapes the "harte Waldarbeit und das Racksen um die kleinen Dinge des väterlichen Anwesens" (34) by keeping bees in his spare time; but his petit-bourgeois father tries to prevent it, fearing public ridicule (35). In the incident which earns Bienkopp his nickname, for carrying a wild swarm through the village, his father tries to chasten his son into obedience by having him dismissed from his job, on the grounds that the baron cannot risk the ridicule from having employees "die Bienen im und am Kopfe trügen" (36). Bienkopp lives up to his nickname by retreating to the woods in defiance, to live off his bees.

This marks the first phase in Bienkopp's development. At this

point, he has learnt that it is impossible to retain the freedom to pursue his own instincts--which Strittmatter is at pains to identify as natural instincts, in the sense of man close to nature--unless he removes himself from the restrictions imposed by society. The society he flees is represented as materialistic, conformist and rigidly hierarchical. Those who conform to its values are exploited by those above them in the hierarchy and will in turn exploit others: The baron has virtual control of his workers and their families, and is able, for example, to have Bienkopp and a friend released permanently from school at the age of twelve to supplement his labour force (33). Even Bienkopp's father exploits him, by expecting him, as the future "heir" to give his meagre earnings and spare time to building up the family smallholding (34).

Nevertheless, although, for the time being, Bienkopp finds some freedom and is able to live off the bees for several years, Strittmatter points out that his solution is far from ideal. As an individual, he has found a means of pursuing his personal goal and evolved a philosophy to match--"Selbst ist der Mann" (38). But his Communist friend Anton Dürr insists he is deceiving himself; although he claims to have fled society, he has adopted its values, as a "Bienenbesitzer," and is dependent on its markets for his livelihood (36f). Tacitly, he is still upholding what he claims to be rejecting. Before he can make the transition from social outcast to social pioneer ("Neuerer"), he must recognize this anomaly, but through his own experience, not by outside persuasion. Strittmatter obviously believes strongly in self-made, "natural" decisions, not ready-made, imposed dogma. When it does come, apparently Bienkopp's attachment to socialism is to be instinctive and emotional, not intellectual and rational. At this stage therefore he rejects Dürr's criticism and call

for mass social revolution and, to judge by the success of his chosen way of life, is apparently justified: ". . . es sah so aus, als ob das Leben Bienkopp und nicht dem kleinen Dürr recht geben sollte" (38).

Strittmatter makes a point of emphasizing that Bienkopp's first meeting with his future wife in the summer of 1932 marks the beginning of the transition: "Da trat etwas ein, was Oles ferneres Leben bestimmen sollte: Es traf ihn ein Blick der Fischerstochter" (38). The crucial events of the next twelve or thirteen years are then condensed into a chain of loosely connected incidents described over only fifteen pages. This has the effect of emphasizing the particular influence of Anngret Anken on Bienkopp's life and at the same time Strittmatter implies that there is a certain historical significance in his hero's development, through the association of those events in Bienkopp's life with historical events in Germany.

The two major influences on Bienkopp's life during these decisive years are Dürr, the idealistic Communist, and Anngret. They represent polar extremes and, as they exert their respective influences on Bienkopp, he begins to define his priorities more precisely, until finally he is shaken from his complacent, asocial position and convinced of the need for social reform.

At first, as has been seen, Bienkopp rejects Dürr's political doomsaying; he therefore also rejects his warning about Anngret, preferring to trust the validity of his instincts in this instance too. After a wild courtship in the last months of 1932, Bienkopp and Anngret marry early in 1933, shortly before the "Gedröhn von Pauken und Trommeln" spreads across Germany. As this ominous coincidence suggests, Anngret's influence on Bienkopp's life is to correspond broadly to the effect of the Nazi ex-



perience on German history, as the East Germans view it. The fact that Annegret is not a Nazi but a capitalist is not decisive. Strittmatter evidently shares the interpretation of Marxist historians that Nazism was not a unique political phenomenon, but a German form of imperialism, which is capitalism in its most extreme form, and therefore, according to the dialectical view of history, the prelude to a new phase of historical development.<sup>85</sup> Strittmatter implies that Nazism is only an intensification of the existing capitalist social structure, firstly, by indicating that the Nazi sympathizers in Bienkopp's village are the same men who dominated the village hierarchy before Nazism (44), and secondly, by not mentioning Nazism specifically anywhere in the novel, except by oblique references to the trappings of the movement--such as marching boots or the "Wessellied" (47, 42). Hence, Annegret's entry into Bienkopp's life signifies only that certain influences which were already inherent in his life are now to be intensified.

Annegret's insidious influence increases in direct proportion to the decrease in Dürr's influence over Bienkopp: When Dürr is forced into hiding by the Nazi accession to power, Bienkopp is bitterly disappointed at his friend's lack of trust in not forewarning him; he turns to his wife for consolation, but Annegret, who is said to have "invisible goals" of her own, tries to blackmail Bienkopp into seeking regular work (63f). Her efforts are reinforced by Bienkopp's father and by the baron, who has noticed Bienkopp's financial success as a beekeeper and demands payment for the use of his waste land (44f). In these various ways the pressures for Bienkopp to conform to the social norm suddenly increase. But the cost of this conformity would be to join the Nazi "Front der Arbeit" as a condition of employment. At this point, the countervailing influence on

Bienkopp's life, Dürr, still makes itself felt: Bienkopp refuses to take back his old job, apparently because a "word or two" from Dürr had taken root after all (45). However, eventually the pressures do become irresistible and Bienkopp, who had been on the verge of taking back his job, once the condition of having to join the "Arbeiterfront" is removed, succumbs to the general war-fever: "Bis an die Schwelle des Krieges reichten Anton Dürres Belehrungen, die in Bienkopp geblieben waren, nicht" (47).

It is a further maxim of the Marxist philosophy of history that capitalism, in its extreme, imperialist form, necessarily leads to war.<sup>86</sup> The Second World War is thus considered in the official East German history to be an imperialist war, the result of the unrestrained development of capitalism in Germany.<sup>87</sup> With this in mind, it becomes somewhat easier for the non-Marxist to understand the significance of the scene in which Bienkopp suddenly gains an insight into his society and his own role in it.

In his patriotic euphoria at the beginning of the war, Bienkopp remains relatively unconcerned about the death and violence he sees at the Front. He sees nothing exceptional in what he is doing and so fails to understand the praise and honour he receives on his first leave, both publicly and from Anngret (47). But then Anngret demands to see "her" booty. At this, Bienkopp is thoroughly shaken. He goes for a walk to consider the meaning of it all:

Was sollten ihm diese, den Bomben und Kanonen abgetrotzten, sonnigen Tage? Er klopfte sein Leben mit Fragen ab. Da war zum Beispiel dieses vielgeschrieene Wort Vaterland.. Wo war Bienkopps Vaterland? Hier bei der enttäuschten Anngret, in der Kate am Waldrand, aus der die Mutter herausgestorben war? Waren die Wälder und Felder des Barons sein Vaterland? (48)

This, for Bienkopp, uncharacteristically Marxist association of Anngret's

greed, the war and the exploitation inherent in the class structure represents the beginning of Bienkopp's transformation from a passive outcast into a social pioneer.

As Bienkopp is in the process of rejecting the values expressed by Anngret (although not yet Anngret herself--she is counted among the innocent victims of the system) Dürr appears, by a completely implausible coincidence, after an absence of ten years. His appearance emphasizes his role as the countervailing influence to Anngret: Having been repelled by Anngret's sense of values, Bienkopp now swings towards Dürr: "Ich begreif dich jetzt, Anton" (49). Immediately after this, Bienkopp returns to the Front, where a chain of incidents over the next two years convinces him of the complete inhumanity of the German authorities. Finally, in a symbolic scene on the east bank of the Neiße, the future border, he leads the surrender of his group to the advancing Russians rather than flee into his former homeland (53).

In this episodic description of Bienkopp's evolution between 1932 and 1945, from a reclusive victim of society to an active rebel against it, Strittmatter hints at, but does not fully develop, a duality in Bienkopp's character. As he is torn between the two opposing poles of his character during this time, Bienkopp gradually recognizes the nature of the world he is living in and his own priorities as an individual.

The two aspects of Bienkopp's nature are influenced respectively by Anngret and Dürr, both of whom strike a responsive chord in Bienkopp at some time, but without his ever becoming completely attuned to either: At first, Bienkopp the individualist finds Dürr's ascetic concern for the welfare of society at large too selfless (37ff); but, having trusted his instincts once again in marrying Anngret, whom he considers to be a kindred

spirit, he eventually recognizes, in the episode of the booty, that her values, which he sees as the values of the social system, are too selfish (48). He then veers back towards Dürr and later comes to share his views that society as it exists is corrupt (53).

The capitalist society represented in Ole Bienkopp offers the individual only two real possibilities: He must either accept a pre-ordained role and a corrupt, and corrupting, system of values, or he must reject society altogether and work towards its downfall. In either case he must surrender his individual freedom. No middle way exists apparently of the kind Bienkopp tries to find, by living outside the normal confines of society whilst depending on society for his livelihood. After the initial warning, when society, in the guise of the baron and his fellow landowners, suddenly demands its due of Bienkopp (45), he eventually recognizes, in the extreme conditions of wartime, that he has been tacitly supporting, and then actively fighting for, a society whose values are completely alien to him (53). By refusing to return home he acknowledges, unconsciously, that there are principles which he as an individual cannot compromise any longer.

In keeping with the "decidedly visual technique" of the novel,<sup>88</sup> Strittmatter avoids abstract definition of Bienkopp's principles. Instead, he uses a variety of narrative techniques. For example, the contrast between the respective influences of Anngret and Dürr reveals that Bienkopp has a stronger sense of his own individuality than Dürr, but is repelled by the self-seeking individuality of Anngret.

In order to define Bienkopp's priorities as an individual more closely, Strittmatter uses another device, namely, the motif of Bienkopp's attacks of "freezing." In particular, the motif is used to distinguish

between the individualism of Anngret and of Bienkopp: Soon after his marriage, Bienkopp discovers that Anngret is not the wild, unconventional kindred spirit he had imagined. He tires of the "Süße ohne Sinn" (43) and goes to find companionship with Dürr. When he discovers that Dürr has gone underground without telling him, he suffers the first of many similar attacks of "freezing," and turns to Anngret for "warmth" (43). As the reader already knows by this point, Bienkopp "freezes" on other occasions, for example when, to satisfy her own vanity, Anngret compels him to grow a beard or wear "Großbauernstiefel" (7, 22) and above all when his friend Dürr is killed (21). And on each of these occasions Anngret responds, as she does to the first attack, by withholding the "warmth" Bienkopp craves, until he does her bidding.

The purpose of the motif is indicated most clearly in the description of Bienkopp's coldness at the death of his friend Dürr as "Weltraumkälte" (21). The motif of space occurs throughout the novel but most obviously at the beginning and end, where it is intended to suggest the wider, cosmic, significance underlying the events in Bienkopp's life (7, 428). The inference of the term "Weltraumkälte" is that Bienkopp's attacks of coldness indicate that eternal, basic human qualities are being frustrated or contravened in some way. H.-J. Thalheim describes the motif as an attempt to indicate Bienkopp's "Glücksverlangen . . . nach echt menschlicher, geistig-weltanschaulicher Gemeinschaft in der Ehe und Gesellschaft."<sup>89</sup> For reasons which are not explained, he finds the motif "very imperfect" for the purpose. The major shortcoming is probably that it implies that Bienkopp is at the mercy of his instincts and unable, for sixteen years, to distinguish between the spiritual "chill" he feels on these occasions and the purely physical "warmth" he craves,

but rarely receives unconditionally, in the arms of Annegret. The motif also emphasizes Annegret's characteristic trait; in contrast to the fundamental human empathy signified by Bienkopp's sudden attacks of coldness, she looks only for self-gratification, and by enticing Bienkopp with the hope of her physical "warmth" she encourages him to do the same and is then able to exploit him for her own ends: "Annegret ist auf das Ihre bedacht und hat herrische Anwandlungen" (8).

Through the motif of coldness and warmth Strittmatter apparently intends to emphasize the difference between the egocentric individualism of Annegret, which is shown to be a product of the values inherent in society (48), and the humanistic individualism of Bienkopp which, it is implied is of more eternal value.

East German critics have often suggested that Bienkopp's activities, particularly after the establishment of the socialist state in Germany, occasionally verge on anarchy.<sup>90</sup> It has been the purpose of the foregoing examination of Bienkopp's early life to try to define the nature of his individualism, in order to explain, if possible, his later reaction to socialism and in particular towards the principle of a collective society. Strittmatter himself has suggested that anarchy may be the result when a progressive individual is given too much licence.<sup>91</sup>

In describing Bienkopp's early development, Strittmatter emphasizes that he is an individualist, in the sense that he is determined to protect his freedom to pursue whatever interests and talents he may have. When society threatens to curtail that freedom he flees into relative isolation and finds a certain harmony on the fringe of society. This harmony is disrupted in part by his own actions and partly by outside interference. As a result, he becomes aware of his dual responsibility as an

individual--to himself and to society. According to Strittmatter these two responsibilities cannot be reconciled in the capitalist society.

But, although Bienkopp is an individualist, he also represents the individual per se. He is presented as an innocent who learns from nature and life; because the events in his life are typical, in that they reflect the orthodox Marxist view of historical development, Bienkopp is placed in the role of a Socialist Everyman. He achieves his socialist convictions as a natural outcome of his experiences, not as a result of faith or as a preconceived dogma; socialism is thus presented as a natural condition of his development.

In his so-called "Anti-Dühring," which has been called the "best general exposition" of Marxist theory,<sup>92</sup> Engels describes the individual in a capitalist society as being in the control of "objective alien forces," by which he means social and historical circumstances, which the individual can neither comprehend nor control. This is the pattern of Bienkopp's early life, as he experiences the arbitrary power of the baron over his life and later as he welcomes the war, which, eventually, he recognizes as one more symptom of a corrupt society. Engels contrasted this kind of existence with the Socialist society. Here, man ("die Menschen") would, for the first time become "bewußte, wirkliche Herren der Natur, weil und indem sie Herren ihrer eigenen Vergesellschaftung werden."<sup>93</sup>

Engels is characteristically vague about how this socialist society would be governed. The word "Menschen" may imply either individuals or the collective mass in this context. There is no doubt, as R. Lenzer points out, that Ole Bienkopp concentrates on the first of these interpretations, on how one individual attempts to gain control of what

Engels had called the "objective, alien" social forces which had hitherto controlled his life.<sup>94</sup>

Bienkopp apparently achieves his Socialist convictions entirely without the aid of the Party or any form of preconceived Party doctrine. He therefore has a very different conception of collective rule from Dürr. This is illustrated in two parallel incidents in which the regional Party authorities try to persuade each of them to prove that their talents as bureaucrats are equal to their proven talents as local organizers and leaders. Dürr has serious doubts about the wisdom of the move, but eventually agrees to go, even though he will have to learn to read and write first (12f). When the same request is made to Bienkopp some years later, he refuses: "Ein Parteiauftrag und der Genosse, der ihn ausführen soll, müßten ein bißchen zusammenpassen" (245).

In the first months after the war there is very little suggestion of collectivity. Dürr becomes local leader by virtue of his personal leadership qualities (12) and the greatest concern is for equality--"Gerechtigkeit in allen Stücken" (9). The land reforms provide an equal opportunity for all; but in time the differences between the energies or talents of the farmers become obvious and grow bigger each year (10) and Dürr looks for some way to equalize the productivity of his charges (16). The fruit of his search is hailed as a new philosopher's stone to solve all ills (16), but Dürr is killed before he can implement the new plan. As his chief assistant, Bienkopp, like Dürr, is "more concerned with the lean farmers than the fat" (16), and would be expected to carry on with the same work; but Bienkopp lacks Dürr's singleminded idealism. Although he believes in social equality in theory, in practice he has allowed Annegret to follow her private enterprise ambitions, because he needs to be "warmed" (9).



His continued susceptibility to Annegret's sexual blackmail suggests that he is still not able to distinguish between the self-gratification, which she offers, and self-fulfilment, which is what he is searching for in reality.

Not until he discovers Annegret in flagrante delicto with the arch-capitalist Ramsch, is her hold over him destroyed. He then sees Dürr's plan as a means of gaining revenge. Whereas originally the idea of a collective farm was conceived to achieve a greater equality, in output as well as opportunity, among the "Neubauern," Bienkopp now apparently sees it as an opportunity to eradicate Ramsch by economic means. But in order to destroy Ramsch, Bienkopp must destroy the whole economic and social structure which supports him and his kind. The motivation for Bienkopp's collective is therefore essentially negative; its purpose is to destroy the remnants of old social values, whereas Dürr's original purpose was more positive, in that he intended to improve the new social structure.

However, by painting a picture of his collective as an earthly paradise of plenty (96, 104), Bienkopp gathers a motley group of followers and begins to plan the practical details of his farm. At this point, the Party, in the person of Frieda Simson, the self-appointed guardian of Party discipline, suspects a subversion of authority (141).

The image of the Party, and Bienkopp's efforts to bring his collective farm into being despite official opposition, have given rise to some of the most severe criticism of Ole Bienkopp. In general, the criticism tends to concentrate on the fact that the relationship between individual and state, or Party, authority is viewed only from the perspective of the individual, which results in an "ungerechte Verteilung der Sympathien."<sup>95</sup> In

the main, these criticisms arise because of the prominence of characters like Simson, who are held up for ridicule. But, as A. Dymshitz has pointed out in defence of the novel, there are many other characters and incidents which may be less colourful than those involving Simson and her fellow bureaucrats, but which are intended to counteract the negative image of the Party she, and they, create. Dymshitz argues that the overall image of the Party is in fact positive: "Mit der ganzen Logik der Ereignisse und Gestalten seines Romans bejaht Strittmatter das Bewußtsein von der großen Kraft der Partei."<sup>96</sup>

But the initial impression of the Party and central authority is certainly predominantly negative: In characterizing Frieda Simson, Strittmatter ridicules her facility with the "Lehr- und Leitsätzen" of Party jargon. Elsewhere, he comments on the fascination of high-sounding phrases for certain officials, who preserve them for public consumption, without having any idea of their meaning (230). This is only one symptom of a more general tendency among the Party officials in the novel to concern themselves with form and appearance rather than content or meaning. Other more serious symptoms can have a much more harmful effect. The most harmful of all is perhaps the insistence on fulfilling norms, regardless of variable conditions or unforeseen accidents. Because of the official pressures, the local officials are forced to take short-term measures which in the long run lead to disaster: Because the tractor drivers must fulfil a norm, they object to ploughing deep enough to break up the waterlogged ground and the crops suffer (332); because the State has provided open stalls, Bienkopp is refused permission to protect his herd of imported cattle from the wintry weather by building a closed stall, and several cattle die, for which he is publicly censured (393); another official

makes up for deficiencies in delivering his norm of ducks, caused by his own errors, by commandeering Bienkopp's (343). These, and many other similar examples create the impression of an inefficient social organization, controlled, with arbitrary unconcern for the realities, by a central monolith.

Because Bienkopp's collective farm does not conform to the accepted pattern, he is faced with even more obstacles than usual. He discovers almost from the start that the bureaucratic machine is incapable of responding except to a stimulus from above. At first it is difficult for him to remember that they share the same social philosophy: "Bienkopp möchte heulen vor Wut . . . aber hier handelt es sich . . . überhaupt nicht um die Reaktion und nicht um Gegner" (148). In time however he gains the respect of one enlightened former official (234) and eventually the guarded support of the district Party secretary, Wunschgetreu. As his name implies, Wunschgetreu had been a loyal servant of the Party, faithfully upholding what he knew as the Truth; but the revelations of the XXth Party Congress of the USSR in 1956 had shaken his faith in revealed Truth (328). Very tentatively, as a result of this experience, he had begun to question his earlier behaviour, especially the "Kunst mit dem schwarzen Diarium" much beloved of dogmatic officials, such as he had been, who used their little book as a threat to cut off heretical discussion (329). Because of this change of heart he mistrusts Simson when she makes one of her frequent accusations against Bienkopp, reading from her own little black book (330).

An image which is frequently used derogatively to denote the dogmatic reputation of the Party is that of the Party as a Church. Frieda Simson is said to act and speak "als sei die Partei eine Gemeinschaft von Betern und Büßern" (144). On another occasion Jan Bullert's stilted manner

of public speaking is described as a "liturgy . . . opium for the people" because of the convoluted Party jargon he uses (189). Bienkopp himself makes the most cutting criticism of all in his outburst against Party autocracy: "Ist die Partei ein selbstgefälliger Gott? Auch ich bin die Partei" (195). In this context, religion is symbolic of dogma, inflexibility and a mystical reverence for the central authority. Strittmatter strongly implies that the structure of the Party bureaucracy still fosters a religious allegiance among its members by describing the fate of Willi Kraushaar, a former agronomist who had proved invaluable in the field and been rewarded in typical fashion with an office job. Almost inexorably he had been drawn in by the "feiner Sog zur Behäbigkeit und Selbstherrlichkeit" until he too became an acolyte of the powers above (307f).

In his article on the image of the Party in Ole Bienkopp, Dym-schitz quotes, as <sup>an</sup> example of the positive image of the Party, the figures of Dürr and Krüger. In the case of Dürr the objection could be raised that, although his Party loyalty was unquestioned, he was quite prepared to take the kind of spontaneous individual initiative which was to cause Bienkopp to be expelled temporarily from the Party. And if he had lived, he was about to be drawn into the bureaucracy, where he might well have suffered the same fate as Kraushaar. Krüger is an entirely positive figure, whom Strittmatter clearly considers the ideal of the Party official. Before he was replaced as district secretary, Krüger had shown a "dangerous" tendency to seek and follow the advice of experts rather than simply carry out the edicts of the Party authorities (252). The collective authority exemplified by Krüger is genuinely collective, in the sense that all who are qualified are encouraged to contribute; and Krüger's authority is upheld by the respect, rather than the confusion or fear, of his charges (252).

A third positive representative of the Party whom Dymschitz does not mention as such is Wunschgetreu, who deserves some credit for his recognition that even he can be flexible in carrying out his duties. There are signs that he will become increasingly more flexible and responsive to suggestions from "below," for example in his efforts to obtain machinery for Bienkopp at the end of the novel (419).

The problem which arises if, like Dymschitz, one views the general impression of the Party given in Ole Bienkopp as being favourable is how to reconcile the death of the hero with an optimistic interpretation of the novel as a whole. Superficially, Bienkopp appears to die in a last frantic effort to uncover a source of fertilizer to make up for the State's failure to supply either fertilizer or the machinery to provide it. Many critics obviously were not able to reconcile the death with an optimistic interpretation. H. Plavius quotes the example of an article in Sonntag which suggested that "death [as a subject for art, presumably] did not reflect the situation in our Republic."<sup>97</sup> Plavius himself argues that Bienkopp's death is necessary, not because of his stubborn, challenging character, which has always placed him in conflict, but because it warns of the dangers which are still present in the society of the time (1964), from the "Kräfte des Alten."<sup>98</sup> That is, he implies that Strittmatter felt the danger of a resurgence of the old modes of thought--by which he means the dogmatism of the Stalinist era. H.-G. Thalheim argues, on the contrary, that Bienkopp's death is not at all "necessary" in the sense of being tragically unavoidable. He points out that Bienkopp could have been saved if the searchers had found him a day earlier.<sup>99</sup>

In the final analysis, Bienkopp's death does not vitally influence the tenor of the novel in any way. It is one possible result

of a confrontation between an impatient individual frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of the authorities. But Strittmatter clearly indicates that Bienkopp is an exception, who is ahead of his time in demanding a receptive hearing from an institution which has been by tradition paternalistic. Bienkopp dies in a sense because he insists that there can only be one correct solution to a confrontation--usually the solution he wants. In this respect his death is a result of his own intransigence. The path taken by Bienkopp does not offer the ideal solution to the problem of the relationship between individual and collective, because in the end Bienkopp proves to be an individualist rather than an individual, who insists on achieving his own, albeit selfless, ends. When Robert Havemann made his controversial criticism of the restrictive atmosphere of East German society he accused the Party of having fostered the impression that there could only be one correct way for the socialist state machinery to run. The argument he used to justify his view might apply equally well as the wry message of Bienkopp's life--and death:

Freiheit ist nicht in dem Sinne Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit, daß man jeweils nur eine einzige notwendige Sache tun kann. Sondern wahre Freiheit haben wir erst, wenn es für unser Tun und Lassen eine breite Skala von Möglichkeiten gibt.<sup>100</sup>

c. Strittmatter's Realism: The characterization of the individual and society

Before Ole Bienkopp, Strittmatter had written three other major works dealing with the recent history of the GDR: He originally wrote Katzgraben: Szenen aus dem Bauernleben (1953) in response to a request for topical, local material by an amateur theatrical group; after considerable assistance from Brecht, the comedy was performed briefly by the

Berliner Ensemble, but with little success. The next work, Tinko (1954) is a short novel which has also been issued, with illustrations, as a children's book. Die Holländerbraut (1959), Strittmatter's second, and so far final, attempt at writing drama is often cited as an important example of the use of contemporary material in the East German theatre, although it was not at all successful on stage.<sup>101</sup>

There are many similarities between these three works and Ole Bienkopp: They share the same setting--a small village during the first years after the war, and demonstrate Strittmatter's thorough knowledge of rural life, and his ability to imbue apparently mundane aspects of country life, such as seed supplies, irrigation or transportation, with wider political or social significance. The four works also share a common theme --the effects of agrarian reform on rural society in the GDR: In each case, the local baron, who exemplifies the rigid hierarchy of capitalist society, fails to return after the war and his lands form a convenient basis for the rise of a new social structure; the lands are divided equally among the former village proletariat and other deserving cases, under the terms of the Soviet land reforms of 1945. The "Neubauern" and the policies which are introduced to encourage the growth of cooperative farming methods (crop quotas, Machine Tractor Stations, etc.) are considered by the "Altbauern" to be a direct threat to their economically and socially privileged position. The confrontation which then takes place between conservatives and reformists is the subject of Strittmatter's three earlier GDR works and of the first part of Ole Bienkopp.

But despite these many similarities of plot and setting, there are obviously major differences, since Ole Bienkopp was both highly controversial and successful, whereas its three predecessors were either un-

successful or only limitedly so and caused no noticeable controversy at all. This section of this chapter will attempt to assess the major differences between the three earlier works, which tend to reflect contemporaneous literary standards, and Ole Bienkopp, which, at the time of its publication, was considered innovative or even somewhat heretical. In this way, Strittmatter's own works provide some standard by which to measure Ole Bienkopp's contribution to the development of Socialist Realism in East Germany.

The most contentious point arising from the publication of Ole Bienkopp was not the form of the novel, which, with the exception of some flashbacks and inner monologues, tends to be conservative; the main criticism was directed at the novel's characterization, particularly its effect on the image of the role of the individual in society. The question raised most frequently was whether Ole Bienkopp was realistic, in the sense in which the word is applied to socialist realist literature: that is, did Strittmatter's characters reflect the socio-political goals, as well as the contemporary state of East German society?<sup>102</sup> Realism here has a dual meaning, which it has not always been possible for East German authors to reconcile, as Strittmatter's earlier GDR works demonstrate. That is, he tended in these works to distort the contemporary social reality in order to illustrate the political "reality."

In general, Strittmatter's earlier GDR works reflect a very stylized view of society because of the predominance of these ideological considerations. The individual figure tends to be characterized mainly according to his ideological allegiance and consequently often plays a largely representative role. This is most noticeable in the first of these works, Katzgraben, where the lines of conflict between the "Neu-



bauern" and the "Altbauern" are drawn very clearly and the struggle is seen as a straightforward confrontation between social classes rather than as a dilemma for the individuals involved.

A device which Strittmatter uses in all of his GDR works is the indicative name, which is of course a traditional method of abbreviated characterization often used for secondary characters who require minimal characterization. But in Katzgraben virtually all of the characters can be identified with a particular point of view or idea through their names, which has the effect of emphasizing their roles as representatives rather than as realistic characters in their own right. Thus Kleinschmidt represents the little man in the struggle against Großmann and his kind, and Mittelländer wavers between the two factions. The local Party leader, who gives moral support to the small farmers, is named Steinert, reflecting his job as a miner and his lapidary perseverance in the face of setbacks to the struggle. Other members of the village community who are categorized by name include the youth of the village, who are all known only by first name, which is not in itself unusual, but does help to separate them from the roles of their parents in the confrontation over the road which is to bring the benefits of the new social order to Katzgraben. Their generation represents the hope for the future, once the difficulties of the present are over: "Räumt fort Gemoder und Gebein,/ die neue Zeit will auch dran sein."<sup>103</sup> They are also presented as the bearers of village customs as they organize dances and sing folk songs, which is perhaps why they are given such traditional Germanic names as Hermann, Günter, Erna, Elli, Karl. One other group to be identified through their names is that of the uncommitted farmers, whose support the two opposing factions are vying for. They are linked by the alliteration of the rough "k" sound

in their names: Klauschke, Krollig, Kubik, Griesecke. By categorizing the characters in these ways, Strittmatter also incidentally implies that in this emerging socialist society at least, the role of the individual is severely limited. Although he may initiate action, as Kleinschmidt does in making a success of his farm despite severe obstacles, he is shown to be powerless to effect lasting change without the support of the group with which he is identified: ". . . tut's gemeinsam."<sup>104</sup>

In Tinko and Die Holländerbraut the individual plays a more prominent role; the ideological conflict is seen from the perspective of the individual caught between the opposing sides. Tinko is torn between loyalty for his grandfather, an autocratic independent farmer, who brought him up, and the natural loyalty to his father, who returns from his years in a Soviet prison camp with radical ideas for agricultural reform. Although Hanna Tainz, the "Holländerbraut", is a socialist from the outset, her dilemma is similar in that she is attracted to a capitalist, whom she believes she can convert by her love. Both works thus deal with a conflict between emotional attachment and rational (here political) conviction.

However, in both cases, the political aspect of the conflict so predominates that the individual dilemma is submerged in the ideological confrontation. In Tinko, for example, the dominant figure is not, as might be expected, the boy narrator himself, but the overdrawn figure of his domineering grandfather. This has the effect of concentrating attention on the evils of capitalism, rather than on the conflicting loyalties of Tinko. Secondly, there is little attempt to present a realistic argument in favour of the father. He is simply one of a group of wooden representatives of socialism--"ciphers, straws on the wind of dogma" as they have been called.<sup>105</sup> The superiority of the Socialist argument is to

be assumed from their names: Tinko's austere father Ernst, his future stepmother Clary, who is constantly cheerful in the face of setbacks, the Party leader Wunsch, the active schoolmaster Kern, and the crudely named Kaldaune, who efficiently organizes supplies and deliveries of crop quotas for the cooperative.

In effect therefore, Tinko's personal dilemma is transformed into a confrontation between ideologies, represented on the one hand by the exaggerated figure of old Kraske, the type of the self-seeking capitalist, and on the other by the idealized figure of Tinko's father and his fellow cooperative farmers, as the representatives of Socialism. Between these two poles, Tinko acts as the naive observer, who is caught up involuntarily in the ideological squabble of his relatives.

The proof of the predominance of the ideological argument over the personal dilemma is Tinko's final decision to go over to his father: This is not made until the struggle between capitalist and cooperative is ended by the death of his grandfather, who makes a futile attempt to out-farm the cooperative singlehandedly. Tinko's conversion to his father's side therefore comes about not because of the moral superiority of the socialists, but as a result of a trial of sheer economic and physical strength which, by weight of numbers and because of their superior machinery (on loan from the central government pool), the cooperative farmers could not fail to win.

In trying to demonstrate the historical inevitability of the socialist victory, Strittmatter ignores the didactic advantages of concentrating on Tinko's dilemma. Tinko is not persuaded of the benefits of socialism but virtually coerced by force of circumstances (the death of his grandfather leaves him no choice but to go to his father). As a

result the novel conveys the impression, which is reinforced in the final lines, that the individual must swim with the current of State socialism or go under, because that is the direction of the times: At the end of the novel, Tinko contemplates the wizened hands of his dead grandfather, "Sie haben die neue Zeit zurückzerren wollen. Die Zeit schleuderte sie beiseite."<sup>106</sup> But, for the reasons just explained, the argument is not persuasive.

A similar conclusion is reached in Die Holländerbraut, even though the personal dilemma plays a much more central role in the play. Initially, the conflict is not caused by an outright choice between capitalism and socialism, but by Hanna Tainz' apparent readiness to compromise her socialist principles in trying to convert her capitalist lover, Heinrich Erdmann. Her dilemma reaches a climax when it is revealed to her fellow socialists that she, the mayor of the village, is pregnant (for a second time, as the audience knows) with Erdmann's child. But at this point the private conflict becomes a public affair: Hanna is unable or unwilling to resolve the inconsistency between her public and her private life ("Die Partei lehrt: Es gibt Widersprüche.")<sup>107</sup> and she retires from the scene. The comment of the Party leader that such an inconsistency simply cannot exist--"Du müßtest wissen, wie das, was man so privat nennt, fast über Nacht zum Fakt der Politik wird"<sup>108</sup>--indicates the direction the play is to take.

In the final Act, events are taken out of Hanna's hands. The ideological confrontation between the capitalist farmers, now openly led by Hanna's lover, and the representatives of the State authorities, comes to a head when the farmers conspire to withhold their assigned quota of wheat: "Wie sah's aus mit [Parteisekretär] Maltens Macht, wenn hundert

Hungermäuler auf ihn einschrien?"<sup>109</sup> This confrontation takes place without the participation of the main character, although the outcome directly affects her life. Hanna's dilemma is ended incidentally when the capitalist farmers are publicly unmasked and routed. Like Tinko, she is swept up in the broader issue and her potentially interesting personal dilemma is made to appear irrelevant in comparison with the historical conflict of ideologies.

In all three of these earlier works the role of the individual vis à vis society tends to be broadly similar. In each case Strittmatter emphasizes the need for absolute identity between the individual and the State. The State is associated with uniformity and a collective identity, whereas individuality is seen as a vice of the capitalist mentality: the small farmers in Katzgraben only achieve their road, and so the promise of an end to Großmann's exploitation, when they unite, forgetting personal differences; in Tinko, Kraske's exaggerated sense of independence causes him to enter into the futile, and fatal, competition with the cooperative farmers, whereas they are correspondingly selfless in their idealistic efforts to meet delivery quotas for the State; and in Die Holländerbraut Hanna's dilemma is shown to arise simply because she allowed individual concerns to compromise an absolute allegiance to state socialism.

A further sign of the secondary importance of the individual in Strittmatter's earlier view of East German society is the decisive role played by the anonymous power of the State in the respective conflicts. In all three works the ideological conflict is initially provoked by the imposition by the State of crop quotas and fixed prices, which threatens the economic independence of the single farmer. In Tinko and Katzgraben, the State is also, literally, the deus ex machina which defeats the op-

position to cooperative farming, by providing the farm machinery which respectively outfarms old Kraske and unites the squabbling small farmers ("Traktoren pflügen die Gehirne um").<sup>110</sup> In the final analysis it is the State which initiates and, through direct, material, or indirect, moral, support, consolidates the reforms. The scope for individual initiative of any extent is correspondingly very restricted.

A symptom of the relatively insignificant role of the individual in these works is the "flat" characterization of the figures, whereby many of them become representative types, tending to be "constructed around a single idea or quality."<sup>111</sup> This may be achieved through the dialogue, for example in the doctrinaire aphorisms of a righteous Party leader ("Autorität ist auf die Dauer nur, wo auch Moral ist").<sup>112</sup> It is also often to be seen in Strittmatter's reliance on indicative naming, which associates a figure with one dominant characteristic. In Katzgraben, as was shown, virtually the whole village is characterized in this way, so that each member is readily associated with a social class or group, which in turn determines his role in the ideological conflict. In Tinko the virtues and collective spirit of the socialists are stressed by their being given indicative names, in contrast to the individualistic single farmers, Kraske and Kimpel. Since Die Holländerbraut, initially at least, concerns deviations within the Socialist camp, its members cannot be identified collectively in this way, but the conspiratorial efforts of the capitalists, and some of the vices of capitalism, are emphasized in their names: Erdmann, Wiesel, Dingel, Klögling, and the cautious, indecisive Löffler.

Such "flat" characterization reflects the relatively uncomplicated theme of these works and in the process presents a very simplistic view of

the social relationships of post-war East Germany. Strittmatter creates the impression of a society divided according to the most general ideological criteria and of individuals whose social relationships are determined by these same criteria: Kleinschmidt in opposition to Großmann, the positive virtues of collectivism in Tinko contrasted with the negative attributes of capitalism in Die Holländerbraut.

The official history of the GDR reflects a similar view of the post-war period as one in which political priorities were established as the society gradually became polarized. The polarity is implicit in the title by which the period is officially designated: "Die antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung im Osten Deutschlands."<sup>113</sup>

Although Ole Bienkopp is concerned at some length with this post-war period, the main emphasis is on the period after 1949, in which, historically, economic priorities generally began to replace political.<sup>114</sup> This next phase of East Germany's development is officially described as "Die Schaffung der Grundlagen des Sozialismus."<sup>115</sup> This is reflected in the principal theme of Ole Bienkopp, which is not so much the ideological conflicts of the 1940's, as the growth of socialism, using the example of farm collectivization, in the 1950's.

Although the theme of the early growth of a socialist society ten years after the event may not seem particularly innovative, Ole Bienkopp and other works which first concentrated solely on that period of East Germany's history were considered to have introduced a new phase in the development of Socialist Realism during the early and mid-1960's, by shifting from the relatively abstract theme of ideological confrontation to the more immediate, practical, questions of the workings of society. In Strittmatter's case the more abstract theme tended to result in abstract,

representative characterization, in which the figures were distinguished mainly by the degree of their commitment to one or other of the two opposing ideologies. But by drawing his material largely from within the established society of the GDR, Strittmatter was compelled to develop different sources of conflict and therefore also to use different criteria in his characterization. The main subject matter was now problems arising "aus dem Zusammenleben unter sozialistischen Lebensverhältnissen."<sup>116</sup>

H. Redeker has pointed out that one of the most noticeable effects of this change was a greater emphasis on the individuality of the individual, as opposed to emphasizing the need to identify with the collective: "Nicht mehr schlechthin Gemeinschaftswesen zu werden . . . ist hier der treibende Faktor individuellen Handelns, sondern das Bedürfnis des Individuums, sich als schöpferisches Mitglied der Gemeinschaft fort-schreitend zu betätigen und zu bestätigen."<sup>117</sup> Both Redeker and D. Schlenstedt, who writes of the new concern in literature for the individual's need to develop his personality "unverkürzt und im Interesse aller,"<sup>118</sup> refer specifically to Ole Bienkopp as one of the first and most prominent examples of the new theme. W. Neubert goes so far as to say that Strittmatter was the first author to develop the so-called non-antagonistic conflict as a fruitful theme: "Das Eindringen der Literatur in die Thematik einer folgenreichen Zuspitzung nichtantagonistischer Widersprüche ist das Verdienst Strittmatters . . ."<sup>119</sup>

In the discussion of Strittmatter's earlier GDR works it was shown that he, like many other early writers of what has been called the "Poesie der kollektiven Tätigkeit,"<sup>120</sup> tends to emphasize the role of the State and of the collective at the expense of the individual. In Strittmatter's case, this was especially noticeable because of his use of indicative names



with the consequent "flattening" of the characters into symbols or representatives. It seems contradictory therefore, in a work which has been so frequently cited as an example of the growing importance of the individual in East German literature, that this same device should be used more obviously than in any of the three earlier works and more extensively than in Tinko and Die Holländerbraut: Of a total of approximately forty different surnames, almost two-thirds (twenty-three) directly indicate a dominant personal characteristic; this does not include nicknames, such as Bienkopp itself, which derive from the narrative rather than directly from the underlying idea.

In most cases these figures are named according to their occupations, for example, the hairdresser Schaber, Gastwirt Mischer, Maurer Keller, Fräulein Danke of the "Konsum" store, etc. Some of these same names also hint at their bearer's political views: Schaber's pettiness towards the collective, Mischer's carefully non-partisan affability as he tries not to alienate any one faction among his customers. But in most cases, the names indicate a personal characteristic, such as Lehrer Küster, whose schoolroom atmosphere is correspondingly "dumpf" to Bienkopp (31), or Buchhalter Bäuchler, who displays the "typical" complacency of the office-bound (260).

The main distinction between this group of characters and their counterparts in Strittmatter's earlier GDR works is that they are not characterized primarily according to the dictates of a single dominant ideological theme. Here, the indicative names serve as an economical means of creating a social background to the main narrative, by alluding to a wide variety of occupations and personal characteristics.

However, there is a second group, who also bear indicative

names, who are not so static or peripheral. Although these figures are still not of central importance, they are closer to the central events and so demand a more dynamic characterization. To some extent Strittmatter successfully accomplishes this despite the constrictions of their indicative names.

Three characters of this sort are the unlikely first recruits to Bienkopp's collective: Hulda Trampel, described as a lustful "Zweizentnerengel" (362), who "suits her family name better than her husband" (263); Hermann Weichelt, "ein Verehrer und Untertan des Himmelsherrn" (69-70); and Franz Bummel, a feckless gambler and horse-lover. Under the influence of Bienkopp's collective farm, these three all become transformed. Frau Trampel's energies are diverted more productively to tending the collective's pigs (264); Weichelt gains self-confidence and a measure of earthly satisfaction (254, 413); and Bummel's love of horses is turned to good effect (418).

By contrast, Bienkopp's childhood friend Jan Bullert demonstrates a completely different reaction to the introduction of collectivization. Although he had welcomed the first post-war land reforms and the early co-operative movement because of the independence and relative prosperity he gained, he cannot accept full collectivization; he views collective farming à la Bienkopp as a threat to his newly found "Ehre des Neubauernstandes" (218). From his point of view, equality is only a starting point, not a goal in itself; after all had been given an equal opportunity, the individual had to make best use of available resources. His motto is "Arm und reich sind Charaktersache" (173).

At first, Bullert's name appears to refer to his tenacity, for example in neutralizing the senseless last efforts of his countrymen

against the advance of the Russians (111); less subtly, it also reflects his duties as keeper of the communal bull owned by the cooperative. But when he begins to resist Bienkopp and then the Party, when collectivization becomes official policy, his name obviously denotes the stubbornness of his nature. The price he must pay for this obstinacy is removal from Party office and gradually increasing isolation from the mainstream of village life.

In their study of Ole Bienkopp, L. and N. Krenzlin argue that under certain circumstances an indicative name can make a character more vivid, rather than reducing him to a stereotype. Their point is that when a character with such a name develops, so that the name no longer applies as before, it has the effect of creating a "Spannungsfeld . . . , das den Leser . . . zwingt, die Figur ständig neu zu durchdenken, ihre Entwicklungen zu beachten, sie anders zu sehen."<sup>121</sup> The name is thus used to call attention to the development undergone by a particular figure. In the cases of the four characters just described, this development is the result of the experience of collectivization, so that the use of indicative names here can be said to emphasize what Strittmatter considers to be the benefits of collectivization, and in particular, through the example of Bulbert, the distinction, in social and personal terms, between a cooperative and a collective communal organization.

Both groups of characters described so far belong essentially to the background of Ole Bienkopp; consequently, the fact that they are characterized as they are does not necessarily infringe on the realism of the novel. They are not required to be rounded out as fully fledged, realistic figures because they are not involved in the central development of the narrative. Although each character individually may not,

strictly, be realistic, their importance is in their collective role in the novel, by creating the illusion of a widely varied social mosaic.

However, when indicative names are applied to central figures, there comes a point when the dominant characteristic will infringe on the figure's reality and so also the reality of the fictitious world of the work. Three such characters in Ole Bienkopp are Dürr, Simson and Ramsch.

In their discussion of Strittmatter's use of indicative names, the Krenzlins cite the figure of Dürr as a leading example of what they call the "tension" between a character and his indicative name.<sup>122</sup> They argue that because Dürr is obviously all else but unfruitful, he, and other similarly named characters are rounded out, because the reader is required to concentrate on the actual, not the implied, characteristics of the figure: "Weit davon entfernt, unter dem Einfluß ihres Namens flächiger zu werden, runden sich so bei geweckter Aufmerksamkeit des Lesers erst die Gestalten."<sup>123</sup>

However, particularly in the case of Dürr, it must be pointed out that Strittmatter leaves virtually no opportunity for misapprehension. There is no question of Dürr's being judged by the direct implications of his name; he is introduced as a leader and inspiration to others from the beginning (12, 16). His name is thus merely ironic and as such is no less constant an indication of his character than the names of the secondary figures who have been discussed already.

But Dürr's name is apt in the sense that it does serve to emphasize that his importance in the novel is not as an active participant in the events in Blumenau, i.e. a rounded character, able to develop, but for the idea he conceives and the inspiration he provides even after his death, i.e., as a constant, unchanging factor. By naming Dürr as he does,

Strittmatter calls attention to his "fruitful" role as Bienkopp's spiritual mentor and as the progenitor of the idea of the collective farm. His death is described at the beginning of the novel (19f), but he influences the events which follow through the "legacy" of his idea, which Bienkopp inherits (81), and which survives even Bienkopp's own death, as the final scene specifically emphasizes (427).

To the extent that Dürr does not take part physically in the main events of the novel, but is important for the idea and inspiration he provided to others, his name may be said to reflect his role, without impinging too drastically on the illusion of reality. But in the cases of Ramsch and Simson, the characterization which is exemplified in their indicative names has a more serious influence on the realism of the novel, since they constitute the main opposition to Bienkopp, respectively in the first and second parts.

Julian Ramsch is without redeeming features, committing adultery and manslaughter, bribery, blackmail and common assault in pursuit of his capitalistic goals. When Bienkopp founds his collective farm, it is a direct consequence of Ramsch's activities, although, as he makes clear to Bullert, he is not seeking personal vengeance on Ramsch, but an end to the type of Ramsch as a whole (115). Thus Ramsch resembles the capitalist figures of Strittmatter's earlier GDR works in acting as the catalyst which spurs the socialists to support social reforms. And, like them, Ramsch is a one-sided, stereotype figure whose character and role is largely summarized in the profit-at-any-price implications of his name.

However, despite these obvious shortcomings of Ramsch's characterization there are some indications of an attempt to round him out rather more than his spiritual ancestors in the earlier works. For example, there are

scenes in which the humour of the situation works to his advantage, rather than further holding him up to ridicule: His ingenuity in trying to preserve his profits in a Socialist society is illustrated in the incident in which he travels to make an illegal bank deposit in West Berlin; he evades the border control by ostentatiously reading a book entitled "Über kommunistische Erziehung" (166). And when he finally decides to flee to the West, he solves the problem of how to persuade his mother to leave the family estate by arranging to have a telegram sent to her announcing the illness of a West German relative whom she then goes to visit (209).

An even more significant indication that Ramsch is something slightly more than the "billiger Klassenfeind" of Strittmatter's earlier GDR works,<sup>124</sup> is contained in the description of his downfall. This is not the exemplary destruction of the capitalist exploiter by the combined efforts of the socialists. Although one of the reasons for Ramsch's flight to the West is his inability to make a profit "nach Belieben" (166), there are more immediate personal reasons too: He is being blackmailed by a former employee and also by Bienkopp's wife, who hopes to be able to renew their former liaison in the West. And even when he does flee, Ramsch is not consigned to an exemplary punishment. Strittmatter describes in some detail how Ramsch makes a success out of the hula hoop fad in the West (389f). Nor can this be interpreted as a gratuitous comment on the frivolous values of the West, because even the East Germans succumb to the fad: "Die Zone hat jetzt angebissen. Hula politisch auf Vormarsch!" (390). There is also some attempt to evoke sympathy for him, when it emerges that he is himself being exploited by Western agents, as a valuable source of propaganda. But eventually he can no longer endure the isolation from his own kind, and flees: "Das halte aus wer mag! . . . Denkmal alter

Zeiten in roter Brandung" (168). Bienkopp, and the new order he represents, have prevailed.

In the main however, Ramsch's search for profit by any available means so predominates his characterization that his struggle often takes on the ritual quality of a struggle between good and evil--an impression Strittmatter apparently deliberately wishes to evoke for example in describing Ramsch's departure to the West to the accompaniment of a violent thunderstorm (211).

The departure of Ramsch coincides with the end of the first part of Ole Bienkopp, signifying that it constitutes a definite caesura in the history of the village. The first part is concerned with the period up to 1949 and Ramsch's flight comes as the climax of the post-war process of social change, symbolizing the end of capitalism as a determining factor in village life.

During the first Part, the main motivation for the action was supplied by the conflict of interest between the emerging socialists and the remnants of capitalism epitomized by Ramsch. H. Redeker, in an article describing the changing image of society in East German literature, has shown that once this "antagonistic" class conflict was resolved, it became necessary for authors to develop the so-called "non-antagonistic" conflicts "innerhalb der sozialistischen Gemeinschaft und . . . in den Menschen selbst" and that this in turn demanded a less categorical, more complex approach to characterization.<sup>125</sup> By implication, figures like Ramsch should tend to disappear with the adoption of the new "non-antagonistic" conflicts as the source of motivation.

Bienkopp's principal opponent after the departure of Ramsch and the end of the major ideological confrontations is however cast in a very

similar mold to Ramsch, as a one-sided, stereotypical figure. Like Dürr, Frieda Simson bears a name which is completely and obviously ironic.<sup>126</sup> Unlike her biblical namesake, she weakens and demoralizes all she touches, and her weapon is words not deeds (376). Strittmatter caricatures her as a "dressierter Mensch," whose staccato speech consists of Party jargon and imprecations, and is described as a "Räubersprache" (143). She, and by extension the Party authority she claims to represent, are consistently held up for ridicule to an almost ludicrous extent, for example when she decides it would serve her best political interests to spend the night with a Party official and then threatens to indict herself "wegen Unmoral" on the next morning (310).

The characterization of Simson has led to an almost universal criticism in East Germany of Strittmatter's "unbalanced" view of the relationship between individual and society; because of this, the novel is said not to "do justice to the dialectics of life."<sup>127</sup> But apart from these political considerations, serious aesthetic objections have been raised, because Simson is a fundamentally unrealistic figure in a realistic setting: ". . . ihr Anstrich steht fest, sie ist statisch inmitten der Bewegung der übrigen."<sup>128</sup> The almost completely negative caricature is not relieved in any way, for example by narrator's comments. Those too are unpardoning: "Frieda, Frieda! Die Rechthaberei zerfrißt ihre Lebensfreude. Sollte sie vielleicht zum Arzt gehen und sich neue Schablonen vorschreiben lassen?" (300).

By caricaturing Simson in this way, as he did Ramsch, the main opponent to Bienkopp's plans in the first part of the novel, Strittmatter in effect weakens the argument represented by Bienkopp. Simson and Ramsch are not adequate rivals to the much more rounded, realistic figure of



Bienkopp because they are too obviously representative. Both stand for an extreme point of view rather than offering a realistic alternative to Bienkopp's position. On the one hand Ramsch's belief in the individual's right to exploit others "nach Belieben" for personal, material benefit (166), negates any social responsibility; and on the other, Simson's belief that individual or local initiative betrays "mangelhaftes Vertrauen zum Staatsapparat" (293) would deny any individual responsibility. Simson is too obviously conceived as a schematic counterpart to Ramsch, with similarly exaggerated, one-sided characterization, to be a realistic socialist rival to Bienkopp.

As may be seen by the comparison with Strittmatter's own earlier works, Ole Bienkopp still contains many of the distortions which were characteristic of the polemical works of the 1950's. By reducing the opposition to Bienkopp to caricature, Strittmatter has fallen into the same dogmatic pattern of the earlier works, implying that, although Party dogma is not here the summum bonum, there is still only one correct way--Bienkopp's way.

Nevertheless, despite these strong reservations about the characterization of such important figures as Dürr, Simson and Ramsch, there is clearly a considerable difference between Strittmatter's own earlier works, and the literary standards they reflected, and Ole Bienkopp. As Hans Koch pointed out in his highly influential article on the image of man in socialist literature, the socialist society, by definition an evolutionary society, could not long continue to be reflected in a literature which concentrated on a fixed ideological standpoint and static, unbending characters.<sup>129</sup> He therefore considers Ole Bienkopp a most essential contribution to East German literature because of its presentation of the

individual who has made a commitment to socialism but is not, for that reason "fad, farblos und langweilig."<sup>130</sup>

In 1961, after living for two years in Berlin as President of the Schriftstellerverband, Strittmatter decided to return to live in the country for reasons which he explained later: "Ich mußte nicht nur wissen, wie die Genossenschaften entstehen; wie die Menschen dabei fühlen und sich verhalten wollte ich sehen."<sup>131</sup> The emphasis on the individual, as opposed to the process, which is contained here is in sharp contrast to Strittmatter's concern only three years earlier to extrapolate the process from the day-to-day reality:

Es ist mir einfach nicht möglich, alle Verästelungen eines Vorgangs, den ich beschreiben und künstlerisch gestalten will, aufzuspüren, wenn ich mich nicht in die ökonomischen und politischen Zusammenhänge . . . vertiefe.<sup>132</sup>

In his appreciation of Ole Bienkopp, Koch implies that it is just such a turning away from the concern with abstract social or ideological processes towards more practical human concerns that distinguishes this novel as an innovative influence on East German literature:

In Strittmatters Roman wird die Idee der sozialistischen Schöpferkraft des befreiten Volkes . . . zur eigentlichen Substanz des ästhetischen Wertmaßstabes. . . . Mit Recht gilt ihm die Realität dieser Idee in unserem Leben, in der Wirklichkeit selbst als das eigentliche Menschliche und darum als das Ästhetische: Kriterium, wenn man so will, der Schönheit von Menschen in unserer Zeit.<sup>133</sup>

The purpose of this comparison of Strittmatter's four major works on the GDR has been to show that, despite the fundamental similarities of plot, setting and theme, the essential difference between Ole Bienkopp and its predecessors is in its more realistic image of the individual and so of the collective society. By using one of Strittmatter's most char-

acteristic techniques, the indicative name, as a yardstick, it has been possible to demonstrate how, in several very important respects, the old categorical standards of the 1950's are retained and severely affect the realism and the persuasive force of the novel. But in other respects, Strittmatter is able to create a much more widely differentiated, complex, and therefore more realistic, image of society, in part, through the more skillful and subtle use of the indicative name. This society is shown to consist of individuals who may be committed to the principle of collectivism, but need not be reduced to faceless cyphers for that reason.

## II. H. Kant: Die Aula

### a. Introduction

Like Strittmatter, Hermann Kant came by his political convictions after the war, so that his loyalties are as much to the state, the GDR, as to the ideological principle of Socialism. He was too young to take part in the Party's activities before the end of the war (being born in 1926) but became a committed socialist at the "Antifascist-School" in the Polish prisoner-of-war camp where he spent four years. He credits the enlightened educational policies of the GDR (the so-called "Zweiter Bildungsweg" which allowed otherwise unqualified adults access to higher education) with giving him the opportunity to become a successful journalist, critic and author. His novel Die Aula (1965) is in a sense a paeon to this "Bildungsrevolution" undertaken by the GDR and in particular to the Arbeiter- und Bauernfakultäten (ABF), one of which he attended from 1949-52.<sup>134</sup> But although his protagonist Robert Iswall shares the same biographical background and the ABF is the principle setting of the novel, his purpose in writing Die Aula was neither autobiography nor a documentary novel assessing the achievements of the ABF. Both Iswall and the ABF show signs of a more ambitious undertaking: namely a retrospective consideration of the origins and conditions of the relationship between individual and collective in the GDR.

The ABF are closely associated with the early years of the GDR. They were created in 1949, the year of the foundation of the GDR as a state, and the philosophy underlying the political activities of the times was very

much reflected in the constitution of the new faculties. Their function was to answer a specific and temporary need which was as much political as educational. They were to provide an educational opportunity to a generation of students who by and large fell between those schooled in the upheavals of the Nazi years and the generation which would receive its education principally or entirely under the aegis of the GDR; that is, the ABF students were old enough to have come in contact with Nazism but still young enough to benefit from education under the new regime.

Entry to the ABF was selective, reflecting their other, political function. The students were selected not only on the basis of proven academic and technical abilities but also according to their social origin, preference being given to political activists or to those delegated by their fellow workers. At the ABF, they were to be given the opportunity to acquire university entrance qualifications and hence access to high positions within the emerging East German social structure.<sup>135</sup> From the state's point of view these students were an elite group with the potential to contribute substantially in later years, both intellectually and politically, to the development of the GDR.

By 1963, when most of the ABF were closed, almost 34,000 former students had gone to university, which is a measure of the success of the ABF in fulfilling the educational role foreseen for them in 1949.<sup>136</sup> However, it is much more difficult to measure how far they also fulfilled their implied social and political role, by helping to improve the understanding of, or involvement in, the workings of East German society. Although Kant is not attempting to provide a documentary, sociological assessment of the influence of the ABF, it is this general aspect, rather than, say, their practical, educational effect that concerns him in Die Aula.

Superficially, the ABF resembled a controlled experiment in which the state removed all possible obstacles to success. The students who were selected seemed to be actually, or potentially, disposed to making the experiment succeed; they lived and worked in a close, laboratory setting of like-minded people who shared a broadly similar interest in the success of the experiment.

But, as Kant presents it in Die Aula, the ABF is far from being an isolated experiment conducted under ideal conditions. A clue to his real intentions in taking up the subject is contained in the epigraph from Heine with which he chooses to preface the novel:

Der heutige Tag ist  
ein Resultat des gestrigen.  
Was dieser gewollt hat,  
müssen wir erforschen,  
wenn wir zu wissen wünschen,  
was jener will.(5)

That is, he is concerned with the broad question of how history influences the present. The principle, but understated, very largely implicit, role of the ABF therefore is evidently to reflect the GDR as a whole and in particular the influence of the early years on the present state. Kant does not indicate anywhere directly that this is so, but the emphasis of the descriptions of life in the ABF during its early stages is sufficiently clear: That the ABF were founded at the same time as the GDR itself is a historical fact, but in the novel, the emphasis from the moment the new Faculty opens is on its social purpose not the educational opportunities it offers: the Director's welcoming speech mentions only one dominant function of education: that it is a weapon, to be used to destroy privilege and class barriers (49). And in his description of the ABF, Kant only mentions the academic activities in so far as they reveal social or polit-

ical characteristics of the staff or students; the great majority of the descriptions of ABF life concern extra-curricular activities of a social or political nature. From this point of view, the ABF also reflects the concerns of life in the GDR as a whole.

Under the circumstances in which the ABF were conceived, the students and staff cannot be expected to represent all shades of political opinion in the GDR at the time; but by having a microcosmic Socialist society as the setting, Kant very largely excluded those conservative social or political groups, such as private property owners or social democrats, who ceased to have any real influence on East Germany's development after the early 1950's. Thus, through the limited society of the ABF, Kant is able to focus on the foundations of political viewpoints and social values which surfaced during the 1960's. To this extent, Die Aula represents an attempt to come to terms with the crucial period when East Germany first began to evolve its present identity. H. Mohr has described it as a good example of a kind of prose arising in the 1960's which increased a sense of identity among East Germans, by developing their awareness of their own socialist past: "Der 'reale Gesellschaftswert' von literarischen Arbeiten [wie dieser] liegt in der Ausbildung 'sozialistischen Geschichtsbeußtseins' und damit in einer Vertiefung sozialistischen Selbstverständnisses."<sup>137</sup>

b. On approaching the social implications of Die Aula

Before considering Kant's treatment of the theme of individual and collective, it is advisable to describe in very general terms the tone and style of the novel, because, more so than in any previous GDR novel, they tend to dominate the meaning. In other words, whatever can be said

in general about Kant's view of the GDR must always be qualified because of the way he says it.

Although popular success is rarely a guarantee of critical approval, especially in the GDR, in the case of Die Aula, those elements which led to its popularity seem to have been the qualities most appreciated by the critics. The novel was indeed very successful: After being serialized in the journal Forum in 1964, it sold out almost as soon as it appeared in 1965; it had eleven editions in East Germany in the next five years and 25,000 copies were printed in West Germany in the same period. A play based on the novel was produced in 1968 and also had considerable success. Kant himself, who had been known mainly as a literary critic until that time, although he had published a collection of stories, Ein bißchen Südsee, in 1962, became something of a celebrity. He lectured on both sides of the border and was interviewed in the popular press and by literary journals.<sup>138</sup>

Critics at the time in East and West Germany seem to have been almost surprised that a novel from the GDR could be entertaining as well as falling within acceptable socialist realist criteria. F. Schonauer for example wrote in Neue Rundschau that it was the first time an East German author had written about his society in a form which was not "so full of activists, heroes of labour and class strugglers that one wanted to yawn."<sup>139</sup> In the GDR itself critics tended to comment on the novel's popularity as proof of how successful the cultural policies of the "Bitterfelder Weg" had been and of the greater self-confidence of their society.<sup>140</sup> In general, it was "recommended energetically" by the Party critics as a worthy product of their cultural line.<sup>141</sup>

In large part the attraction of the novel is its episodic, anecdotal style. This derives from the plot, which is mainly a retrospective



view of the narrator's student days at the ABF: Robert Iswall, one of the best of the first ABF students at his particular university, is invited to give a speech at the ceremony to mark the closing of the faculty in 1962. Because he wants to make an honest, realistic assessment rather than an objective factual résumé of the numbers of doctors, engineers etc. it had created out of former workers and peasants, he decides to immerse himself in the experience again as far as possible. He visits former fellow students and teachers and looks up documents from the time; but mainly he remembers a vast number of episodes and stories (and stories within stories) connected with his time at the ABF. Like Kant, Iswall is a journalist and demonstrates a very good ear for the pointed story, colloquial language, word plays and innuendo, etc. S. and D. Schlenstedt made the style of Die Aula the subject of a fairly lengthy article entitled "Modern erzählt," which probably did much to make the--by then current standards--very "modern" techniques employed in the novel acceptable within the framework of socialist realism. These techniques, which Kant undoubtedly uses more frequently than his predecessors and very effectively, also arise largely from the plot; they include flashbacks, shifting perspectives and time levels, inner monologue (and dialogue) and deliberate confusion of imaginative and "real" descriptions. The Schlenstedts argue that, apart from the autobiographical reason, the choice of a journalist as protagonist/narrator is very apt because a journalist constantly must reflect on and write about many different aspects of life. But here, as in the rest of their article they tend to overemphasize the theoretical point--the journalist's philosophical concern--at the expense of the facts. The novel is not a treatise on social relationships; it reflects far more the quick-wittedness of the journalist than any ponderous musings on

society. As H. Kähler said in commenting on their article: "Wir wollen nicht zuviel in den Roman einlesen."<sup>142</sup>

The novel did seem, possibly because of its success, to attract an unusual number of overzealous supporters. In the West there were those who praised Kant's supposed "Anti-dogmatism" and tried to enfold him into the category of the middle-way, pan-German author.<sup>143</sup> In the East, the initial reaction was, in Kant's own opinion, suspiciously positive. He felt that he did not deserve or want the approbation being heaped on him, because he had not been uncritical of society: "ich [bin] . . . wie ich glaube, doch auch etwas kritisch gewesen."<sup>144</sup>

The source of this "misunderstanding" is mainly the very element of the novel that drew public attention in the first place--namely, its entertaining style. Because it is so episodic and many of the anecdotes have only very limited bearing on the plot ("relative Eigenwertigkeit")<sup>145</sup> the thread or the emphasis of Kant's argument is often lost. Seemingly interesting or important questions may be raised, only to be ignored or fended off with a flippant remark or another story. For example, one of the important plot lines is Iswall's determination to clear up his own conscience about his betrayal of his closest friend at the ABF. He finally meets Trullesand, whom he had cunningly despatched to China for seven years in his jealousy over a love affair, and asks him about the experience in China. One of the arguments implied in the novel is that "all's well that ends well"--Trullesand had become a respected sinologist interested in his work. When Iswall asks about the latest political hard-line in China, Trullesand replies: "Ein Mist ist das. Laß uns lieber über was Lustiges reden. Magst du noch lustige Geschichten?" A story follows, and Iswall is glad to see that his erstwhile friend can still tell a good tale with

a point (303-304).

A most important caveat, that must be stated before any consideration of the social implications of Die Aula, is therefore that, unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Kant is not out to create a tract, but to entertain and engage the imagination: "Wer spricht denn von Bilanz; ich denke doch nur an ein paar Geschichten, die ich erzählen könnte."<sup>146</sup> Although his motivation was apparently to show his appreciation for an underrated aspect of the socialist reforms, the "Bildungsrevolution," he set out to write a book which would "stir people into thinking about it or get a bit closer to it" not a documentary novel.<sup>147</sup> For this reason it is quite mistaken to ignore the strong element of irony with which he deflates the pompous who love to generalize about society. H. Herting for example, in an article published by the Tribüne Verlag (the trades' union press) entitled "Der intellektuelle Held Robert Iswall" stresses the wrong element in saying (in terms Iswall would no doubt also ridicule) "Kant . . . wollte . . . zeigen, wie sich menschliche Schöpferkraft zu entfalten vermag, wenn die entsprechenden gesellschaftlichen Voraussetzungen dafür gegeben sind. Der Schriftsteller macht den realen Humanismus unserer Ordnung sichtbar."<sup>148</sup> She goes on to stress the ideological implications, by saying the novel shows what human qualities capitalism allowed to wither while socialism allows them to unfold.<sup>149</sup> This, and various other appreciative comments on the GDR are undoubtedly implicit, even underneath the irony, but they are not the main point. In a mental version of his speech for example, Iswall imagines parading the chemists and surgeons before the audience: "Ginge es nach mir, verehrte Anwesende, dann ließe ich das Reden sein, dann machte ich was ganz anderes, dann höbe ich den Finger und zeigte auf euch, ihr Mitneunundvierziger, auf jeden einzelnen von euch und sagte:

Steh auf, sag deinen Namen und sag deinen Beruf, den von damals und den von heute, und dann setz dich wieder, denn das ist alles. Alles, was wir brauchen, sind Tatsachen. Und nun steht auf, ihr Tatsachen, und laßt euch sehen!" (249) The focus of the irony is clear here, as everywhere else in the novel: the tendency of bureaucratic socialists to view success and failure in statistical terms only. The statistics and "facts" of the ABF's achievements are emphatically not what Kant intends to emphasize as the point of the novel.

Kant's concern in Die Aula is principally the individuals involved in the process of social change and not the abstract sum of their experiences. This is both the greatest benefit of the novel and the source of most of the criticism. In his apparent enjoyment of the depiction of events and character, he tends often to ignore the plot and the lines of argument he himself has set up. The most serious flaws of this kind are the incidents involving Trullesand's being despatched to China (which has overtones of the Stalinist personality cult) and the affair in which an outstanding member of the collective ABF community, "Quasi" Riek, suddenly flees the country to become a "Kneipenwirt" in Hamburg. Neither of these matters is resolved in any satisfactory way, although both preoccupy Iswall throughout his research into the ABF. Schonauer, somewhat unjustly, accuses Kant of deliberate superficiality in this context; "Er hat am Thema, das sich aus der Inanspruchnahme des Individuums durch die totale sozialistische Gesellschaft ergibt, bewußt und sehr virtuos vorbei erzählt."<sup>150</sup> Whatever Kant's motives, though, the point is that any attempt to assess the image of society presented in Die Aula must be qualified by the fact that he himself often fails to draw the full general consequences of the specific examples he offers.

### c. Individuality and collectivisation

When Robert Iswall first appears for his interview for the ABF, he becomes involved in a squabble (21), which almost ends in a fist-fight outside the interview room (26-27) and, during the interview itself, he causes some dissension among the board by insisting that his reasons for applying were strictly personal (21-23). Kant's description of the opening of the ABF thus begins with a distinctly iconoclastic blow to the mythical image of socialist solidarity. Presumably the students applying and the faculty appointed to the ABF shared a common belief in the principles of Socialism, but by introducing the ABF in the way he does, Kant evidently wishes to emphasize that the roads were many although the general destination may have been the same.

In his description of the ABF, Kant concentrates on the earliest months, as the students adjust to their new environment and to one another. But the many anecdotes and incidents which fill the first half of the novel are not considered just character exposition. It is in these first months of the existence of the ABF and, significantly, of the GDR too, that the students and faculty with their various backgrounds and characteristics are first thrown together in a collective venture. By concentrating on these first few weeks Kant suggests that first impressions, as the individual comes in contact with the collective, are vital. It is then that the individual makes the first practical comparison between personal and collective values; and it is here that Iswall concentrates, in sniffing out the "Duft von damals" (179), because, as he knows from personal experience, contact with the pressures of the collective way of life later altered many an individual's sense of values.

The sheer physical adjustment, from mostly physical to mostly mental activity does not take the students more than three weeks (98). It is the individual psychological adjustments to collective living which principally interest Kant and which are the underlying point of most of the stories and incidents drawn from the first weeks. Virtually every aspect of the ABF is related to this central issue--even, for example the descriptions of the various classes and their instructors. And here too, as in the description of Iswall's interview, it is the diversity, not the similarity, of the personalities which is emphasized, so that each one represents a different facet of the individual's adjustment to collectivity.

#### i) Individuality -- The Students

The ABF and so, indirectly, the principle of collectivity, is seen mainly through the eyes of the four students living together in the room they call "Red October." Through these four, Kant demonstrates a wide range of individual attitudes, varying from idealistic belief in the collective ideal to outright compulsion in the name of the collective, and from what appears to be dilettante curiosity to desire for political and intellectual knowledge. The ABF is thus by no means presented simply as a panacea for the frustrated hopes and utopian dreams of a large section of the young adult population of East Germany; some are there by choice, but others by chance it seems.

In introducing each of the students Kant consistently emphasizes the personal motives for their being at the ABF. With the possible exception of "Quasi" Riek, there are few signs of an overwhelming sense of collective solidarity. Indeed, in the case of his principal character,

Kant appears to be at pains to emphasize the very opposite.

At his selection interview Iswall makes virtually no concessions to contemporary political platitudes, insisting that his reasons for applying were purely personal-- "Nein, das ist privat" (23): He had lost his job, because he had no particular inclination to follow his employer to the West, and had decided, strictly for family reasons, to leave home. He had applied to the People's Police as well as to the ABF (which at least demonstrated political consistency), and had come to the ABF, rather than the police, only because they had replied first. Finally, he even has to be persuaded to register (23). In all, the impression is given that Iswall's arrival at the ABF has been part accident and part opportunism, with ideology playing only an insignificant role.

But Iswall is not so politically nonchalant as his interview suggests. As is the case with the novel itself, there is a strong undercurrent of ideological conviction beneath the lackadaisical exterior. It emerges much later, that, before entering the ABF, he had remained in a Polish prison camp an extra year after his release, in order to teach in the Antifascist School, to atone in his own way for German war damage (171). This private, modest act belies the more public iconoclastic attitude Iswall so often adopts at the ABF. Nor are his reasons for applying there in the first place as opportunistic as he implied in the interview: He tells his girl-friend in the first week of the first semester that the ABF holds the promise to him of helping fulfil his long-held dream of a new, peaceful and respected German state. So much so that he could "burst with pride" that he is an ABF student (74).

However, at first Iswall's political conviction appears to be confined to trivia and all too often takes the form of petty prejudice--such

as his deliberate brusqueness towards some middle-class girls whose speech he finds stilted (32), or his sarcasm towards a helpful medical worker who prefers to use her own serviette and silver spoon in a cafeteria (115). It is only slightly less trivial when he baulks at the Barock splendour of the auditorium of the university to which his ABF is attached, on the grounds that it is too ostentatious for a faculty of workers and peasants (8-9).

Rather than treating these episodes as a trivial distortion of a serious political change of values, or the light-hearted symptoms of a more serious conviction, Kant appears to take them just as seriously, as convincing proof of the bourgeois menace. For example, after describing Iswall's reaction to seeing students knock and stamp to greet a lecturer, he seems to justify Iswall's criticism that it is bourgeois by spending two pages (19-21) to illustrate the pedantic verbosity of the professor and his patronizing attitude to the working-class Iswall. The major weakness in Kant's (and Iswall's) image of those times is that, while they can be highly critical of the "bourgeois" prejudice that exists, they do not explain or understand their own beliefs--they react on a purely emotional basis. A typical example is the description of the opening ceremony, which consists largely of two speeches: The university President conveys a narrowly specialized conservative view of education in a dry, rambling speech which patronizes the new faculty. This speech covers two pages (47-49). By contrast, the speech by the director of the ABF, Völschow, which lasts an hour, is covered in nine lines and reported for its effect (rousing jubilation) on the ABF students and not at all for its content.

On the other hand, perhaps Kant's image (Iswall's memory) of the times accurately reflects the polarized thinking of the "antifaschistisch-demokratische Umwälzung." The imagery and the mentality of



the early period of collectivization are militaristic and aggressive.

The role of the ABF in the eyes of both faculty and students is to destroy bourgeois social prejudice. (One wonders if the bourgeois element in universities and society was still as strong by 1949, as Kant suggests). On the first day for example Iswall and his friend Trullesand dream of storming the provocatively aristocratic university auditorium, the symbol to them of social and educational privilege (8-9). And the ABF director Völschow uses precisely the same militaristic metaphor in his formal address of welcome to the first ABF students; he praises their courage in reporting to storm the ramparts of educational elitism. These ramparts are protected by "Hochmut, Vorurteilen, Angst umbedrohte Privilegien, Aberglauben und Klassendünkel " (49). However, there is a significant difference in these two passages, which indicates an idea that is to become much more important as the novel progresses: the one major distinction between Völschow's metaphorical vision and Trullesand and Iswall's is that he sees the attack as a collective effort by the ABF as an institution, whereas the two students see it as a personal struggle, an excuse for individual heroics which, only incidentally, is for the ultimate benefit of all (9).

Iswall's particular brand of individualism with commitment, which more than anything else sets the overall tone of the novel, is explained to some extent in the description of his "Zahlenschreck" (58). His abhorrence of any inclination to reduce life to an abstract is typified by his complete anathema to mathematics. Thus Frau Tuschmann's novella, in which characters are completely without any inconsistency with their assigned roles and move "like Billiard-balls," is described as "angewandte Mathematik" and nothing at all to do with real life--"das hatte Buckel

und Risse, und die Menschen auch" (25). Later, in a comment which (in context) has obvious connotations for all who try to generalize from life, whether for literary or political reasons, Iswall says that he doubts whether real individuals could ever look back on a life "in dem alles reimt, in dem es so geordnet und übersichtlich zugegangen ist wie in einer arithmetischen Reihe" because life simply has too many "Zwickmühlen, Zwangslagen, Fallgruben und Alternativen" (208). That is to say, he, or Kant, is arguing in effect that there are imponderables in life which defy mathematical summary and therefore also exact prognosis. The essential, as far as Iswall's project is concerned, is to be as aware of those imponderables as possible.

Gerd Trullesand's arrival at the ABF is not so fortuitous as Iswall's. Although he came of his own accord (27), he speaks of being persuaded by family and friends, who felt he was outstanding, "vorneweg" (36). This knowledge, that they, as well as his fellow carpenters, expect him to shine at the ABF, gives Trullesand a perpetual "Furcht im Nacken" (37). That is, unlike Iswall, he feels a strong moral responsibility to live up to the expectations of others. This proves to be the weak spot on which those who wield the authority of the collective can play to get their way with Trullesand.

Trullesand has a basic personal reason to be at the ABF. He wants to find a scientific basis for his "selbstgezimmerten moralischen Plattform" (27) by studying philosophy eventually: "die Sache muß von der Wurzel her aufgerollt werden" (28). This is the reason why he can appreciate Latin as the language of science whilst others reject it as "constructed" (101-2). His interest is not only in finding a rational solution to political problems, such as the causes of war (28), but to all human relationships, even

his relations with girls, where, he is forced to admit, putting theory before practice can be a distinct hindrance at times (89f).

In general, Trullesand may perhaps best be described as a humanist seeking a rational basis for human relationships which is neither sentimental--he warns a fellow former Stettiner to accept that their city is Polish now (27)--nor too coldly rationalistic--he criticizes Iswall's abrupt dismissal of a girl-friend, because he had not the courage to tell her in person (119). Until he finds the best solution, Trullesand puts more faith in the humanistic goals of the collective cause, than in his own individual inclinations, the prime example being his willingness to give up his plans to study philosophy and go to China "um der Sache willen" (299).

Jakob Filter on the other hand approached the ABF with neither the sense of responsibility nor the intellectual ambition of Trullesand. He appears to have been victimized rather than challenged by the collective cause. He too has been persuaded to attend the ABF, but, unlike Trullesand, not out of any concern for his welfare. He had been made to feel the weight of an arbitrary collective authority when, despite his strong objections, he had been delegated, in the name of democracy, "mit der man einen überreden kann, auch wenn er nicht will," to fill the local quota of applicants (250).

But Filter does not react, as might have been expected, by representing the system which caused him such trouble. He simply withdraws himself from all political activity, for example by putting up a clothes line while others discuss the political merits of Völschow's formal welcome (50), or reminding his roommates to get some sleep at the height of their excitement over a marching song they have just composed (77). But,

oddly, his dampening remarks do not cause resentment among his roommates nor is he subjected to political agitation of the kind meted out later to other dissenters.

Filter arrives at the ABF in a state of almost pristine innocence as compared with the worldliness and scepticism shown by his urbanized roommates. He himself uses the phrase "ihr aus der Stadt" to denote a basic distinction, in this case between urban and rural humour (50). But his innocence is not only a result of his rural background and lack of experience; Iswall comments with amazement on the fact that he never read a single fairy-story and infers from this and Filter's strictly utilitarian approach to study that the problem is his complete lack of imagination: "Er hat keinen Sinn für Wunder . . . keine Phantasie" (202). The implication is that this also explains Filter's unimaginative view of collectivity: to him the ABF is nothing more than an intrusion into his life as a forester, which he fully expects to continue once the years of formal education are over (251).

But in spite of his passive approach to collectivity, it is Filter who becomes Iswall's ideal of the ABF graduate. When he visits Filter in 1962, Iswall finds him as an administrator; now, what attracts Iswall to him above other former ABF students is his humour and self-assurance. Filter had been directed into the bureaucracy much as he was earlier delegated to the ABF; but now he has a new quality--imagination--which gives him the ability to accept that he must compromise his dreams of going back to the forest (244).

Filter is first introduced as a disinterested outsider whose initial commitment to the GDR is only tacit--he remains there--and whose allegiance to the principle of collectivity is non-existent. But the Filter

Iswall meets in 1962 sees a constructive purpose in his work for the state --he becomes upset at Iswall's suggestion that the bureaucratic machinery is often a "Kafkatour" (243); more important, as far as Iswall is concerned, is the fact that Filter is one representative of state authority who commands the respect of the field workers by his humility and his thorough knowledge of both the theory and practice of forestry (252).

Kant characterizes Filter as a vital bridge between the individual citizen and the collective authority (251-252). But his description of how Filter bridged that gap in himself is very vague: Filter decides to join the Party at the end of his years at the ABF, apparently for no other reason than that he had enjoyed the company of his roommates--"Das war die beste Zeit unseres Lebens" (239). After being pressed to become an administrative, rather than a practical, forester, he suddenly "acquires" the imagination to see beyond his personal frustrations and discomforts to the purpose of his work (244). His conversion to the idea of contributing to the collective at the expense of his own individual dreams is thus based on two singularly abrupt changes in attitude and character, neither of which is foreshadowed in the Filter of ABF days, the one being his decision to join the Party and the other his "acquisition" of an imagination. As H. Kähler comments, in view of Filter's exemplary role in the novel, more details of his story are indeed needed.<sup>151</sup>

Iswall's praise of the new Filter over all other ABF graduates --"vor euch allen" (252)--suggests that Filter is intended to demonstrate the persuasiveness of the collective argument over the individual--if the ABF could convince one so uncommitted as Filter, it must have a strong point. If this is Kant's intention, and Filter is supposed to grow from a typical character in the sense of being average, unexceptional, to being

a typical character as Socialist Realism defines the word--that is, exemplifying the progress of the social revolution--Kant misses his mark badly. Filter's new position vis à vis the collective smacks of resignation, of accepting the inevitable with good grace and making the best he can of it: "Ja mein Traum ist es nicht, aber es hat doch einen Sinn. Ich hatte mich zwar mit wallendem Vollbart und Schonzeitbüchse in einem ruhigen Revier gesehen, aber mit etwas Phantasie siehst du den Wald auch in einer Statistik" (244).

If Filter is shown to progress from individuality to acceptance of the principle of collectivity, the fourth member of the quartet living in the room "Roter Oktober" follows almost exactly the opposite course. Quasi Riek enters the ABF as a fanatical believer in collective action and at the end of his three years there, abruptly and without explanation flees to the West, where he becomes the owner of a bar in Hamburg. His conviction about the need for collective action was never doubted by anyone; Iswall felt he was "für unser Land wie geschaffen" and vice versa (129). That is why his defection seemed so completely out of character. Iswall professes to be completely baffled by it to the end, but Kant offers several indirect suggestions why Riek might suddenly be disappointed in his ideal of the collective society.

The first point to make is that Riek's allegiance to the collective is principled, not blind. This is the gist of the incident in which he tracks down a sugar thief in his factory, but, once he has extracted a promise that the thefts will stop, he does not resort to the law. His aim was to educate the thief to the principle of collective ownership, not extract retribution in the name of a monolithic collective authority (180). He does not insist on the absolute authority of the collective

principle, but tries to show the thief the rational basis for his faith.

At the ABF Riek's faith in the collective principle takes the form of a near-genial ability for organization (129): He organizes room-allocation and fuel storage, he sets up a study roster and a timetable for visits to the clinic. But occasionally his zeal overtakes him and he is forced to realize that there is a point beyond which people will refuse to be organised. The two comic incidents in which he tries to introduce uniform hats to increase the sense of solidarity among the ABF students are cases in point (54, 253).

Riek's faith in organization as a principle of life is defined more clearly in a discussion on the merits of studying Latin. For all his appreciation of order and control, Riek detests Latin: it is "ausgedacht," "Wie aus dem Stabilbaukasten!" (101). It seems to him to have been invented by someone with not the least "Beziehungen zum Volk" (101). Evidently he recognizes here, as he does in the hat incidents, that the ultimate justification for organization must be the interests of the people concerned, not the principle of organization alone.

But these attitudes are the commonplaces of official pronouncements, which always invoke the nebulous idea of the people when speaking of organization, and mass activity. This does not explain why Riek should reject the GDR--particularly when he had every prospect of a brilliant career as a mathematician.

The roots of Riek's fanatical loyalty to the collective idea seem to lie in his family background and the desperate frustration he felt at the sudden and arbitrary killing of his young brother, whom he had only recently nursed to health for the first time in his nine years of life: "Wozu hab ich ihn durch den Gasgestank gehetzt . . . wenn dann

so ein Mistvieh kommen kann und schießt ihm mit der Kanone ein Loch in den Rücken" (132). The idea of an organized, controlled existence under a socialist form of government may have appeared to Riek to offer a solution to the sense of the meaninglessness of life he felt at this incident; and, in the absence of any close relatives, it seems that the collective acts as a substitute family: he, more than any of the other students uses the phrases from the organized camaraderie of the FDJ, such as "Freundschaft, Freunde!" (44), and "Jugendfreunde" (46). At times it is as if the collective is a refuge for him, from any kind of individual responsibility; whenever he is faced with a direct question, especially on political matters, he is described as taking refuge in the organization, by suggesting a discussion be held on the matter (45).

To Riek it appears that the collective principle offers a refuge from the insecurity he feels alone. He admits to having a fear of sickness and death which almost verges on superstition (130). The friendship and recognition he seeks, and finds, in the ABF seem to act as a haven from these fears. But then, at the very end of it all, something happens which destroys his image.

When Iswall meets Riek in Hamburg, the only direct reference he will make to the ABF is to tell Iswall that he has no illusions about the incident of Trullesand's trip to China and that he keeps those particular thoughts warm in his memory "für den Fall, daß ich mal Heimweh kriege, die helfen einem dann schnell darüber hinweg" (136). Whatever the reason for his leaving the GDR, whether it lay in the mysterious meeting before the fateful discussion of the China trip or not (297), the fact remains that it is the memory of Iswall's behaviour, in sacrificing his closest friend in an outburst of jealousy and by the use of political position, which



prevents Riek from returning to the GDR. Having once pursued the goal of collectivity with all energy, Riek now rejects it equally vehemently, because of this one incident. If indeed Riek's attachment to Socialism and the collective society in particular was emotional, based on his desire to force "jedes Durcheinander in ein übersichtliches Schema" (297), that is, to bring order into what to him had seemed an irrational, capricious life, then it would seem that his faith was destroyed because he saw Iswall's totally irrational, selfish act sanctified in the name of the collective cause.

But here, as in the case of Filter's conversion to Party member and state official, Kant avoids direct explanations. The specific aspects of the collective society which attract Filter and frustrate Riek are not made clear. The role of the students in Die Aula is evidently to state the position of the individual in the collective society. To a great extent, the students themselves, or the events befalling them, do this by demonstrating what the collective should not do--for example: it should not eradicate individuality (Iswall); it should not abuse the individual's trust in the principle of collectivity (Trullesand); it should not rely on coercion to convert the uncommitted (Filter); and it should not become an arbitrary, autocratic force (Riek).

## ii) Collectivism -- The Staff

The main case for the principle of collectivity is made through the teachers and administrators of the ABF. It is they who set the initial course of the institution, and they exert the greatest influence on the students by their example. Here too Kant emphasizes the social influences rather than the academic, so that when he describes a typical class of

each of the more important teachers, it is always their approach to the subject rather than the subject itself which is paramount. Kant is also careful to distinguish between subject and instructor for this reason; it is possible, for example, for Trullesand to favour the subject, Latin, but detest the instructor, Angelhoff (102).

There are three members of faculty who exert the greatest influence on the students, Völschow, the President, Angelhoff, the Latin instructor, and Riebenlamm, who teaches history. Each of these three is a convinced Socialist, but each has a very distinctive understanding of what that entails. To this extent they, like the students, represent a variety of views of the collective society. But the obvious distinction must be made that they are shaping society while the students are generally only reacting to it at first.

As the president of the new faculty, Völschow tends to consider the theoretical functions of the ABF, its overall social role and its political goals. His resounding phrases about the storming of the entrenched positions of higher education can rouse the new students to great enthusiasm (49f). But he tends to speak in similarly sonorous tones in other, less formal circumstances too--for example when interviewing the prospective student Iswall. He can barely suppress his oratorical style, but speaks, as if addressing a large audience, with rhetorical questions and slogans: "Unser Land braucht alle Hände. Aber braucht es nicht auch alle Köpfe? In der Tat braucht es sie. In der jetzigen Situation ist es, wie Genosse Stalin sagt: Die Kader entscheiden alles" (22).

Völschow's favourite phrase to summarize his philosophy for the ABF is: "Des Geistes Licht, des Wissens Macht, dem ganzen Volk sei's gegeben!" (49). He sees the students as waifs who are to benefit from the

paternalistic generosity of the state--he speaks of them as educational and social "Waisenknaben" (passim) who are to become "prächtige Repräsentanten des Neuen" (191).

With these high-flown phrases and broad social vision, Völschow creates an image of the ABF as primarily a creation of the state and the students consequently become less significant as individuals; their role is to fulfil the collective mission foreseen for them by the state, by bringing the light of the intellect and the power of knowledge "in ihre eigentliche Heimstatt, ins Volk" (191). Although he pays lip-service to the notion that the cadre, the basic social unit in the political hierarchy, is the source of political activism, he betrays a different attitude in practice: When Angelhoff questions the choice of words when he quotes Stalin to Iswall, Völschow re-phrases his quotation in an illuminating way: "Ist die richtige politische Linie gegeben so entscheiden die Kader alles!" (22). In practice he aligns himself with the orthodox practice that the Party, and therefore the State, alone has the ability and right to interpret and put into effect the will of the people.

But in spite of the faint air of irony which surrounds the portrayal of Völschow and his association with the Stalinist view of politics, he is not intended to be a negative influence. He is not only a man of words but is prepared to live up to his nickname, "Alter Fritz," literally, as well as in spirit, by physically leading his forces against social injustice (75). Völschow's positive contribution to the development of the ABF is summarized in a fittingly ironic but nevertheless positive verdict by the narrator: ". . . und wenn auch manches über Völschow zu sagen war, so konnte doch niemand leugnen, daß er bisher immer alles getan hatte, damit die Waisenknaben zu dem Ihrigen kamen" (255). And even Ribenlamm,

who in many ways is Völschow's opposite, and who admits to laughing at his fixation about his orphans, concedes that beneath the pompous exterior Völschow was basically correct in his judgement (206). Here as elsewhere Kant's irony acts as a gentler substitute for outright criticism.<sup>152</sup>

In matters involving the practical details of his social revolution, Völschow usually tries to avoid making interpretations of policy. This he prefers to leave to the Party, either at the local headquarters (111), or he will bow to the insistence of the Party representative on staff, Angelhoff (22).

In his role as Party secretary, Angelhoff often acts as Chief Inquisitor, using the various tactics of agitprop to unmask or browbeat the unwary. He likes to play the reluctant public conscience, by appearing to have to overcome his petit-bourgeois scruples before reeling off the misdemeanours of the opposition. He is a master of the use of innuendo and character assassination.

Angelhoff exhibits his talents as a political agitator for example in dealing with the doctor who diagnoses a mild case of tuberculosis and agrees to let the patient, Riek, who has no close relatives, be treated by his roommates: He argues that this treatment distracts, in all, four students from their main duties; and he implies that there is malice aforethought involved, that the doctor, a practical man with scant regard for dogma (112), somehow engineered the affair--after all, he had qualified in Bonn in 1934 and he had declined to join the Society for the Study of the Culture of the Soviet Union. After a short discourse on the threat of a resurgent petit-bourgeoisie, Angelhoff returns to his main point, reinforcing his original innuendos by calling the doctor "ein Gegner des Studiums der Kultur der Sowjetunion, ein Gegner also der Kultur der Sowjet-

union und folglich ein Gegner der Sowjetunion" (111). That such logic does not prevail is due in the end only to the mutual loyalty of the students rather than the inherent absurdity of the argument.

Under the circumstances, however, Angelhoff's unerring instinct for spotting evidence of political deviation in trivial details has more drastic results: A student who finds excessive the public display of self-criticism by Neues Deutschland over a misprint in a quotation from Stalin becomes the butt of his insinuations. But before Angelhoff can have a second, more thorough interview with him, the student, Fiebach, flees from the ABF, and is never seen again (194).

Fiebach's sin had been to question a policy decision by the "Genossen im Zentralorgan," which, according to Angelhoff's logic, raises suspicions about Fiebach's loyalty to the state (193). Apparently he had stepped over the invisible boundary between the scepticism of an enquiring intellect and that of a politically independent mind: "Man hat ihn hier denken gelehrt, mehr denken als bisher jedenfalls und im Geschichtsunterricht bei Riebenlamm bekommt man sogar eine Eins für gescheites Fragen, aber nun hat er etwas nicht verstanden, hat gedacht, hat gefragt, weil er nicht irren wollte, hat wie alle ein Ziel vor Augen, das gleiche Ziel wie sie, und versteht nur diese eine Sache nicht" (201).

In commenting on this episode, which is central to his understanding of the political atmosphere of the times, Iswall refrains from blaming Angelhoff outright for driving Fiebach to flight. When he first mentions the incident, he says, without censure, that Angelhoff had discovered ideas--idealistic, existentialist, cosmopolitan ideas--in Fiebach's head "die gebrandmarkt werden mußten" (129). Whether Angelhoff alone felt the ideas should be stigmatized, or it was generally held that they should,

is not specified.

If any fault is to be found in the Fiebach affair it is not only Angelhoff's sins of commission but also a more general sin of omission. As Iswall pointed out, Fiebach had shared the same political or social goals as the others and had simply had one momentary reservation (201). But Angelhoff's accusation that he was deviating from the official, collective line had cast him suddenly in the role of an outsider. And so, the fear which made him flee was not just the fear of what Angelhoff might say at the interview on the next day, but fear of the consequences of being an alleged outsider in a collective community. The other students, who were too busy celebrating their greatest collective achievement--the removal of an offensive sign--to trouble themselves with Fiebach, are, from his point of view, as much a part of the collective society as the central authorities he is supposed to have impugned: Therefore, according to Iswall, they are as guilty as Angelhoff: "Wir haben Fiebach mit seiner Angst allein gelassen--nicht nur mit seiner Angst vor Angelhoff, sondern auch mit der Angst vor uns. Wir waren nicht besser als Angelhoff" (208). Although Angelhoff may have been the catalyst which brought the issue to a climax, Iswall asserts that the students, and to a lesser extent the administrators, who together formed the collective identity of the ABF, were guilty of condoning the affair, by their unwillingness to intervene on Fiebach's behalf.

In his teaching, as in his political activities Angelhoff pursues his interests zealously. He himself would see no contradiction in principle between his role as executor of Stalin's ideas and that as intercessor for the greatness of ancient Greece and Rome (141). And yet the former role makes him cold and unpleasant, whereas as a teacher he displays "eine Fülle von Witz, Charme und menschlicher Wärme" and can be so infectiously loquacious

that his students feel they learn "ganz nebenbei" (103).

This crass distinction between Angelhoff the Stalinist and Angelhoff the teacher appears to represent an irreconcilable inconsistency in characterization. It is often difficult to find him convincing in either of these roles, because they are so contradictory. However Kant does indicate that the contradiction is only intended to be an apparent one, since both roles are only external aspects of Angelhoff's basic character: both are "Äußerungen seiner Existenz" (141). He gives a clue to his overall opinion of Angelhoff and his type in an incident in which, paradoxically, Angelhoff plays no direct part. This is the episode of Riek's speech for the student council elections which, significantly, immediately follows the discussion of Angelhoff's contradictory behaviour (141ff).

In preparing his platform for the election speeches, Riek decides to take a new, Stalinist approach. He does so partly because of who Stalin is, but more particularly because of his contempt for the oratorical style of speaking used by the ancient Greeks and Romans and so lavishly praised by Angelhoff (102-3). In effect then he puts Angelhoff's contradictory Stalinistic and classical characteristics to the acid test. In the event, the fragmented, blunt and defiant Stalinesque speech, which Riek directs, draws only ridicule from the student audience. Riek, annoyed by the reaction, abandons his strategy, leaps to the stage and delivers a rousing speech, in the classical style, accompanied by the very same gestures Angelhoff used when declaiming in class (149). The effect is electrifying, among both university and ABF sections of the audience; the classical speech succeeds as absolutely as the Stalinesque slogans had failed.

In a sense, both of Angelhoff's two principal activities are

concerned, like Riek's speech, with the art of persuasion. It is the great speeches of classical literature that arouse his enthusiasm. His love for the subject is such that he virtually mesmerizes his students (103). And he does consider his relationship to it as love--he describes Riek, who detests that class, as "einer jener fühllosen Schüler, die der Liebe nicht hatten" (141). But whereas his advocacy of classical culture is imbued with warmth and emotion, his equally partisan pursuit of what he sees as the bourgeois mentality is coldly unfeeling, because it disregards human sensibilities altogether, for, as he says to his victims, the cause is more important than the individuals involved--"die Sache . . . nichts anderes als die Sache, die allen gemeinsame Sache" (102).

The failure of Riek's Stalinesque speech and the failure of Angelhoff's Stalinesque agitprop methods--particularly in the case of Fiebach, whom Kant is careful to describe as a supporter of the same common cause so fervently championed by Angelhoff (201)--both imply that these techniques are bankrupt, because they lack the crucial ability to encourage emotional, and therefore personal, involvement in the cause. When Riek had organized his first version of the platform speech, he had pursued the direct line between his own mind and the minds of the audience but he had ignored one of Iswall's primary tenets, that life, and man, is not to be defined or controlled by mathematical principles. Riek begins to understand this, when he assesses the failure of his original speech plan: "Der kürzeste Weg zwischen zwei Punkten ist die Gerade, und die Frage ist nun quasi: Ist es beim Menschen anders?" (151).

Riek's slogan speech and Angelhoff's political agitation thus both pursue the head at the expense of the heart, by advocating an idea, an end, while ignoring the indispensable element of individual involvement,



the means, by which an idea gains lasting support.

Outside the classroom, therefore, Angelhoff, like Völschow, tends to foster an authoritarian image of the ABF and the state by his emphasis on the importance of the collective cause. But this influence is quietly countered by another staff member, Riebenlamm, who, without confronting the other two directly, nevertheless undermines their influence effectively.

One of the first ways in which he is contrasted with the other two is in his manner of speech. Whereas Völschow and Angelhoff prefer the orotund phrase and rhetorical, declamatory style, Riebenlamm is laconic in the extreme. He greets his first class with a minimum of preamble: "Ich begrüße Sie und so weiter" before beginning a short lecture, in plain language, on his subject, history (55). His subject and the fact that he is the most humane and influential of the teachers reiterates the emphasis of the whole novel on the need to understand the past. Riebenlamm is responsible more than any other faculty member for Iswall's registering at the ABF. He evidently appreciates his forthright answers and refusal to have words and political motives put in his mouth by the interviewers (22-3). For dogma and cant are anathema to Riebenlamm: He offers a first-class mark for "gescheites Fragen" (201) and to those who have the courage to disagree with established opinion (57). When Iswall sees that he is in danger of becoming the victim of innuendo and guilt-by-association in a political witch-hunt conducted by Völschow and Angelhoff, it is Riebenlamm whom he asks to be present along with his closest friend Trullesand (69). Riebenlamm cuts through the insinuations by asking direct, factual questions and Iswall is then able to defend himself thoroughly on that level against the charges of heresy.

But whilst Riebenlamm has no time for the dogmatic aspects of Socialism, he is nonetheless a convinced socialist. Kant suggests that his political beliefs are similar to those of Brecht in that they are marked by persistent questioning and re-appraisal and a basic concern for the lot of the underdog. It is not mere coincidence that Riebenlamm the historian defines his first rule of approaching history as being contained in Brecht's poem "Fragen eines lesenden Arbeiters," which begins: "Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?" (57). The poem asks who actually did the sheer physical labour involved when great historical events took place.

The poem symbolizes Riebenlamm's major contribution to his students. He tried to make them feel that they too were part of the historical process, not insignificant cogs in an inexorable machine. Speaking to Riebenlamm ten years after leaving the ABF, Iswall admits the moral of the poem had found its mark: "Das hast du uns in den Kreislauf gebracht, und darum müßtest du Oberst-Studienrat heißen" (208). Riebenlamm's choice of this poem illustrates both his belief in the importance of the individual's contribution to a greater cause and his insistence on questioning accepted dogma. Iswall later acknowledges his own debt to Riebenlamm's second point when he expounds his personal credo: "Ich weiß nur, daß ich fragen muß, wenn ich leben will" (300).

Riebenlamm's emphasis on the need to preserve one's individuality at the same time as one works within a social environment thus largely counteracts the influence of Völschow and Angelhoff, which tends to detract from the individual in the interests of what seems at times to be an autarchical state authority.

Only two other instructors are singled out for attention, mainly because of the nature of their dedication to their respective subjects.

Dr. Fuchs, the German teacher is caricatured as a pedant whose concern for the comma outweighs his concern for the context in which it is used (22, 190). On one occasion, Fuchs vehemently refuses a direct request from Völschow to speak on Bach to a group of students embarking on a cultural tour: "Ich spreche nicht mit Jungfern über den Geschlechtsverkehr" (254). Needless to say, Fuchs' reverence for knowledge but inability or unwillingness to make use of it for the benefit of others is not shared by his students.

Dr. Schika teaches mathematics and, with great reluctance, physics, which he despises because it is concerned with physical matter: "Ich bin ein Kopfwerker, meine Damen und Herren, die Materie interessiert mich nicht" (221). He consequently argues that pure science cannot concern itself with the physical application of its discoveries, that the moral responsibility of the scientist ends as he enters the laboratory. In the ensuing verbal battle with Trullesand, Kant implies that his preference lies with the latter's humanistic argument when he shows Schika's resorting to sarcasm and personal remarks about Trullesand's accent, to try to save his position (222ff). Evidently Schika, like Fuchs, does not appreciate contradiction and discussion in the same way that Riebenlamm does. The position taken by these two, of separating theory from practice, can also be taken as an oblique comment on those who, like Völschow and Angelhoff, put the principle of collectivity above the reality of human individuality.

As the ABF is not only the physical setting for the novel but is presented in part as a reflection of the formative years of the GDR, so the various instructors tend to have a representational function, representing attitudes typical of those same formative years. The influences they exert on the students represent a spectrum of the more or less orthodox

views present at that time in influential circles of East German society.

The representational function of the characters is evident also insofar as they have names which reflect their character. Völschow's name for example suggests "die volle Schau," which might refer to his tendency to take an overview of the ABF or to his eagerness for his students to gain access to all aspects of life. Angelhoff's name recalls his attempts both in the classroom and as Party Secretary, to inveigle his students into his own way of thinking. Characteristically, he prefers the student whose mind is a *tabula rasa* (202), upon which he can inscribe his lesson: "Es schreibt sich besser auf unbeschriebenen Blättern" (22). Riebenlamm's name, as he himself points out to Iswall, is deceptive, but not, in the sense that he means on that occasion, because he is willing to resort to physical measures to bring a student to his senses (23). Riebenlamm's name is deceptive because he is not, nor does he want his students to be, fawning and meekly receptive to authority. But on the other hand, neither does he encourage confrontation and aggressiveness. If Ribenlamm advocates a critical approach it is a criticism born of amity rather than hostility, much like Kant himself, it seems.

As befits their role as representatives of a specific historical period, the faculty figures tend to remain constant, whereas the students are shown to adapt and develop. The effect of this is to suggest that although the individual is capable of change, given the right opportunity, those who represent the collective authority are rigid in their approach and any change in the central authority can only come about by a shift of personnel in the hierarchy. With the singular exception of Jakob Filter Kant's view of those in authority seems to be that they are inelastic and incapable of adapting voluntarily to altered circumstances.

iii) Individuality and collectivism in microcosm: The rally at the Pommernplatz

In addition to single episodes illustrating characteristics of individual students and staff members, there is one scene in which all parties are brought together. This event, above all others, symbolizes the ABF, its students, staff and their various relationships and priorities. The description of it appears at the point of the narrative where Iswall returns to his ABF alma mater for the first time in many years, and it is symbolic of his affinity with the man that it is Riebenlamm with whom he sits, contemplating, literally, the square where the scene took place and, figuratively, the ABF experience they shared. Significantly, this is the episode which causes Iswall the greatest concern that absolute historical authenticity should prevail: It concerns the march on the Pommernplatz, which Iswall himself had instigated (195).

In this scene the ABF appears as a body, with each figure taking up a characteristic pose, depending upon his attitude to the ABF and the collective society it reflects in microcosm. Drs. Fuchs and Schika, for example, are typically somewhat aloof, Fuchs commenting on the grammar of the placards and feeling uncomfortable in such a radical undertaking as the march, and Schika ostentatiously carrying his slide-rule and gazing heavenwards "zum Zeichen seiner geistigen Abwesenheit" (190-1). Völschow, as he often does in the affairs of the ABF, occasionally relinquishes his leadership of the ranks to Angelhoff in order to conduct discussions of principle with the mayor on the question of having the offensive name of the square removed (191). Angelhoff himself becomes embroiled in what Iswall retrospectively and with some irony calls an exhibition of "dogmatischer Phänomene"

against Fiebach (193). Riebenlamm, who is not otherwise characterized as a lover of the mass mentality, is scarcely mentioned, except to say that, symbolically, his bright clothing stood out in an otherwise fairly drab crowd (199).

As far as the students are concerned, Iswall wants it made quite clear that they were not the unified body of single-minded, political demonstrators that they may have appeared to the casual observer. Apart from singing suitably stirring marching songs--organized by Riek, naturally--the students also have their individual, private concerns, which they cannot simply throw off because they are taking part in a public mass demonstration. And in the pauses between the songs--"Da wird auch gelacht, gerufen, geflüstert, gefragt und geantwortet, gestritten und geflirtet" (200). Iswall's problem is how to recreate the scene realistically, to do it full justice.

Because the individual participants' private concerns cannot be represented adequately on film, Iswall advises his imaginary film-makers --and hence, by implication, anyone who tends to emphasize deeds and words, which are public activities, at the expense of thoughts and feelings, which are more private activities: "Laßt doch die Finger davon" (205). That is to say, he reiterates that the essential import of this picture epitomizing the ABF is not only the external image of collective political activity but must also include the reactions, mood and feelings of the individuals taking part.

Occurring approximately half-way through the main narrative of the novel (which begins after the initial methodological deliberations [7-18]), the rally, which is deemed important enough to warrant being discussed and described in minute detail over fully fifteen pages (190-205),

marks a climax and a turning point. Up to this juncture, Iswall's reminiscences have tended to concentrate on the characterization of his friends and teachers and on the various bonds of personal relationship which grew in the first months and together formed the identity of the ABF. But as a result of the rally, the first major cracks in the unity of the Faculty begin to appear. The most immediately obvious breach occurs when Fiebach is driven to flee, following Angelhoff's agitation during the march. But a second weak-spot begins to show following Iswall's first overtures to Vera Bilfert. After their visit to a cafe at the end of the rally, Iswall begins to show signs of the hypersensitivity and latent jealousy (220) which will eventually lead to his misusing his political influence against his best friend, whom he suspects of having designs on Vera.

Both of these incidents, which arise directly out of the rally at the Pommernplatz, indicate a theme which becomes increasingly important in the latter part of the novel--namely, the importance of personal considerations as a motive for actions which appear to be mainly political in nature. That is, Kant emphasizes that, ultimately political decisions are made by and for individuals.

The scene at the Pommernplatz in most important respects epitomizes Kant's view of the ABF as a capsule collective society. The emphasis in the scene is on qualifying and delimiting the claims of collectivity, as it was in the previous descriptions of ABF life. Outwardly the march is a success, a high point in the collective activities of the ABF, with staff and students uniting in common cause to protest an offensive sign. But Kant is careful to point out that a common desire to eradicate even the least hint of German militarism (by removing the reference to "Pommern") is not proof that the same collective thinking exists in all other respects.

Iswall's description repeatedly emphasizes that the marchers had private cares, even reservations, and were often distracted in all kinds of ways (200). He is insisting, in other words, that the marchers retained their individuality beneath their collective front.

The second major point to be made in connection with the march is that collectivity is supposed to be a means, not an end in itself. When Haiduck, the Party secretary, storms at Iswall over the whole affair of the rally, it is because, ultimately, the point of the march, the removal of a street sign, was trivial; in their enthusiasm for showing a collective front, the ABF had chosen a superficial, unworthy target: "Den Namen sollte man ändern, jawohl, aber ändert ihr mal erst euren Kopf, euren und den von ein paar Millionen lieben Landsleuten" (195). The kind of collectivity Haiduck wants is more philosophical and political than physical. But it must come about by conviction, not the kind of physical coercion shown in the march, nor the psychological variety exhibited by Angelhoff's attack on Fiebach, which also takes place during the march. Angelhoff believes in total collectivity, with no reservations for individual deviation, so that when Fiebach questions the wisdom of Neues Deutschland, Angelhoff insinuates that he is also attacking the wisdom of the march and so of any collective activity: "Und warum wirfst du diese erledigte Frage gerade jetzt wieder auf, jetzt in dieser revolutionären Situation?" (194).

The rally at the Pommernplatz thus contains both the best and the worst elements of life in the collective society. The students are shown to have a strong sense of camaraderie, in a common cause, but the irony is that their energies are largely misdirected at short-term immediate ends, which in the long term will have no lasting social value. And the rally



also demonstrates how, if collectivity is treated as an absolute end, desirable in itself, even those who are otherwise committed to Socialism, like Fiebach, will withdraw when they find their individuality completely suppressed.

iv) Dogmatic Collectivism: The historical role of the Party

Looking back on the early years of the GDR, Jakob Filter muses that a typical speech by one of his predecessors in the forestry department might have begun with the rhetorical question "Wer hat dich, du schöner Wald, aufgebaut so hoch da droben?" (240). In the course of such a speech it would be suggested that the forest grew up because of the efforts of the Party, and, if possible, that Stalin had been personally involved. His comment is aimed at the early tendency of the SED to claim and practice, under the spiritual auspices of Stalin, sole authority over most aspects of social life. This was based on the assertion that the Party alone had the ability and right to interpret the will of the people.

In Die Aula, the central Party authority is barely represented as such, except as a distant, rather amorphous source of policy decisions. It makes itself known through its mouthpiece, the "Zentralorgan" Neues Deutschland (193). Only one high official appears in the novel and he contributes little to the characterization of the Party except to act as a symbol of the central authority.<sup>153</sup> Instead, Kant characterizes the Party mainly through its members and their conception of its function.

The individual's image of the Party is shown to be greatly influenced by the qualities of the local Party officials, who are responsible for seeing that central decisions are carried out. But since these officials vary greatly in their approach to their duties, it is clear

that no single, simplified image of the Party will emerge.

Kant approaches the subject of the Party in a dialectical fashion, by contrasting one official with another, either directly or by implication. Among the ABF staff, for example, Angelhoff's blunt, Stalinistic approach is complemented by Riebenlamm's less authoritarian, more individualistic approach. And outside the ABF these two have their counterparts in Nußbank, Iswall's stepfather, and Haiduck, the District Party Secretary.

Superficially, these last two have many similarities. They belong to the old guard of the Party, having suffered under the Nazis and in concentration camps for their Communist beliefs (172). But this similarity only serves to emphasize how far apart the two are in other respects. Comparing the two, Iswall finds them at polar extremes, especially in their treatment of their pasts. Where Haiduck is a lively raconteur about his experiences as a Party man in pre-war Germany and the Spanish Civil War, Nußbank uses bathos and self-pity mixed with a self-righteous sense of his own importance to wring every ounce of sentiment out of his martyrdom "für die neue Zeit" (23). This suffering he feels gives him the right to pontificate on all subjects--culture, politics or foreign affairs (174-5).

Haiduck on the other hand can make his own past vivid for his listeners and, in the process, adds the personal touch to the image of pre-war European socialism. Through his anecdotes and forthrightness, he influences the political attitudes of those who hear him (223). Significantly, he is the one man who immediately springs to Iswall's mind when he thinks of a communist of the old style (172).<sup>154</sup>

Another superficial similarity between Nußbank and Haiduck is that both lose their Party positions. Nußbank tries to use his position to increase his local influence, giving agricultural credits to all and

sundry, regardless of political loyalties. When he is arrested as a bourgeois agent he tries to implicate Iswall's mother, and the ensuing "Kafka-tour" (243) becomes an indictment of the arbitrary behaviour of petty officialdom. In this case however the officials are Party representatives, so that the incident takes on ideological overtones.

Assuming guilt, the Party expels Iswall's mother as soon as she is arrested for questioning, following Nußbank's accusation. In her absence, her household possessions are confiscated--most probably by Party order, since they are responsible for the whole affair, according to the state prosecutor; and Iswall's mother is unable to gain restitution from anyone, despite her innocence. Finally, persecution and mistreatment drive her to flee permanently to Hamburg. The irony is that her flight is caused by the very same authoritarian disregard for others on the part of the Party that Nußbank himself showed so often.

Nußbank is a fairly comic figure who parodies the sort of mentality exhibited in much more serious vein by Angelhoff. Angelhoff's technique of polarizing opinions along ideological lines (102) is reflected in more trivial circumstances by Nußbank's efforts at debate with Iswall: When his stepson proves too adept at playing the recalcitrant farmer to his propagandizing Party official, Nußbank brands him a latent reactionary (86). In this respect he resembles Angelhoff, who also tends to brand anyone who crosses him as an ideological heretic.

In a sense Nußbank and Angelhoff are products of their time, which was characteristically a time of confrontation between ideologies, the so-called period of antifascist-democratic revolution. In the logic of the times, it was not enough not to oppose official dogma; those who did not support the Party line without demur risked being<sup>branded</sup> as opponents of it, and

in some cases the mere suspicion was sufficient proof of guilt, as the case of Iswall's mother and of Fiebach both demonstrate.

But if men like Nußbank and Angelhoff show the rule of suspicion and confrontation, they are balanced by their respective counterparts Haiduck and Riebenlamm. It is Iswall himself who indicates a basic difference in attitude between the two pairs, when he points out that, apart from his closest friend Trullesand, only Riebenlamm and Haiduck could see through his arrogant facade (282). Although these two are no less convinced socialists than Angelhoff, their socialism is based on strongly humanistic sentiments, so that they are more inclined, as Iswall's statement implies, to treat each individual event or person on its own merits. Haiduck, for example, spends considerable time and energy just trying to counteract the suspicions and innuendos fostered by men of Angelhoff's sort: "Solange wir das Mißtrauen nicht besiegt haben, haben wir nicht gesiegt" (113).

In the pivotal scene at the Pommernplatz the two different approaches are placed back to back. First of all Angelhoff's browbeating of Fiebach, and its consequences, are described (193-4), followed by Haiduck's reaction (194-5). It is noticeable that Haiduck's rage is not directed at Angelhoff personally for Fiebach's flight, but at the whole mentality it represents, of which the students are guilty too. Their great expenditure of energy just to change the name of a city square is put on a par with Angelhoff's sound and fury over Fiebach: ". . . Studiere Physik oder von mir aus auch Polnisch, bis dir der Schädel platzt und dann hau die Kriegsmacher in die Pfanne, aber spring hier nicht mit einem roten Tuch herum, und kein Stier ist da, und am Ende ist auch kein Fiebach mehr da" (195). In other words, to use his metaphor, these are trivial targets and shooting them down is a waste of political ammunition (113).

Since Haiduck is presented as a spiritual godfather to the students, his demise for political reasons represents one of Kant's most explicit illustrations of the political excesses of the early years of GDR. Haiduck's downfall occurs when he acknowledges having once, seven or so years earlier, as a private individual, advocated a distinctively German form of Socialism, in cooperation with, but distinct from, the Soviet Union. Regardless of his effectiveness as a local Party leader, the very suspicions of heresy he had fought so hard to dispel about others are taken as proof enough to cause his dismissal and eventual removal, after suitable penance and re-schooling, to the political sidelines (245).

There is a suggestion that Riebenlamm, who is philosophically related to Haiduck, was also a victim of the mentality of the early 1950's. He tells Iswall in 1962 that he had taught until one year previously but had since been rapidly promoted to regional school supervisor (205). The inference is that his talents were not acceptable until the dawning of a period of greater tolerance, when criticism of the kind he exercised could be appreciated as not necessarily being negative. Indeed, Jakob Filter, the least critical of the ABF students, says in 1962 that criticism is a *sine qua non* in any important speech nowadays: ". . . und wehe, du bist nicht kritisch" (240). A second indication of a new atmosphere is the quiet dropping of men like Angelhoff from Party influence. His departure is mentioned only briefly as a rumour (294), but the rumour itself indicates the common currency of the idea of a new atmosphere.

Kant depicts Haiduck as a modernizing influence, in the sense that his influence lives on in his student protégés, particularly Iswall and Filter (245), as opposed to any influence his counterparts Nußbank and Angelhoff may exert. It is paradoxical though that this modern or pro-

gressive influence reflects the humanism of Marx and even Lenin more than the political philosophy of their successor Stalin, whose dogmatism severely curtailed individual liberties.

All of the episodes in the novel illustrating the bad effects of dogmatic or arbitrarily authoritarian behaviour involve the Party in one way or another. Fiebach and Iswall's mother flee from the experience or threat of disciplinary action without being able to defend themselves; Filter is dragooned into the ABF against his express will, to satisfy the local Party quota (250); Haiduck is dismissed for having dared in the past to express a view which is anathema at the time it is published by someone else (242); and Iswall artfully uses his own position and the presence of a Party official to trap Trullesand into having to affirm his political faith by accepting the offer to study in China (296).

The code of the Party is referred to as the cause--that is, the supposedly unanimous goal of all Socialists of a classless, harmonious, socialist society. To invoke the cause was to invoke the faith, and, like any other faith, this one attracted zealous priests who resisted private interpretation of the doctrine. Thus Angelhoff is able to quote the Marxist scriptures--"Schriften"--in order to excoriate the sins--"Sünden"--of those he considers wayward, and then claim he has done it in the interests of faith: ". . . die Sache, . . . nichts anderes als die Sache, die allen gemeinsame Sache" (102). And Trullesand is almost offended at the idea that the China trip is the supreme test of his faith--"als ob er nicht der Sache wegen noch ganz andere Dinger zu tun bereit wäre" (299).

At these times, few were willing to seriously question the authority of the cause, apparently. Filter comments on Haiduck's downfall as a normal occurrence: "Du weißt ja wie das damals war" (243). Where anyone

does question it, as in the case of Fiebach's "immer ein bißchen genauer wissen" (195), it is treated as tantamount to hubris: "Ob sich der Herr Student etwa klüger denke als die Genossen im Zentralorgan?" (193).

When referring to the early period, Kant frequently satirizes the political attitudes of the times by using religious terminology. On one occasion he describes the adulation accorded the chief prophet of the cult, and only eligible interpreter of the word of Lenin, Joseph Stalin, whom he refers to as "ER" (275). With surprising political ecumenicism, he even has one of the few West German characters in the novel who does not verge on caricature, Herr Windshull, comment to Iswall that modern GDR journalists are no longer acting as if on a mission to spread their faith: "Heute weiß ich: Sie kommen nicht hierher um meine Seele zu retten, Sie wollen keinen Proselyten aus mir machen" (95).

In one scene which otherwise adds little to the novel--either in new character insights or plot development--Kant strongly reiterates the notion of Socialism in the early years as a religion, by specifically comparing Christianity and Socialism. When the four student friends together formally renounce their membership in the Church, they are visited by the local bishop, who is concerned at these simultaneous defections. But instead of introducing a discussion of the role of the Church in the Socialist State as it so easily might have done, the scene avoids the topic altogether. Both Riek, who seems ready for an argument on basic principles (271), and Iswall, who reacts very aggressively (271-2) seem prepared to provoke a confrontation. But Trullesand tactfully intervenes, avoiding the trite explanations, to explain their defection as the result of a straightforward choice between two alternatives: ". . . um gleichzeitig in der Partei und in der Kirche zu sein, dazu sind wir nicht gebildet genug. Wir sind froh,

wenn wir den einen Text behalten" (273). Far from attacking religion as an opiate, dulling the pains of social distress, Trullesand implies, and Kant does nothing here or elsewhere to refute the analogy that there is a basic similarity between the institution of the Party and the organized Church, at least during the early years of the GDR.

During these years, the GDR appears, as Kant portrays it, to have been swept by a wave of Puritanical fervour, as if it was felt that only single-minded purity would suffice to remove all traces not only of political and social but also of moral turpitude from society.<sup>155</sup> No areas of doubt or equivocation were to be tolerated; hence, in the political arena, there was the drive to polarize the population in the so-called anti-fascist-democratic revolution; in the social arena there was a deliberate effort to rout out the so-called bourgeois elements, reflected in Iswall's early prejudices against such incidentals as affected speech or table etiquette; and in the moral arena, as elsewhere, the suspicion of guilt was often proof enough. In view of these efforts to divide the population distinctly between those who were politically, socially and morally pure, and those who were not, it is not surprising that Iswall should insist that if ever a film were made of those times it should not be a colour film: "Nehmt ein scharf zeichnendes Schwarz-Weiß-Material; darauf bring ihr fast alles naturgetreu unter" (198). Although there are more colourful influences at work, Kant shows they are inevitably masked during the early years by a pervasive pressure, always associated with the activities of the Party, towards a political and social monochrome.



- d. Conclusion: 'Showdown' or the need to come to terms with the Past for the sake of the Present and Future

On being invited to speak at the closing ceremony of his ABF Robert Iswall's main problem is how to approach his speech. The question is not simply one of style and presentation, but of "historischer Betrachtungsweise" (18). The emphasis of the epigraph on the relationship between Past, Present and Future is echoed in Iswall's concern for how the Past influences the Future--"das war eine Binsenwahrheit und bedurfte keine Diskussion," but--"es lief immer auf das Wie hinaus" (9). And so he turns to the whole question of historiography and the various ways in which the past can be interpreted.

Iswall's main intention is to give his speech a personal touch. But he reminds himself of the danger that one will then romanticize the Past, either as a time of heroic self-sacrifice or as the good old days (9). Somewhere between these two extremes must lie a more objective truth, but the problem is how to express this truth and yet maintain the element of personal interest: "wie hält man die Sachen von allgemeinem und objektivem Interesse und diese persönlichen Memoirenkringel auseinander?" (11). He dreams of a machine which would guarantee absolute objectivity, by taking into account all the variables, but in the end there are just too many of them, and it breaks down (11-12). This kind of absolute, impersonal objectivity is evidently not feasible.

Forced to rely on his own resources to find the real sense and importance of the ABF, Iswall embarks on his researches, delving into his own memories, asking questions, reading all he can. Only after some time does Kant reveal the real purpose of this seemingly over-cautious approach to the Past: Iswall is not out just to recreate an image, a realistic,

visual reproduction of the ABF; he is suspicious of images because they can be so deceptive: --"Weg mit dem Bild--es lügt" (253). What he wants is to recreate the real atmosphere of the times, relying not on his mind's eye, but on his figurative nose: "Ich erinnere mich mit der Nase. Wenn ich erst einmal herauskriege, wie eine Situation gerochen hat, dann fällt mir das übrige auch bald ein" (179).

When Iswall discusses with his imaginary film director the filming of the rally at the Pommernplatz which, to him, epitomizes the real atmosphere and the characters of the ABF (196f), he persistently advises the director not to try to put the scene on film. Film can only deal in external, visual effects which are always an oversimplification. Only the "nose" can sense the entire atmosphere of a situation, and the component influences contributing to it. In other words, Iswall wants to recreate more than just the appearance of authenticity; he wants to remove any anachronisms, by which he means the bias of hindsight. He would include in his re-creation everything "was damals in der Luft gelegen war" (197).

In many ways, this approach to the past is according to the principles of Socialist Realism, especially as they were propounded in the wake of the first Bitterfeld conference. The determination to achieve total authenticity, by having Iswall immerse himself in his subject matter, corresponds to one of the main points in Ulbricht's speech at Bitterfeld: "In dem Maße, wie den Schriftsteller selbst das neue brausende Leben des sozialistischen Aufbaus erfüllt, werden seine eigenen Fähigkeiten wachsen, dieses neue Leben künstlerisch zu gestalten."<sup>156</sup> Iswall even looks upon his speech in terms of a piece of literature, reminding himself that it should contain "das Typische, also Erzählenswürdige" (11). That literature should deal with the "typical," that is, exemplary, aspects of life, has

been a basic criterion of Socialist Realism ever since Engels' famous letter to Miss Harkness became a central factor in the theory.<sup>157</sup>

But although Iswall's approach to his subject is very close to the orthodox socialist realist approach to any subject matter, his principal aim is not obviously the one the Party would have the Socialist Realist pursue. The reason the Party encourages total immersion by the author in his subject is that he will then be better able to draw the political lesson. At Bitterfeld, Ulbricht praised socialist realism because it educated authors "zu aktiven Kämpfern für den Aufbau der sozialistischen Gesellschaft."<sup>158</sup> But Iswall specifically leaves this duty to the present director of the ABF. "Die historische Analyse war selbstverständlich dem Direktor vorbehalten" (17). It is not Iswall's desire or his duty to make that kind of analysis of the ABF's contribution to society.

Iswall's interest in the ABF is not in imposing an interpretation, by assessing its achievements according to criteria which seem important to this, his own, age: He questions for example whether a reader 500 years from now would be able to make anything of the statistics of the ABF--"würde es ihn sehr beeindrucken?" Scarcely, "denn was waren schon dreizehn Jahre" (18).

Although facts, such as the numbers of successful graduates, would have their place in any contemporary assessment and would not fail to make their impression (18), in the end they are "boring," another statistic in the chronicle of the GDR's social reforms (249). But Iswall's fear is that facts can also be misused and forced to fit a preconceived theory, as the example shows of the scientist who, using only the known facts, could in theory reduce the sun to the size of a pea (17). In

aesthetic terms this is equivalent to forcing human beings into a "Moral-tute" as Frau Tuschmann, Iswall's literary bête noire does in her novels, to satisfy a preconceived moral code (24).

Iswall does not attempt to recreate the past with complete authenticity only for aesthetic reasons either, so as to be able to give a more vividly realistic picture of the times when he gives his speech. There is a moral purpose involved: Having begun to consider this topic of the ABF, he inevitably turns to his close friendship with Gerd Trullesand, and his own guilty conscience for the way he had used his political influence in the last days of their years of study together to consign his friend to an arranged marriage and seven years of virtual exile in China. Like other facts this too, taken out of context, could be misinterpreted and an outside observer might say the friendship and shared political ideals had simply fallen victim to "Zeit und Umstände" (37). But Iswall knows this is a distortion of the truth and until he has cleared it up, and his own shabby role in the affair, it would be sheer hypocrisy to sing the "Hohelied" of the ABF students (37).

But there is more involved than just hypocrisy. Iswall feels his treatment of Trullesand makes a mockery of the values he purports to uphold. On his way to Leipzig to see Trullesand ten years later, he speaks of heading for a "Showdown," not with Trullesand, but with himself (278). When he inadvertently begins dreaming of the future, he pulls himself up short with the reminder that he has no moral right to plan anyone else's life when his own contains such a glaring moral inconsistency: "Was entwirfst du hier Pläne für ein ganzes Land und kommst dabei mit dir selbst nicht ins reine? Melde dich wieder als Neuerer, wenn du das Alte in Ordnung gebracht hast" (285). The wording of this admonition is very evi-

ly equally applicable to anybody, individual or collective, who claims the right to guide the fortunes of the state without being honest about how they acquired the right.

As long as Kant's implicit appeal for absolute authenticity in recreating historical facts remained on an aesthetic plane, he was acting on the safe ground of the Bitterfeld appeal for authors to immerse themselves in their subjects. But by introducing moral connotations the discussion moves to a much more sensitive aspect of Socialist Realism--namely its didactic, political function.

By definition, Socialist Realist literature is concerned with the future: Zhdanov's original definition described the socialist realist writer as the "engineer of the human soul" who would evoke reality "in ihrer revolutionären Entwicklung" and so "reshape" mankind.<sup>159</sup> Twenty-five years later, at Bitterfeld, Ulbricht spoke of the writer's duty to help solve the great task of socialist development. But by emphasizing the future, there was a corresponding tendency to ignore the past, or at least those aspects which were politically unsavoury. Kant's implied purpose is to redress this imbalance, not simply for the sake of revealing the skeletons lurking in the closet but because he believes that the past contains lessons which are important for the present to discover: "Sicherheit macht Unsicherheit vergessen, bis zur nächsten Gefährdung" (275). For this reason it is well to acknowledge that the past is not always unblemished. Kant's argument is that the influence of the past will continue to exist, regardless of the convenience of the individual memory, which, even if it remembers an unpleasant event, will try to ignore or minimize its political implications or personal consequences: "Die Wahrheit aber ist nicht nur die Tat, sondern auch deren Folge, nicht nur Motiv, sondern auch Wirkung, ist

Vorsatz und Ergebnis; die Wahrheit sind auch die anderen" (279).

Kant clearly means Iswall's "Showdown" to represent the argument for a reappraisal of the past on a national basis. Towards the end of the novel Iswall's representative role becomes much more pronounced, implying that his difficulties are not only these of one egocentric individual, but that they derive from universal, or at least inherently German, characteristics. This is done largely by the use of literary allusions, which imply a similarity between Iswall's situation and that of well-known literary figures, and attempts to lend a degree of epic breadth to Iswall's life.

There is always an element of irony on these occasions: Thus, an invitation to relax over a glass of beer is transformed into a call to arms from the Germanic epic: "Auf sprang da Robert Iswall, Paul Iswalls Sohn und Quasi Riek, der kühne Degen ließ den Schlachtruf über die Korridore schallen" (269). But most often, as elsewhere in the novel, the irony serves simply to disarm the reader, in this case into accepting the analogy between Iswall and the hero of medieval epic. In particular this applies to Iswall's treatment of Trullesand: As he sees Trullesand off to China, Iswall compares himself to Hagen before the body of Siegfried and expects the "dead man's" wounds to bleed in the presence of his "murderer": "Aber aus Trullesands Wunde war kein Blut geflossen, und doch, als Robert und Trullesand einander die Hand gaben und Trullesand 'Viel Erfolg, Iswall!' sagte, da war der Nibelungen Worms nicht weit" (209).

When Iswall tries to explain his "sudden transformation" into a King Mark, Othello or Richard III, he compares himself, only partially ironically, to the most German of literary heroes, Faust (295). The irony is only partial because Kant has, only a few pages earlier, discussed his

hero's two souls, the "outer" rational, calculating Iswall, and the "inner" sensitive unconscious Iswall (281). Therefore, when Iswall tries to excuse his treatment of Trullesand as the work of a Faustian Devil, comparing himself to Goethe's Faust and Thomas Mann's Leverkühn, he is not speaking of an old-fashioned diabolus ex machina, but of a Devil who works from within, by exploiting the conflict between his two souls.

Kant obviously cannot pursue these literary comparisons too far, since Iswall is hardly a great literary character in the same tradition as the heroes of medieval epic or of the Faust tradition, but the clear implication is that Iswall is not only one individual but that his characteristics are ingrained, national characteristics. This carries with it the further implication that the course of Iswall's life will somehow reflect the course of the national life. Examination of the sparse details Kant does give of his hero's life tends to bear this out.

Iswall's family history reflects many of the important developments in Germany's post-war history: The family is split very much as the country itself became divided. First of all Iswall's father, who becomes to Iswall an ideal, representing the harmony and inner unity of feeling and reason (281), is a victim of the war, as was the ideal of a harmonious unified Germany. Iswall's mother tries to salvage the family by marrying Ernst Nußbank, the self-proclaimed socialist martyr to Nazi oppression. But Nußbank's self-righteous bombast only destroys the family unity; and when he is caught building a personal empire of influence, other petty, suspicious state officials are all too willing to accept his accusations at face value and begin a relentless "Kafkatour" of persecution against Iswall's mother (243). As if the similarity with the authoritarianism and suspicious intolerance of the early 1950's was not already clear,

Kant, mentioning one of the few precise dates in the novel, describes the incident leading to Iswall's mother's final defection to the West as beginning "kurz vor dem siebzehnten Juni" (243). (Grotewohl's speech after the 1953 uprising, which Kant also mentions in this context, blamed the unrest on the overzealous pursuit of socialism by some bureaucrats.)<sup>160</sup> The flight of Iswall's mother marked the final split in the family, but was not so hurtful to Iswall as the earlier defection of his sister. Her flight also coincided with a significant moment in post-war history--the founding of the GDR; and she fled because her love affair with a Russian had been thwarted by official action and popular sentiment.

Without going so far as to blame the division of Germany on the same causes as the division of Iswall's family, Kant nevertheless does suggest two possible motivating factors--the suspicious intolerance and dogmatism of the East German state machinery, and a strong popular undercurrent of suspicion of the Russians.

The description of how Iswall himself develops into a passive, and then an active, supporter of a separate East German state in many ways parallels the growth of the state itself from general left-wing antifascism, to full-fledged Socialist state: Iswall goes off to war in the final months as a political innocent; but the utter human degradation of war and its aftermath is brought home to him in prison camp (263), and he undergoes his fall from innocence: "einmal war er den Wegmarken ohne Zögern gefolgt und hatte seinen Fall getan, und im Schrecken hatte er lange stillgelegen" (280). He is raised from this fall by the message of Socialism which he learns, appropriately, from two Slavic instructors at the Antifa-school; but from now on his life is changed (280). Having lost his innocence, he becomes a prey to the two souls within his breast, and his political de-



velopment is now marked by the conflict between conscious reason and unconscious feelings.

Iswall's political development is generally measured by the yardstick of his emotional development, particularly as this is shown in his relations with the opposite sex. Thus the first unconscious glimmer of political awareness occurs when, at sixteen, he is seduced during working hours by the wife of an absent soldier, and feels pleased to be deceiving his employer, who exploits him (264). In his next relationship with females there is no suggestion of any physical attraction. Wanda and Danuta, the two instructors of the Antifa-school, teach Iswall how to think when they instil in him the lesson of Socialism as an idea (280).

But after returning from the war and imprisonment Iswall thinks he has "done his bit" by teaching in the school (281). He next feels oddly challenged by, and attracted to, the bourgeois, rather aloof Inga. Their relationship is reminiscent of the brief post-war relationship between the Eastern and Western zones of Germany: Although they talk a lot, Iswall later recognizes that he and Inga have very different viewpoints about the subject they discuss most frequently--German national identity. Although Inga is generally xenophobic and conservative, Iswall often hides his opinions under a noncommittal reply to her direct questions because he looks on the idea of breaking with her "mit Schrecken" (87). His only thought for a long time was how to be with her: ". . . mit ihr, allein mit ihr, und es war egal, wohin, nur mit ihr, das war wichtig" (88). But eventually he is forced to admit he was deceiving himself, trying to skate on the thin ice covering the political gulf between them (88). Trullesand finally brings Iswall to the admission that he had allowed his emotional nature to silence his reason (88-89). Their only common interest had been

a mutual, but fundamentally different, interest in the German national identity.

Iswall's reaction to the Inga affair is to swing away from any display of emotion to the opposite extreme. After curtly dismissing Inga by letter (117-119) he devotes himself wholly to the life of the ABF, "in der das Denken als Hauptfach galt" (281). Although he becomes very friendly with Trullesand, Iswall has little to do with girls in any emotional sense and Kant makes it clear that his socialist convictions are similarly devoid of any real emotional attachment: As they had been at the Antifa-school, so at the ABF, Iswall's convictions are too much a matter of the head and not enough of the heart (280-281). Gradually Iswall's "outer," critical, egocentric self smothers his "inner" sensibilities (281).

The implications of Iswall's volte face in terms of East Germany's history are that in turning from the emotional indulgence of trying to establish a relationship with Western Germany, East Germany grasped too severely the opposite principle, the idea of Socialism, "die Sache" as it becomes known at the time. The result for East Germany as for Iswall is an excessive egocentricity, so that when a concerned friend expresses well-meant criticism, as Fiebach does of the central authority (193-194), and as Trullesand does of Iswall (292), they are accused of treachery.

Once Iswall realizes his tendency to swing from one extreme to the other, he realizes more than ever the need to face up to the consequences of his past actions. He realizes that in going to see Trullesand in 1962 he is not just satisfying idle curiosity, but is trying to find out how justified he was in his past actions and so too how unjustified. In other words, he is facing up to himself and his own capacities and limitations, as he had once done in the past, to rid himself of the

nemesis of the Nazistic bully Waldemar (62):

Der Gegner . . . mochte diesen Namen tragen  
oder jenen, er mochte Waldemar heißen oder  
anders, mit seinem wahren Namen hieß er  
immer nur Robert Iswall. (278)

Iswall recognizes how overly sensitive and susceptible he had become about his own "unbewältigte Vergangenheit" (208). In the GDR this phrase normally refers to the way in which past mistakes, on a national, political scale--usually Stalinism--must be explained as necessary in the circumstances of the time. Once explained, they are "bewältigt." But as has been seen, Iswall is not interested in retrospective excuses and descriptions coloured by hindsight. He recognizes that the natural inclination is to avoid the issue, but says, "aber es ist auch normal, daß man sich den Fragen stellt und nicht vor ihnen davonläuft, sosehr man auch die Antworten fürchten mag" (208).

In the course of his research, Iswall does "face up to the questions" in his own life in the sense that he genuinely searches out the places, people and other evidence that could provide the clues to the answers. But whether he actually pursues the answers to the questions as he might is another matter: Even though he goes to Hamburg (his own and Kant's childhood home) and meets Riek, he learns nothing new about the case. But Kant is able to comment on life in West Germany at some length and with considerable humour; and although Iswall shows a certain courage in facing up to the Trullesand affair, he draws no conclusions from it, other than that it is done--and that Trullesand is reasonably happy in his work and his marriage and reconciled to the past. There are no real lessons to be learnt from this immersion in the past apparently, other than that it should be done: "Wie Robert Iswall eine Rede halten sollte, da

träumte er viele Monde von ihr und nichts anderem, gewährte so manche Unordnung in seinem Leben und räumte nun auf, weil ein Glanz sein sollte, und machte, daß beinah alles gut war und ging vielmals sich zu prüfen an die spiegelnden Wasser, und als er wähnte, nun endlich könne er den Mund aufmachen, da zeigte sich, daß ihn niemand hören wollte" (317).

Although Iswall is willing to face up to his own past and so put an end to deceiving himself and others (his "Punktmachen" 279, 314), he finds that the collective is not yet ready to do so--Meibaum cancels the plans for speeches as having "einen etwas zu sehr rückwärtsgewandten Charakter" (313). But Kant nevertheless seems to believe that the moment will, or must come, when the collective memory will have to confront the past. Trullesand tells Iswall that even if the speech were cancelled he should not throw away his draft (306); and, after a momentary depression at the thought that the collective was not yet ready to hear the criticism of an individual citizen, Iswall consoles himself that the time will come, eventually: ". . . hier wird schon noch geredet werden" (317).

In the light of this, it is clear that Die Aula is neither a pan-German, humanistic classic nor an unstinted "Laudatio auf die DDR."<sup>161</sup> Its real, underlying emphasis is on how the Filters and Trullesands have adapted to circumstances and now contribute as best they can and with reasonable satisfaction to a society which they firmly believe is the best available, although not by a long way the ideal of their student dreams. The end result is a compromise. To a great extent the novel shows how one individual, Iswall, made his personal compromise, in order to take stock, before going on, "nicht ohne Kritik, auf die Sicherung der individuellen Möglichkeiten bedacht und den freien Spielraum innerhalb des Kollektivs verteidigend."<sup>162</sup>

Die Aula shows how one member of the generation which self-consciously considers itself the true representatives of the GDR (because they, more than any other, shared its birth pains) took stock of his role in the collective. Kant's attitude is essentially complacent; he insists that the past must be seen in its proper light, but draws few conclusions from it, either in terms of saying what the consequences for individual and society would be if they do not face up to their past, or in terms of the beneficial effect on the present and future. There is no sign of a change in Iswall's life because of what he has done.

In the next novel to be considered, another member of the same generation with a similar conception of her representative position as an individual, demonstrates a similar concern for her own and her society's past. She too is convinced the past must be understood, but for her the question is more urgent and the consequences, for present and future, of ignoring the past are potentially drastic.

### III. Chr. Wolf: Nachdenken über Christa T.

#### a. Introduction

Although Die Aula and more especially Ole Bienkopp were the source of considerable controversy at the time of their publication, neither of them can be said to have caused such apparent embarrassment in the GDR nor such fervid interest in West Germany and elsewhere as did Nachdenken über Christa T. Similarly, whereas the former two works were soon accepted into the canon of East German literature, Christa T. appears to exist in a cultural limbo, neither completely banned nor fully accepted.<sup>163</sup> Yet Christa T. clearly constitutes a more profound contribution to the evolution of a specifically East German kind of literature and culture than either of the two novels discussed so far: With them it shares the physical setting of the GDR and the overall concern for individual and national identity; but in its sensitive treatment of historical, philosophical and aesthetic considerations it demonstrates a much more serious, reflective concern for the nature of East German society and for the role of the individual and of literature in forming and reflecting society's goals.

To a great extent, the significance of Christa T. as a contribution to East German literature derives from the author's knowledge of the nature and function of literature in her society, which must be unique even in the GDR. Christa Wolf has had practical experience of virtually all the phases through which the literary work passes, from its inception in the privacy of the author's imagination to its reception in the publicity of popular and

professional assessment: After studying Germanistik in Jena and Leipzig (until 1953), she became, during the very influential and controversial period of the middle and later 1950's, "wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin" for the Schriftstellerverband--when she wrote on contemporary East German literature; she was also editor of Neue Deutsche Literatur and lector for two major publishing houses. Although she had begun writing creatively at that time too, she admitted later to having become, because of her career as an analyst and critic of literature, her own most severe critic, with the result that she submitted none of her creative writing for publication until 164  
Moskauer Novelle (1961).

Christa Wolf's reputation as an author still rests mainly on her second work, Der Geteilte Himmel (1963). This is a superior example of the so-called "Ankunftsliteratur" of the early 1960's, which dealt with the problem of the individual who must decide for or against the GDR (at a time when it was still possible to choose whether or not to leave the country). Wolf greatly improves the model set for this type of work by B. Reimann's Ankunft im Alltag (1961), through more subtle characterization, not only of individual figures but of the division between East and West Germany. Instances of this kind of characterization occur for example when the flight of the heroine's fiancé to the West, because of professional rather than political frustration, is treated with understanding; there is also, in the hidebound figure of Mangold, one of the first negative portrayals in East German literature of a Party man. Der Geteilte Himmel was a great popular success, and, after considerable debate and discussion was, and is still, accepted as a major contribution to East German literature, for having helped strengthen "ein neues staatsbürgerliches Selbstbewußtsein und Selbstverständnis." 165

As a respected critic, and, after the popular and official reception of Der Geteilte Himmel, a respected author, Wolf became a principal authority on GDR literature and its development at a time when a change in cultural policy seemed imminent. She was a leading spokesman on behalf of the writers at the second Bitterfeld Conference held in 1964, where she made a strong plea for greater 'honesty' in literature, by which she meant a more realistic, less conformist and stereotypical representation of reality. On this occasion, her remarks and illustrative anecdotes were met with both applause and amusement.<sup>166</sup> However, in the following year, at the infamous 11th Plenum of the central Committee in December 1965, when Wolf warned of the dangers of a renewed cultural repression and called for a "new spirit of moral commitment,"<sup>167</sup> the response was hostile and defensive, signifying the approach of a new wave of official intolerance.<sup>168</sup>

Two years later, Wolf reinforced her pleas for greater freedom of creative expression by openly supporting the cause of Wolf Biermann and Professor Havemann. Her name was removed immediately from the list of candidates for the Central Committee of the SED, but, unlike Biermann, she was not forbidden to publish. In this way it was made clear that her views were in sharp conflict with the new firm approach of the Party to cultural affairs, but not enough to warrant complete suppression, apparently.

Although a first version of Christa T. is said to have existed by the end of 1965,<sup>169</sup> the final revisions and preparations for publication took place against the background of these events of 1967 and the somewhat ambivalent official treatment of Wolf at that time. However, the events surrounding the actual publication are even more indicative of official ambivalence, if not of outright embarrassment: On the one hand, publication did take place, preceded by a lengthy, and characteristic, extract in Sinn



und Form;<sup>170</sup> and the novel was discussed at length at the time of publication in articles in both Sinn und Form and NDL.<sup>171</sup> But on the other hand publication was delayed by almost one year, until April 1969 (the book bears the date 1968), and it has been estimated that considerably less than 1,000 copies were actually distributed in the GDR at the time, although reliable reports exist that the publisher had received 20,000 advance orders.<sup>172</sup> The more overt symptoms of official disaffection followed soon after publication: In the middle of May the director of the Mitteldeutscher Verlag publicly denounced the decision of his editorial board to allow such a book to be published;<sup>173</sup> and the Sixth Writers' Congress of the GDR at the end of May became the forum of an attack on several deviant authors, among whom Wolf was the object of very sharp criticism.<sup>174</sup>

The question of the foreign publication of Christa T. also indicates a certain official ambivalence. Since the so-called "lex Biermann" of 1965, foreign publication has required official approval. The official treatment of Christa T. appears to have been as generous regarding publication outside the GDR as it was restrictive towards the internal publication. Luchterhand were licensed to publish a limited first edition in West Germany, apparently consisting of the residual copies of the original East German edition of 5,000, which had been sold to them by the East German publisher.<sup>175</sup> They were subsequently licensed to publish further editions in much larger numbers, whereas no further editions appeared in East Germany for over 3 years.<sup>176</sup>

In 1968, at approximately the time when Christa T. was to appear originally, Christa Wolf published a very illuminating article in which she defends her new work against accusations of subjectivism and over-emphasis on individuality.<sup>177</sup> These later proved to be the principal criticisms

raised by official critics in the GDR. However, Wolf's careful, anticipatory responses to foreseeable criticism by Socialist Realist critics were not published in East Germany at all, initially, but in the West German journal Kürbiskern, where they could be far less effective as a defence against criticism, but quite effective as advance publicity for a new 'individualistic' East German novel, by an author who was already well-known and respected in the West, through the novel and film of Der Geteilte Himmel.<sup>178</sup>

To judge purely by this external, circumstantial evidence of the publishing history of Christa T. it would appear that, although it was too unorthodox to be made generally available in the GDR, the novel was considered of significant value as a cultural ambassador abroad. If such was the case, the results must have seemed rewarding, since Christa T. has engendered a generally positive reaction not only among Western critics but in Eastern Europe too,<sup>179</sup> and its appearance evidently encouraged a greater interest among Western critics in the individual works, as opposed to the overall evolution, of East German literature. However, in the GDR itself Christa T. seems to have represented a difficult, borderline case for those who control literary and cultural policy. As the work of one of the most thoughtful and at the same time politically committed literary figures in the GDR and as a work which is through and through a product of the East German cultural, social and historical environment, Christa T. demands serious consideration; and yet its faults or potentially disruptive influence were deemed great enough to warrant its "virtual suppression."<sup>180</sup>

To a degree, the intensity of the official reaction to Christa T. is itself a measure of its effectiveness in questioning and examining the institutions of State; it cannot simply be rejected on straightforward ideological or aesthetic grounds, because at one level it is precisely

this monolithic attitude towards social and cultural affairs which it calls into question.<sup>181</sup> Thus, by responding to the novel in the defensively aggressive manner in which such matters have been traditionally treated, the arbiters of cultural correctness would justify one of the central arguments in Christa T.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Christa T. and the previously acceptable type of prose writing in the GDR lies in its overall approach to reality, in the way in which Christa Wolf portrays the actual world. In comparison with Strittmatter's pictorial description of a clearly discerned historical and sociological evolution or with Kant's more abstract, but still factually inclined, examinations of a process of psychological evolution, Christa T. tends to avoid factual definition; it is rife with contradictions and paradox and consciously opposed to "facts," in the sense of acceptable truths. Unlike Kant or Strittmatter, who both try to explain a situation, even if it does have as many aspects as observers (e.g. the episode at the Pommernplatz), Christa Wolf's protagonist resists the inclination to seek out answers, in favour of posing new questions: One typical illustration of this is the scene in which Christa T. flees from the university reading room when she first sees it, because of a sudden fear "hier könnte schon auf jede Frage eine Antwort stehen" (68).

It is possible, as more than one Western critic has suggested, that the tone of political orthodoxy in Eastern Europe is so strongly didactic, that the tendency towards stating and defining has eclipsed other possible approaches to a given subject and that this has been reflected in the language and aesthetic preference of Socialist culture:

Sprache wie Kunst allgemein ist in der marxistischen Ästhetik nicht Frage und Spiel, sondern dient dem Beweis. Das eben bis

ins sprachliche Detail hinein ablesbare  
 didaktische Moment ist wesentlicher Bestand-  
 teil der heute noch in der DDR . . .  
 herrschenden Orthodoxie: Kunst ist  
 Lehre, Belehrung.<sup>182</sup>

Since Christa T. was published in the wake of a renewed effort by the Party to reassert its influence in cultural affairs, it is conceivable that the vehement reaction to what Hans Mayer has called such a "Buch der Mutmaßungen"<sup>183</sup> is indeed to be attributed in part to an instinctive mistrust among orthodox critics in East Germany of the indefinite and indefinable, or even of the merely ambiguous. Certainly this is the basis of the strident attack made by M.W. Schulz at the Writers' Congress in 1969. In terms ominously reminiscent of the ideological confrontations of the 1950's, he accuses Christa Wolf of sowing seeds of uncertainty through her new novel:

. . . die Geschichte . . . ist . . . angetan,  
 unsere Lebensbewußtheit zu bezweifeln,  
 bewältigte Vergangenheit zu erschüttern,  
 ein gebrochenes Verhältnis zum Hier und  
 Heute und Morgen zu erzeugen. . . . Wem  
 nützt eine subjektiv ehrliche, parteilich  
 gemeinte Absicht, wenn sie streckenweise  
 im literarischen Text und im Gesamteindruck  
 die Doppelbödigkeit der Aussage so eindeutig  
 provoziert, daß sich die andere Seite nur zu  
 wählen braucht, was sie gern herauslesen  
 möchte.<sup>184</sup>

However, despite the outmoded reference to "die andere Seite," neither Schulz, nor any of her other East German critics have questioned Christa Wolf's loyalty to the GDR. There is no suggestion that the criticism is directed at anything other than errors of creative judgement. Despite the overtones of Schulz's remark, Christa T. evidently represents a concerned challenge from within the system rather than an inimical, external threat. To some extent therefore, the reaction reveals the limits of official

toleration and the novel represents one touchstone by which to assess certain of the literary standards of the GDR at the end of the 1960's.

Discussion of Christa T. should not however be limited to the political implications of Christa Wolf's approach to reality. The content of the novel and the form in which it is expressed are so closely interwoven that they should not be considered in isolation. One East German critic used Wolf's own words, from a different context, to describe Christa T. as follows:

Der Roman bewegt sich "auf jener Grenze, die zwischen der herkömmlichen Prosa als dem Bericht von etwas Geschehenem und der Poesie, dem Instrument für feine, kaum noch registrierbare Vorgänge, aufgerichtet zu sein scheint."<sup>185</sup>

That is to say it blends the objective, descriptive techniques of prose and the more subjective elements of lyric poetry so that the style of the novel, as well as its content is more individualistic than usual--especially among socialist realist writers. What Becher called the trinity of individuals which is evoked by a work of art, is involved much more obviously here than in Ole Bienkopp or Die Aula, in the sense that the individual perspective of the author and her main characters is emphasized, rather than concealed beneath a supposedly objective, descriptive or didactic façade, and the intellect of the reader, as an individual, is challenged quite deliberately, for example through the provocative, ambiguous style in which the material is presented, or by the many direct and indirect literary allusions.

As a contribution to the theme of Individuality and Collectivism Christa T. must be considered both for its content and for its form and style. In Christa Wolf's eyes, prose, because of its very specific generic qualities has a vital role to play in reflecting and shaping socialism, but

not if it is compelled to pretend to be objective and purvey a simplistic, monolithic (collective?) view of the world:

[Die Prosa] ist ja ein Produkt des Reifeprozesses der Menschheit, spät entwickelt, geradezu erfunden, Differenzierungen zu schaffen und auszudrücken. Prosa schafft Menschen im doppelten Sinn. Sie baut tödliche Vereinfachungen ab, indem sie die Möglichkeiten vorführt, auf menschliche Weise zu existieren. . . . Sie hält die Erinnerung an eine Zukunft in uns wach, von der wir uns bei Strafe unseres Untergangs nicht lossagen dürfen. Sie unterstützt das Subjektwerden des Menschen.<sup>186</sup>

More so than either Kant or Strittmatter, Wolf is concerned with the whole process by which individual and collective goals can be brought closer together, so that the distinction between the present reality as each individual (author or citizen) experiences it and the long-term collective purpose, which society as a whole is supposedly pursuing, need not appear so great. As she says in her essay "Lesen und Schreiben," it cannot be assumed that humanity collectively will instinctively pursue humanistic goals; humanism exists only to the extent that each individual supports it and can be made aware of it, for instance through reading prose which evokes his real world and provokes his individual attention. For this reason, both in form and content, she believes prose, and particularly socialist prose, must first engage the individual man in order then to affect the collective, mankind:

Gerade solche persönlichsten Motive, ein ganz persönliches Interesse an sich selbst täten der Menschheit not. Das heißt: dem einzelnen, dem, an den die Prosa sich wendet. Wenn alles davon abhängt, auf welche Gesellschaftsordnungen die neuen Erfindungen von Wissenschaft und Technik treffen, dann möge man sich erinnern, daß jede faschistische "Ordnung" damit beginnt, das Individuum auszulöschen.<sup>187</sup>

Christa T., which was finished in the same year (1968) that Wolf

wrote these words, very much reflects this same individual approach to the collective goal. In the section which follows, the influence of this on the form and style of the novel will be considered.

#### b. Individuality and Collectivism

##### i) The individuality of the socialist writer: Wolf's approach to reality

The factor which separates Nachdenken über Christa T. most obviously from other East German prose up to that time is its ambiguity. Where its predecessors tend to be overtly tendentious and clear in their presentation of an argument, Wolf's novel often seems deliberately opaque in both form and content. In the West, critics tend to comment mainly on the literary significance of this, drawing parallels to similar tendencies in Western literature, on the lines of Mayer's reference to it as a "Buch der Mutmaßungen" à la Johnson.<sup>188</sup> Possibly because of the contrast with its predecessors, they are especially aware of its complexity, and have referred to it for example as a "schwer greifbares Stück Literatur" which "strotzt von Widersprüchen,"<sup>189</sup> or at least "erregend vielschichtig und mehrdeutig . . . nicht aufzulösen in der Interpretation."<sup>190</sup> In East Germany itself, critics were more concerned with the social consequences of what they see as the novel's dangerous inclination towards ambivalence: Abroad, it might "leave the gate wide open to misuse"<sup>191</sup> and at home, particularly for the uninitiated reader, it was said to cause doubt and uncertainty: "Sowie die Geschichte nun mal erzählt ist, ist sie angetan, unsere Lebensbewußtheit zu bezweifeln, bewältigte Vergangenheit zu erschüttern, ein gebrochenes Verhältnis zum Hier und Heute und Morgen zu erzeugen."<sup>192</sup> The danger of a work which allegedly fosters doubt is presumably that it poses

a more indirect, insidious threat to collective solidarity than a frontal attack. The criticisms levied in Ole Bienkopp for instance were clear and unequivocal and above all largely concerned with a historical situation which, by the time the novel appeared, no longer obtained. As such, they could be answered directly and assessed from a historical perspective without too much emphasis on any topical relevance they may have had. Similarly, Die Aula concerned itself with a historical phase and was not considered overly critical of contemporary society. Neither of these, as examples of social criticism, were felt to be a threat to the "here and now and tomorrow" as Wolf's novel was.

The ambiguity which was the main cause of these reactions appears in almost every aspect of the novel and pervades it from the first sentence (or even earlier, as will be discussed later) to the question mark at the end, which aptly typifies the generally provocative, undogmatic tone of the whole novel. And it is not simply a stylistic flourish, but an integral part of the novel's meaning. Before discussing possible reasons and effects, some examples of how Wolf uses ambiguity may illustrate how pervasive it is.

The reader is made conscious of the literary medium with which the fiction is to be created from the outset, through the language and style Wolf uses. In both cases, ambiguity plays an important role.

Like the Lord Chandos created by Hofmannsthal, Christa T. fears the power of language: "Sie hatte Angst vor den ungenauen, unzutreffenden Wörtern. . . . Sie hielt das Leben für verletzbar durch Worte" (217). She accuses one boyfriend for instance of leading an irresponsible "Wort-Existenz" because he mistakes the words he reads for reality (81, 217). For this reason she either will not, or cannot, write other than for purely personal consumption (217). The narrator however, for her own part, is certain that



she must write, and that the subject must be Christa T., "die Möglichkeit, durch Aussprechen zu verfestigen" notwithstanding (56); because Christa T. had "forced" herself upon her as a subject (56f). Faced with this necessity, but being aware apparently, like Christa T., of the power of words to distort meaning, she uses language consciously, with as much care and precision as possible, e.g.: "Wenn man es mit nackten Worten sagen dürfte, müßte man sie schön und eigenartig und glücklich nennen" (155). As this example shows, she constantly qualifies herself, as if she were afraid that the words she chooses may be inadequate to express the idea she has in mind. In this instance she uses a "Bescheidenheitsformel" (the "wenn"-clause) and a succession of adjectives which create a slightly paradoxical effect ("schön/eigenartig/glücklich"), thereby emphasizing her doubts. On at least three important occasions in the novel, this contrastive technique is used in a deliberately ambiguous way.

As the motto of the novel indicates, Christa T. is about man's search for identity, "Das Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen" (5). It is conducted on two constantly interconnected levels, one literary (the narrator's search for Christa T.), one social (Christa T.'s own search for her identity as an individual). In both, there are three important phases: First, an urgent feeling of restless longing, which is a symptom of dissatisfaction with the status quo. The narrator, for example speaks of her "new" fear of losing sight of her friend and says "this is the moment" to try to begin to do something about it (8). Secondly, a perceived necessity to consider the formative years which led up to the present situation. This takes the form, thirdly, for both the narrator and Christa T., of writing. Each of these three ideas is conveyed by a single word, and each of these words is given a subtle, highly personal, new definition in addition to its

generally accepted meaning.<sup>193</sup>

The first to be treated in this way is the "Nachdenken" of the title. Rather than introducing the narrative (plot or character) in her first sentence, Wolf emphasizes the reflective tone that is so characteristic of the novel by redefining her title: "Nachdenken, ihr nach--denken" (2). The new definition is obviously capricious and somewhat contradicts the more objective implications of the original title. Where one might have expected the novel to be a retrospective "consideration" of Christa T.'s life, from some distance in time, it seems that it is to be a more personal, active continuation of her ideas or ideas she provoked, which would in effect reduce the gap between her life and the present.

The tone of the first sentence is indicative of the tone of the novel generally--namely a constant juxtaposition of objective and subjective, which invites comparison and contrast. As was just suggested, at one level Christa T. is about writing about Christa T. This theme ("Dichten") is treated much as was the "Nachdenken" of the title. For the narrator, the act of writing about Christa T. creatively is a highly personal venture (7-8) but mainly, she is conscious of an objective purpose--her responsibility to the reader ". . . dem ich alles erzähle, den ich brauche" (147-148). For Christa T. on the other hand, writing is mainly for strictly personal reasons. It helps her to define her world: "Dichten, dicht machen, die Sprache hilft" (23). But at times even she seems to have an audience in mind: To the narrator, her writing seems to be like "laying tracks," so that she can be found by someone else (43), and later: "Sie redet, daß man sie sieht" (114). In all of this Wolf seems to be deliberately making no distinction between the writer's personal (subjective) motives for writing and the (objective) requirements to put the material in a form which can

be grasped by others. As a result, the narrator's doubts about Christa T.'s true motives for writing can be extended to the novel as a whole.

The third important idea to be treated in this way is also contained in a single word, "Sehnsucht," which is re-defined highly subjectively: At university in the early 1950's Christa T. feels her life is fragmented, but wonders if she can ever, or even should, try to find some unity in life. This uneasiness ("Unruhe"), which she feels far more than others, first comes to a head late one evening when she is walking with a friend. She comments on how late others seem to be up too and wonders if they share her feelings--"Und wie sollte man ihnen Mut machen zu ihrer Unruhe? 'Sehnsucht, du Vogel mit dem leisesten Schlaf . . .'" (47). As she uses it here, Wolf associates the word "Sehnsucht" with the sense of helpless frustration in life which prevents Christa T. from playing a normal role in the practically-oriented society of that time. One of the subtle ways in which she (Wolf) suggests that this withdrawn restlessness is cause for optimism, not recrimination, is by returning to this word 'Sehnsucht' after some time and defining it (and at the same time Christa T.'s emotions) in such a way that it comes to mean the longing to understand the realities of life: "Da Sehnsucht von 'sehen' kommt: die Sucht, zu sehen, hat sie zu sehen angefangen und gefunden, daß ihre Sehnsucht, wenn sie nur ruhig und gründlich genug hinsah, mit den wirklichen Dingen auf einfache, aber unleugbare Art übereinstimmte" (112). The reality, apparently, was that they were frustrating times. The irony of this is that three or four years later, Christa T. apparently withdraws from the main stream of life altogether, to the country house, again with a very strong, but ill-defined yearning. This withdrawal, and how to interpret it, is one of the crucial points of the novel, but is clouded in ambiguity largely because it is not clear whether the two situ-

ations are directly comparable, whether her yearning here is also cause for optimism, as the rather idiosyncratic re-definition of "Sehnsucht" here suggests, or whether it is a symptom of her helplessness, as was first suggested.

Since these three words describe key ideas in her novel, it seems significant that Wolf should attach so much ambiguity to them in this way, by creating an implied contrast between the generally accepted definition of a word and the particular emphasis of her new "definition." Similar contrasts between general and specific can be seen in other aspects of the novel too, for example in its style, where the reasons for the ambiguities become somewhat clearer.

In presenting her view of Christa T., the narrator is not only aware of the possibility that her words may distort the image, by having different connotations for different readers for example, but particularly anxious to point out that events and characters can be viewed in very different ways too:

. . . auf andere Weise machen sich die geheimen Manipulationen und Ausflüchte der Erinnerung geltend, anders geht bei jedem die eilfertige, gefährliche Arbeit des Vergessens vor, so daß man, je nach dem Zeugen, dem man sich anvertraut, die Spuren leugnen oder sie übertreiben kann: Das wären, soviel ich sehe, die Vorbehalte, die gegen mein Verfahren gelten könnten und gegen die sich zu verteidigen sinnlos wäre. (82)

Rather than create the illusion of objectivity therefore she prefers to emphasize how arbitrary the various views of Christa T. can be, including, or especially, her own. For example, she describes one scene in realistic detail but then adds: "So kann es gewesen sein, aber ich bestehe nicht darauf" (134). Because her perspective is biased anyway, she need not rely on factual reporting in the interests of realism; she might just as well

create a scene in her imagination--"erfinden . . . um der Wahrheit willen" (31)--as she does with the "interview" with another friend of Christa T., Gertrud Dölling: At the end of their lengthy, imagined conversation, she announces: "Ich werde nicht zu ihr gehen . . . diese Gemütsbewegungen werden wir uns ersparen. . . . Warum soll ich [sie] traurig machen? . . . gewisse Fragen, die ich ihr stellen wollte, kann ich ebensogut--oder besser --mir selbst stellen. Der Umweg war überflüssig" (64-65). Occasionally she even contradicts herself, as she does over the matter of her conversation with Christa T. about the "trumpet-blast" (9, 215). This too emphasizes the arbitrariness of her "report," as she calls it (125).

But her emphasis on the subjective bias of the various views on Christa T. does not mean Wolf is denying that there is an objective truth --for example, a real Christa T. who can be identified. Nor is it hopeless to expect to reveal it in writing. As H. Mohr has shown,<sup>194</sup> the narrator often doubts whether she will ever "catch" the essential Christa T. (147-148), and must encourage herself and her reader to continue the search: "Nehmen wir uns zusammen, sehen wir sie groß" (221). Nevertheless, she does continue and evidently does believe that there is a purpose to it all. But, because she does not believe her own perspective necessarily represents the real Christa T., she must adopt an ambiguous approach to it, throwing doubt on it, at the same time as she presents it as evidence: "Wie man es erzählen kann, so ist es nicht gewesen" (82). She is not aiming to create a realistic picture directly with her tentative, reflective words and style, but to point to the underlying, essential Christa T., which she believes does exist, even though she feels incapable of expressing it herself. Just as the words used to describe key ideas in the novel can have a very specific personal connotation as well as a general definition, so the narrator

believes Christa T.'s life has a particular meaning to herself and each of those who knew her well but also a significance over and above that: Christa T. had the ability to "mean" something specific to each of her friends; they were each "nur mit ihr, nicht untereinander befreundet" (45) so that, like Gertrud Dölling, each felt at times that they were her only friend (62). Because Christa T. was able to do this, and because she was the one common factor in all these intense relationships, the narrator feels there must be an essential core to her character which is worth pursuing so that others can see her too. But because of the very nature of the relationships and of Christa T. herself, all the clues to this essential identity are limited in their perspective, so she must treat each piece of evidence tentatively and sceptically, frequently contrasting one view with another or even supplying evidence she personally feels might be misleading (89). Beyond that, she is very conscious of the fact that these "others," who are to see the essential Christa T., are entirely dependent on her writing and her particular presentation of the evidence (147-148). For this reason too, the style of her "report" is often more tentative than definite. Nevertheless beyond the apparent ambiguity, she still retains a focal point.

These examples of ambiguity in the language and style of the novel can be explained inherently--by the narrator's desire not to appear to prejudge Christa T. by using words carelessly or by restricting the reader's perspective to her own. But of course the narrator is also a fictitious character in the novel and her requirements are only part of the whole novel, even if a very influential part, in the way they determine its mood and form. The veiled insinuations of ambivalence and even betrayal of the national heritage<sup>195</sup> arose mainly in connection with the overall style and content of the novel, in particular Wolf's choice of protagonist

and the ambiguous way she is presented to the reader.

As the title suggests, the structure of Nachdenken über Christa T. is based loosely on the biography of Christa T. herself. But even before her "consideration" of her, Wolf qualifies her approach to her subject, with three passages which significantly affect the reader's attitude to what follows. The passages are respectively the motto, where Wolf announces her theme, the author's disclaimer that the novel has any deliberate resemblance to real people or events and the preface, in which the narrator reflects on her reasons for wanting to revive the memory of her dead friend.

Without wishing to imply a direct relationship, although there are direct and oblique references to it in Wolf's novel (94, 128, 221), the example of Goethe's Faust illustrates very well the effect of prefatory scenes on the main body of a work, in this case more by contrast than comparison.

When Goethe took up the Faust material again at Schiller's insistence, he had seen the need to provide the very fragmentary scenes of the Urfaust with some kind of introductory context and created the three scenes "Zueignung," "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" and "Prolog im Himmel." If one considers the three as one introductory unit, they deal successively with his own feelings for, and difficulties with the material, then the literary and aesthetic background into which it is to fit and, finally, the overall philosophical or eschatological theme. That is to say Goethe proceeds from subjective motivation to objective framework and in this way gives greater emphasis to the theme which gives the work its unity.

By contrast, Christa Wolf, who is also dealing with the theme of the search for individual fulfilment (although obviously on a more mundane scale), follows the opposite course. Rather than emphasizing the theme

or the framework, she systematically modifies it and in the process focuses attention on the parts rather than the whole.

The quotation from J.R. Becher which stands as the motto for the novel does indicate quite accurately that the theme is the search for identity: "Was ist das: Dieses-Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen?" (5). But it does not say whose identity. In a collective society, one would expect that the word "Mensch" is to be understood as mankind, i.e. the "Gattungsbegriff," as opposed to the "Einzelwesen."<sup>196</sup> (The Kafka-like generalization of Christa T.'s surname in the title has been taken by some critics as confirmation of this.)<sup>197</sup> But on the other hand, in its original context--a piece subtitled "Aus dem Leben eines bürgerlichen Menschen unserer Zeit"--the passage refers to problems of bourgeois alienation and defining individual identity.<sup>198</sup> (In this case, as H. Kähler argues, the name in the title might have been reduced to its initial for reasons of tact.)<sup>199</sup> Whichever definition obtains however, the question is a provocative, if not almost heretical one to pose in a society which for over fifteen years has ostensibly been pursuing a collective humanistic purpose. The fact that it is borrowed from the acknowledged patriarch of East German literature and to some extent therefore sanctified by his name only adds a certain irony to the question.<sup>200</sup>

Following the motto is a brief disclaimer by Wolf herself ("C.W.") which, like "Vorspiel auf dem Theater," raises the question of how reality is transformed into literature. Wolf emphasizes that her Christa T. is a "literary" figure and that in creating the events and characters around her she did not feel bound by realistic, factual detail ("äußerlicher Detailtreue"). In other words, in the interests presumably of whatever literary purpose she had, she has adapted the life of the real Christa T. But on



the other hand the only concrete written evidence of her character--the "diaries, sketches and letters" which she uses in the novel--is specifically said to be "authentic" (6). In the light of the ambiguity of the motto, the reader must now begin to wonder at what point Christa T. will cease to be an individual and begin to become a literary, representative figure. Is it Wolf's primary purpose to recreate an individual by literary means or to transform an individual into a social paradigm?

Having raised questions about Christa T.'s thematic function and then her literary role, Wolf goes on to discuss the motivation for considering her in the first place. In her preamble, the narrator discusses her motives for wanting to revive the memory of her dead friend. At first it seems to be purely personal concern for her as a close friend, in order to preserve her from the "Trost im Vergessen, das man Erinnerung nennt" (7). She had had a sudden feeling of anxiety that Christa T. would become a fixed, moribund cypher in her own all too fallible memory and determined to act before it was too late: "Fast wäre sie wirklich gestorben. Aber sie soll bleiben. Dies ist der Augenblick, sie weiterzudenken, sie leben und altern zu lassen, wie es jedermann zukommt" (8). The motive seems to be loyalty to a friend who died too young, before making her mark, mixed with the desire to derive whatever inspiration she can from her life. If so, these would be the most personal of reasons. But then she revives the idea first suggested in the motto, that her recalling her friend's life does have a representative, collective function after all: "Und bloß nicht vorgeben, wir täten es ihretwegen. Ein für allemal: Sie braucht uns nicht. Halten wir also fest, es ist unseretwegen, denn es scheint wir brauchen sie" (9).

To the extent that these three passages form an introduction to

the main narrative, by putting it in a broad social and literary context and touching on the motives for writing it, they can be compared to the introductory scenes of Faust. But their emphasis is completely different. Where the scenes before Faust appears move from Goethe's subjective motivation towards the objective factors which governed his treatment of the material, Wolf's prefatory passages tend to move from the objectivity of the theme towards the subjectivity of the motives for writing and to create ambiguity rather than greater clarity.

The ambiguities of the language and style of the narrative generally were seen to reflect, at one level, the narrator's reluctance to interpret or shape Christa T. for her readers. But in the overall context of the novel they can be seen as part of a deliberate technique on Wolf's part to make the reader withhold judgement too. The effect of the introductory passages is to suspend Christa T. between what appears to be two critical poles--the one suggesting she is a representative figure whose life is relevant to, or reflects, society collectively, and the other insisting on her individuality and unique characteristics. This same ambiguity is then carried over into the narrative itself through the narrator's constantly questioning the objectivity of her report and her cautious use of words and tentative style in presenting Christa T. to her reader. She too is apparently caught between her own highly personal relationship to, and memories of, her and her conviction that the fundamental nature of Christa T. can and should be indicated to others.

Because Wolf is questioning generalizations in all of this--whether it is the definition of a word, the description of a scene or the interpretation of a character--she dwells more on the subjective viewpoint than the general or objective one. This is not to imply that the individual

perspective is more valid than the general, only that it requires more emphasis, simply because it is unusual. In the survey of the introductory sections for example it could be seen that, although the general emphasis was towards a more personal view of Christa T., the main purpose in writing about her was still to reveal the elusive, transcendent qualities which would give her a more general significance, beyond the immediate circle of those who knew her. Despite the constant allusion to her individuality, it is her representative function or role in the collective society which is at stake in the long run. The emphasis, and the ambiguity it creates, are not to be construed in any way as a denial of this function, but are rather a reflection of concern that Christa T.'s role as a literary figure or as a member of society, should not be assumed in advance, until the individual herself has been properly understood, "denn sie ist, als [literarisches und gesellschaftliches] Beispiel, nicht beispielhaft" (57). Wolf is making elbow-room for herself, by reminding the reader that this literary figure is and was an individual.

Most critics from the West, in looking for reasons why Wolf chose this time and this method of insisting on the individuality of the individual, tend to concentrate on the cultural-political background of the 1960's and the general tendencies of Wolf's public statements over this period. M. Jäger for example feels that a just evaluation of the novel "wird aber wohl doch erleichtert" by tracing Wolf's views and positions over the previous twenty years.<sup>201</sup> Whether it makes it "easier" is dubious; nevertheless, the background of literary politics preceding the novel's appearance is undoubtedly a decisive influence. Without some awareness of the circumstances in which it was conceived, the reader would almost certainly miss the subtler points of emphasis in the form and the content of Christa T.

In his study of the effects of the Bitterfeld programme on shorter narrative prose ("Erzählungen") in der GDR in the 1960's, F. Trommler cites Wolf as one of the few who reacted against what he calls the "Ästhetik der Repräsentanz" which prevailed then. This refers to the tendency among prose-writers to treat the lives of individual characters as symbols of the process of social evolution, so that the events in their lives were not realistically represented as individual experiences but became "emblems" of a larger, collective reality, to use Trommler's term.<sup>202</sup> According to him, this kind of writing, generally termed "Ankunftsliteratur," exhausted its limited number of themes and motifs by the mid-1960's, and various authors, especially Christa Wolf, turned towards a more individualistic, less representative, kind of writing. He quotes from Wolf's introduction to a collection of stories by the Russian author Kasakov which was published in 1967, as evidence of her turning away from the sweeping generalizations of what the political critics insist are the "great themes" of socialist literature.<sup>203</sup> She wrote: "'Große' und 'kleine' Themen . . . gibt es nicht. Jedes Thema kann großzügig oder kleinlich behandelt werden."<sup>204</sup>

Trommler suggests that, even before the threat of stagnation made it necessary, Wolf was one of the few authors who reacted against what he calls the "Fetischisierung" of the Bitterfeld programme.<sup>205</sup> But, as M. Jäger has shown in his extensive study of Wolf's development as a critic and writer, she did not altogether avoid the pitfalls of representative art and the tendency to interpret the individual's experience in terms of man's or society's collective experience. Jäger gives the example of how, in Der Geteilte Himmel (1963), Wolf treats Gagarin's space flight, which is called "die Nachricht," as a symbol of hope for the progress of mankind, which is so impressive that it "tears the mask of normality from the face

of the day."<sup>206</sup> Another example, which he does not mention, is the image of West Berlin: Rita Seidel's visit there does no more than confirm her "Klischeevorstellungen der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft" in the words of another commentator.<sup>207</sup> Both the space flight and the visit to West Berlin are emblems, in Trommler's sense, and as such they emphasize the character's representative function rather than individual responses.

In Christa T., Wolf takes up these symbols again, but with a very different effect. H. Haase first pointed out how Wolf revives the symbol of space-flight only to reject it this time: At one point the narrator and Christa T. step out onto the balcony to drink a toast to the sputnik, as the symbol of the new era after 1956 (180f). Because they soon recognize this optimism is unrealistic, the "new star" fails to appear and the scene ends mundanely, with none of the grandiose phrases of its predecessors in the earlier story, Haase accuses Wolf of being anti-scientific and his critique devolves into an angry tirade, full of political platitudes.<sup>208</sup> But, as Jäger points out, the purpose of this scene is not to attack the cult of science (Wolf is a strong proponent of the judicious use of technology) but to revoke the overt and now excessive symbolism of the earlier space scene. According to Jäger, scientific breakthroughs may cause a temporary sensation, but this is soon surpassed and therefore make a poor metaphor for human progress and self-discovery. He concludes that Wolf recognized this and took the unusual step of reviving her own symbol in order to reject it: "Ein literarisches Verfahren ist als ungeeignet erkannt worden und wird beiseitegelegt."<sup>209</sup> But Jäger overstates the case in saying the symbol is rejected completely. The passage occurs as an illustration of how perspicacious Christa T. can be about her own times. Although she recognizes that the days when men could accept such signs of their own progress unquestioning-

ly are gone, the less astute will probably continue to believe in them. The symbol is not rejected out of hand; its aptness is simply called in question.

However, it is not only a matter of this one inappropriate image, as Jäger seems to imply. The same point could be made about the metaphorical image of West Berlin. In Christa T. there is a scene reminiscent of the earlier visit of Rita Seidel. It begins by emphasizing the image of West Berlin as the opposite of all that East Germany stands for, and as a symbol of all that Christa T., as an East German, is not: "Drüben, wo die anderen, wo entgegengesetzte Entwürfe von allem--von jedermann und jeder Sache und jedem Gedanken--hergestellt werden" (157). As such, it helps each individual, as it helps East Germany, to define their own identity better: "Nicht nur das Land, jeden von uns gibt es doppelt: als Möglichkeit, als Un-Möglichkeit. Manchmal löst man sich aus der Verwirrung mit Gewalt. Sie spuckt auf den Gedenkstein für die geraubten Länder im Osten" (157). The associations, like the spitting, are excessive: Christa T. finds it difficult to confirm her preconceptions in other respects; the materialism and arrogance of the West Berliners are not blatant any more, and the supposedly typical attitudes towards the GDR are put in the mouths of two old ladies who are scarcely more than caricatures. In other words, without entirely withdrawing the metaphor of West Berlin, Wolf does correct it, so that it no longer stands as an outright symbol of the evil in man.

Wolf's withdrawal, or correction, of her own symbols is not however only a literary flourish as Jäger implies; it is more important as an indication of how Wolf approaches reality generally in Christa T.--that is, didactically, contrasting one idea with another.

In her essay "Lesen und Schreiben" Wolf argues that the novels of the nineteenth century contained a strong plot and gave a consistent form to the world they dealt with, as one means of taming "die reichlich wilde Welt." These novels even had some social usefulness as models for "selbstunsichere Gesellschaftsschichten (sie schufen die Möglichkeit, als Zitat zu leben)."<sup>210</sup> But they fostered the idea of the universe as a great mechanism carrying on inexorably, independently of man. Tragedy was the result of not judging the mechanism correctly and happiness was a sign of being in tune with it. But man's view of his world has changed radically since these times, so that according to Wolf, the author is required to approach reality in a very different way, not simply by altering old "literary models."<sup>211</sup> She therefore calls for a revival of prose as an active influence in society through rejecting the old inclination to shape the world to some pre-conceived plan--what she calls the "mechanical" view--in favour of a new "dialectical" approach.<sup>212</sup>

In the essay Wolf does not explain in any detail how she expects an author to approach reality "dialectically," except to draw an analogy between writing and modern physics, where, now that the Newtonian belief in a single system, the "mechanical" approach, has been superseded, the scientist must try to suggest ideas without limiting his colleagues' imagination by being too specific: ". . . im Geist des Hörenden durch Bild und Gleichnis gewisse Beziehungen hervorzurufen, die in die gewollte Richtung weisen, ohne ihn durch eindeutige Formulierungen zum Präzisieren eines bestimmten Gedankenganges zwingen zu wollen."<sup>213</sup>

Wolf's own attempts to put these ideas into practice can be seen in Christa T., in what so far has appeared to be ambiguity or, in the eyes of East German critics, ambivalence. To avoid shaping reality like a nine-

teenth-century writer and encourage the reader's active involvement (by not presenting him with a preconceived "Himmelsmechanik")<sup>214</sup> she consistently emphasizes the duality of virtually every aspect of the novel--the important ideas, the narrator's motives and technique and especially the duality of Christa T. herself. Each of these can be viewed objectively or subjectively as has been shown, which is what gives the impression of ambiguity on Wolf's part. The dialectics of the situation are most obvious at those points where she deliberately sets up an objective thesis--for example the myth that West Berlin is an unredeemed den of capitalist iniquity, or that sputnik is a symbol of hope--and then counters this with a more personal, subjective antithesis. But she does not deny the metaphor entirely, suggesting that the two views are not necessarily contradictory. In this way she points to the possibility of a synthesis--the real identity of West Berlin or the real significance of sputnik. The same is also true in the novel generally in that Wolf does not deny that Christa T. may have a representative function as she continues to insist on her individuality.

What appears to be deliberate ambiguity in Wolf's approach to her subject is therefore perhaps better explained as her attempt to point to a reality which lies outside the limited perception of the individual but is not adequately described by any existing social system; nor can any conventional descriptive literary technique reveal it, since that is limited always by the author's own criteria in shaping his "Newtonian" world.

Because Wolf is aiming to provoke rather than describe, she relies more on hinting at a truth than stating it. As Mohr says, the novel "enthält sich der Verdeutlichung."<sup>215</sup> But that does not mean that the critic should avoid interpreting and collating the signs given in the text. Of necessity, he must define where Wolf wants to avoid definition. But it is



premature definition, in the form of the hasty assumption, that she is trying to prevent, not all definition. Indeed in many ways she is relying on the fact that her ambiguous, undefinitive approach will challenge the critic or reader to try to define Christa T. and what she signifies, and keep up the challenge to the end, so that, theoretically, not the narrator's definition or Wolf's, but the reader's own--evoked by their words--will be the result. In this sense, to use the narrator's own words, the real Christa T. will not be revealed until after the reading is over, in the reader's mind: "Aber wie ich diesen Bericht auch in die Länge ziehen mag, mir scheint ausgemacht, daß der Augenblick, sie zu sehen, nach seinem Ende eintreten wird" (112).

With this idea in mind, the following sections of this chapter represent an attempt to define Christa T. firstly as an individual evolving a particular relationship to collectivism and secondly as a representative literary figure, whose life-story constitutes a comment on the past and the prospects of the GDR.

ii) The individuality of the socialist citizen: Christa T.'s search for identity.

The figure of the outsider is almost as well-known in East German prose as it is in bourgeois literature. But whereas the bourgeois tradition has tended to favour the perspective of the outsider himself, especially in the twentieth century, the emphasis in East Germany, for obvious reasons, has been on society and how the gulf between the outsider and the social norm can be bridged. This was the principal theme of the "Ankunfts-literatur" for example in the early 1960's. The modern bourgeois tradition on the other hand more often depicts alienation, rather than assimilation, either of the detached and often guilty observer (Mann) or of the lone in-

dividual struggling to control his own existence in an apparently arbitrary world (Kafka).

Critics in East Germany and in the West seem to be generally agreed that the period of the "Ankunft" was followed by the "Alltag," beginning with novels such as Ole Bienkopp, which took up problems within socialism rather than attitudes for or against it. Having overcome his reservations about joining the collective effort, the protagonist could now, so to speak, turn towards the day-to-day realities. On the question of how authors dealt with the "Alltag" however, critics in East and West disagree. The official view in the GDR is that the new hero was still an exceptional individual, but now he was within the fold, "aus dem sozialistischen Alltag, aus der normalen Situation des Lebens." He is the "Erbauer . . . der entwickelten sozialistischen Gesellschaft" who has already found his "wahre menschliche Heimat" there.<sup>216</sup> Now, rather than proclaiming the principle of assimilation per se, the new novels are said to derive their greater realism from showing how individual and collective goals are gradually blending into one: "Eine neue Qualität entsteht bei der Darstellung bewußter Schöpfer der neuen Gesellschaft erst dann, wenn sichtbar wird, wie große und kleine Welt im Denken, Fühlen und Handeln der Menschen zur Einheit werden."<sup>217</sup>

Western critics on the other hand note the general shift away from the broader social concerns (the ideology after all is no longer in question, only the inner workings of the system) and a corresponding emphasis on the private or even fantasy world of the individual. Many imply that this is a new kind of 'inner emigration' to escape the deadening insistence of the politicians on the preeminence of the collective perspective.<sup>218</sup> In the eyes of one commentator, who cites Christa T. as evidence, "the socialist homeland" has proved to be a myth, because the individual is no longer

sustained by the dream of a realizable Utopia and no longer willing to sacrifice perpetually to attain the unattainable: He has become alienated within his own society and to this extent is said to be "not basically different" from the bourgeois outsider figure.<sup>219</sup>

However it is quite wrong to compare Christa T. to the bourgeois outsider. She does not reject society, but wants very strongly to fit in: "Sie gab sich ja Mühe hineinzupassen, sie fiel nicht aus bloßem Übermut heraus" (45). Furthermore, she steadfastly refuses to find fault with the social system: "An mir liegt es" (90). If she cannot identify with the ideal, then she, not the ideal, must be at fault: "Der neue Mensch, hörte sie sagen und begann, in sich hineinzublicken" (72).

But obviously she does not fit the socialist model either, of the exceptional individual who is out of line because he wants to take, rather than follow, the lead in society:

Diese Schöpferkraft des [besonderen] Individuums ist nicht im bürgerlichen Sinne auf den vereinzelt einzelnen reduziert. Die Neuererpersönlichkeit, die in unserem Sinne auch "aus der Rolle" fällt, kann ihre produktive, vitale und stimulierende Kraft einsetzen, wo sie die Bewegung, die Initiative des Kollektivs, die Gemeinsamkeit zur Voraussetzung und zum Inhalt hat. . . . Eine autonome Persönlichkeit ohne soziale Funktion ist eine, im Falle Christa T., tragische, Illusion.<sup>220</sup>

Christa T. is not an "innovator" in the sense in which the word is used here; she simply wants to find a role to suit her capabilities in a society which, despite its early promise, seems to have none to offer her: "Keine Lücke für mich" (90). Apparently despite her conviction that no other social system is even worth considering (66) and despite her desire to participate, she becomes an outsider.

As an outsiders figure she is noticeably unremarkable. Apart from her greater sensitivity and premature death the external details of

her life are entirely commonplace. Wolf provides just enough of these details and historical reference points to establish her as a character who could be one of the whole generation which went through the traumatic change from Nazism to Socialism at a very sensitive period in their lives. But the fact remains that she is excluded, or excludes herself, from the new society while others with the same background join in smoothly and even enthusiastically. Because of this, the most important factor is not what she does in her life so much as why she does it: If the events in her earlier life are so commonplace, why does she behave differently from others in the end? How far is her withdrawal an indication of a more endemic social discontent, or is it simply based on personal, idiosyncratic motives?

The major difficulty facing Wolf is common to all socialist realist writers attempting to deal with individual motives. Either she can adopt the perspective of the individual, as often happens in twentieth century bourgeois literature; but in this case her outsider figure is likely to be dismissed as an aberration whose subjective demands of society were unrealistic. Or she could use the fiction of an omniscient narrator who interprets and elucidates the protagonist's motives; but this is simply to set up one other, probably equally inflexible perspective (the narrator's) in addition to the existing social "cosmology" which, as Wolf says in "Lesen und Schreiben" is a futile and unstimulating exercise in confrontation.<sup>221</sup> Her solution is to compromise, by having a narrator but trying as far as possible to allow Christa T.'s life to speak for itself. The purpose of the narrator, as has been seen, is not to impose form or interpretation on her life but to offer possible interpretations. She does this not only in "her" careful choice of language and contrastive style of presentation but

by creating an implicit analogy between what she as a writer is trying to do and what Christa T. tries to do in her own life. Because the two overlap in certain important fundamental aspects, Christa T.'s motives can often best be explained in terms of what the narrator is trying to do in her sphere.

Stated in the most general terms, the purpose of the novel is to examine how an individual can set about discovering Reality, or the truth. For both the narrator and Christa T. there comes a moment when they suddenly feel that their view of reality has become distorted in some way. For the narrator, it is largely an aesthetic problem, which she tries to resolve reflectively, by intellectual means; but for Christa T. there is a great deal more urgency and less opportunity to gain intellectual distance from the problem because it affects her deep, emotional involvement in life very radically.

In her essay "Lesen und Schreiben" Wolf describes how very often an individual's perception of himself and his role in life is based on distorted evidence and how this can be one of the causes of distorted collective thinking: Over the years and through repeated tellings, an individual tends to alter his version of important events in his past very subtly to make them more vivid or palatable or entertaining to his audience. Gradually, these "medallions," as she calls them, alter his understanding of himself as he begins to adapt them, imperceptibly, towards the common mythology of the past:

Erinnerung aber pflegen wir es zu nennen, wenn wir diese recht hübsch gemachten Kunstgewerbestücke als echt unter die Leute bringen, damit sie ihren Marktwert erweisen, sich mit dem gängigen Angebot messen können und, je mehr sie ihm entsprechen, für echt erklärt werden.<sup>222</sup>

As an example, she quotes her present version of one of the most vivid experiences in her life--the final days of the war. (This scene compares very closely with a similar point in Christa T.) In Wolf's "film-like" version of the end of the war, the self she describes is hardly herself any more ("die muß ich wohl 'ich' nennen") and has even begun to take on a separate identity, capitalized and immutable: "Szenenwechsel. Zweite Einstellung. Kamera am Fuß der Treppe zum Haus von Ich." Now this "medallion," "blank poliert beim häufigen Erzählen," sits in her personal collection of important memories entitled "Ende der Kindheit."<sup>223</sup>

What disturbs Wolf most about her own medallions is their two-dimensional, visual quality; they are "ohne weiteres verfilmbar" and yet, when she pauses to consider, she feels the real essence of the experience of leaving her home town and her childhood was the "unfilmable" mixture of emotions. Her present picture lacks these finer emotional tones and, if she is ever to retrieve the real sense of that incident, she feels that this is the quality she must pursue. She then explains how she intends to go about it: "Wahrscheinlich würde er [der Gedanke] mich tief in meine Kindheit zurückführen, in Zonen die gemieden werden bei der Anfertigung der Medaillons, in Regionen, in die mir, wenn nicht alles täuscht, die Filmkamera nicht folgen könnte." She would hope to explore this indistinct but vital area not with the defining eye of a camera but with the more subtle, imaginative tool of words: "Die Sprache aber, das hoffe ich doch, könnte mir folgen, überallhin, wohin zu gehen man eines Tages den Mut haben wird: denn von dieser Zuversicht lebt man."<sup>224</sup>

According to this passage, Wolf distinguishes between two formative periods in an individual's life--childhood, when certain basic emotional values are laid down, and a later period, perhaps beginning with the "end

of childhood," when influential incidents occur which can be recalled quite vividly later; but because of the tendency of the mind to order and give shape to these experiences, they can be misinterpreted. Only when these two identities clash, does one recognize a dichotomy.

Both the narrator and Christa T. come to a point of recognition of this sort, but the outcome in each case is not the same. For the narrator it acts as the stimulus for her to write her "report," but for Christa T. the results are far less tangible.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains her motive for wanting to revive the memory of Christa T., by describing her sudden feeling that her memory of her was almost "dead," static. It had been reduced to a series of vivid episodes which made up a kind of "Schattenfilm" (8). Like Wolf with her "medallions," the narrator finds that the more she replays her mental film the more the real Christa T. recedes behind the plastic images. Jolted by a sudden sense of anxiety that she might lose the real Christa T., she sets about retrieving her, and the novel which follows is the result.

For her, the search for the identity of Christa T. is an intellectual exercise: Since the "Schattenfilm" is all she has to base her feeling for the essential Christa T. on, she begins with what seems to be the earliest, most typical episode (the "trumpet-blast") and expands from there, using whatever other material she can find and making up in imagination what she lacks in fact. To create the necessary distance from Christa T. she must proceed thematically, not biographically, for if she builds up a chronological, cumulative picture of her, she is simply repeating the process which led to the "Schattenfilm." Time distorts, so she must ignore it wherever necessary in order to pursue the ideas under-

lying Christa T.'s activities: "Szenenwechsel, Sprung von sieben Jahren, die Chronologie stört" (139). In the words of H. Mohr: "'Bedeutung' ist das Ordnungsprinzip des Romans, nicht Chronologie."<sup>225</sup>

But for Christa T. the situation is significantly different. When she reaches a crisis point, it is not an intellectual awareness that her view of reality is distorted, but an intense feeling that the whole basis of her life has been called in question. She cannot "consider" her situation from a distance and approach a solution reflectively, but must live it out, practically. She can scarcely remove herself from the time-scale as the narrator does, in order to gain an overview of herself, or so it would seem at first. However, there are distinct parallels between what she tries to do, instinctively, in her life and what the narrator does, consciously and with deliberation, in her writing. In this way, the motives of the one suggest possible motives of the other.

To the narrator, as to Wolf herself, childhood is the period when the basic emotional values are established. She also believes that later experiences can sometimes obscure the essential importance of the original episodes: She imagines on one occasion taking Christa T.'s daughter back to her childhood haunts and reminding her of various little incidents--"Nun wird das Kind sich zu erinnern glauben, was es nicht erinnern kann, und von den saftigen Bildern, die man ihm vorhält, werden die Schatten, die ihm manchmal bei geschlossenen Augen erscheinen und wahrer sind als die prallen Bilder, für immer verdrängt werden" (170). And later still, at Christa T.'s last New Year Party, everyone begins to tell stories of their younger days and is astonished that the stories are really all they do remember and that they were all quietly adapting them to make their lives seem like a coherent whole, leading to the present high point: "Wir



arbeiteten an einer Vergangenheit, die man seinen Kindern erzählen kann, die Zeit rückte schließlich heran" (211). The cumulative effect of the passage of time and their natural inclination to order and interpret their own past, gradually alters the reality, just as the "medallions" had done for Wolf.

But if one has reason to try to rediscover these fundamental values, say at a crisis point in one's life, as both the narrator and Christa T. do, then one must re-create the events which gave rise to them. But since these episodes are now obscured by the later, "prallen Bilder" one has to rely on imagination, the narrator's "Freiheit und . . . Pflicht des Erfindens" (57). In this sense, Christa T. also turns to her imagination, when she reaches a critical point in her life. She begins writing sketches recalling her own childhood. But for her it is a quite instinctive, unconscious act: "Ganz sicher aber hat sie nicht gewußt, warum sie gerade jetzt dem Kind in sich selbst nachgehen mußte. Wie aber innerlich beteiligtes Schreiben immer auch mit Selbstbehauptung und Selbstentdeckung zu tun hat . . . so hat sie . . . doch die Genugtuung gehabt, das Kind am Abend wieder aufstehen zu sehen" (73). Like the narrator, who goes back to her first conscious impression of Christa T., looking for something representative and fundamental to her character, Christa T. herself reverts to her "Kind am Abend"--the episode when she first became dimly aware of herself as an individual, separate from others (29f).

When the little gypsy boy who had been her friend shows his disgust for the villagers who are driving his family out, he includes Christa T., among the rest. At this instant she recognizes a difference between the "Krischan" he and others see in her, and another, more real, inner self. From now on she can no longer see herself as, or call herself, "Krischan" and

feels as if she has "given birth" to a second personality: "ICH denkt das Kind, ICH bin anders" (30). This is the same as the "self," Christa Wolf suspects exists beneath the false self of her story of the "end of childhood" and the same real identity of Christa T. that the narrator is searching for. As the outside influences on her life increase, Christa T. will become more conscious of the distinction between inner self and outer role until much of her life and her writing simply becomes a search to identify herself in the face of the pressures exerted by the outside world. On that evening though, Christa T. only recognizes a dichotomy and feels she must keep aware of it: "Es hat damit zu tun, allein zu sein mit einem Schmerz, den man aushalten muß, den man zum erstenmal nicht wegblasen lassen darf" (29). She treats it as a warning sign at this point.

The "Kind am Abend" episode is one of a series of "dark" incidents ("Fremdheiten") through which Christa T. unconsciously and occasionally consciously defines her role in life. As a child, faced with the authoritarian rule of the local landowners or the sight of their strutting offspring in the Nazi army, she feels "dunkel unter Dunklen" (24, 25). Then, over a period of years, a series of other incidents evoke a similar reaction, whenever she sees man's capacity for sudden, mindless cruelty. Although most of these involve animals, they are equated in her mind with the autocratic landowners and the cruelty of the Nazis, or man's inhumanity to man (51). The first of these incidents had been the brutal slaughter of the family cat by a drunken farmer, which made her mistrust outward appearances, the prelude to her later instinctive mistrust of the outside world generally: "Da faßt man ein Mißtrauen gegen den hellen Tag und die glatten Gesichter" (28f). To overcome these doubts she had taken to writing then, as if to assure herself of her own private view of the world:

"zu dichten, dichtzumachen die schöne, helle, feste Welt, die ihr Teil sein sollte" (27).

But then comes the moment when she can no longer escape from the dark, external world in which "Krischan" used to play her role. Like Wolf, she has her experience of the "end of childhood" in the last days of war, when she is fifteen or sixteen years old. One night the sound of the last fanatical demands of the Nazis and the sight of the misery they provoked finally shake her out of her last vestiges of childhood and push her forcibly into the post-pubescent world she had so far only dimly perceived:

"Nun war sie wohl für immer in die andere Welt geraten, die dunkle, die ihr seit je nicht unbekannt war . . ." (27). Because she is now required to play a full, adult role in the world, she has no opportunity to retreat into her writing in order to find respite and define her own priorities. She does not write again, after the war, until the evening when she sits down to recall the "Kind am Abend," during her crisis of 1952 or 1953. Instead, she tries to live intuitively, according to the dictates of the "ICH" she once glimpsed very briefly and indistinctly.

Her reaction to the Nazi period is not so much revulsion as relief--that she was never corrupted by being forced, or taking the opportunity, to play an active role. Out of this sense of relief she evolves a determination never to lose her childish innocence: "Diese entsetzliche Dankbarkeit über den Mangel an Gelegenheit wird man nicht vergessen. Und diesen Argwohn gegen den Erwachsenen in sich . . . . Gegen ihn vorgehen, endlich in voller Schärfe. Ihn verdächtigen, ihn anklagen, ihn überführen. Keine Widerrede dulden. Verteidigung höhnisch zurückweisen; das Urteil sprechen: lebenslänglich. Es annehmen. Es selbst vollstrecken." The narrator comments, reinforcing the implications of this: "Lebenslänglich.

Kein leeres Wort" (38).

In his study of Christa Wolf, M. Jäger speaks of the marked "Tendenzen einer gewollten Naivität" in her speeches and novels. By this he means her desire for authors and literature generally to regain a lost innocence, so as to be able to respond more directly and intuitively to reality: "Die Last früheren Wissens und früherer Erfahrungen abzuschütteln, um in einer zupackenden Unmittelbarkeit sich der Realität öffnen zu können, ist ein als dichterische Methode empfohlener Wunschtraum der Autorin."<sup>226</sup> This description might aptly be applied to the narrator's efforts to shake off the deadening burden of her "Schattenfilm" in order to make herself receptive, or unbiased, towards the original, real Christa T. But for Christa T. herself such an approach seems questionable. The source of her uneasy relationship with society seems to lie in the very fact that she never really loses her innocence and therefore does not make any distinction between naiveté as a poetic method of approaching reality and the same thing as a *modus vivendi*. As a child, she had been able to escape into her imagination and her writing, away from everyday reality; but in the adult world that is not an adequate approach to life.

She believes that the new society is above all a rational society, so that when she welcomes it, she does so not in direct reaction to Nazism, relatively unquestioningly, but because it offers the hope of eradicating the "dark" side of life, which includes Nazism, among other things: ". . . sie begreift nicht, wieso danach, nach dieser vernünftigen Klarheit, das Äußerste an Unvernunft noch möglich gewesen sein soll" (41). The omens are not good, however; she looks up from the reading that spurred her into these hopes, to find one of her pupils systematically destroying a bird's nest containing nearly hatched eggs (41).

The "double-edged quality of [Christa T.'s] uncompromising idealism"<sup>227</sup> is not obvious immediately. She drifts, or is persuaded, into a number of jobs, for most of which she proves too physically or emotionally sensitive, before finally drifting into university (43). Here as elsewhere a pattern has begun to evolve as the new society defines itself and begins to influence the lives of individual citizens. This in turn evokes a response in Christa T. and her "Lebenskrise" is the direct result. Whatever general inferences are to be drawn about Wolf's view of the relationship between individual and collective depend very much on how one understands this section of the novel, taking into account the personal and political premises which have been explained up to this point.

Although the crisis is described largely from Christa T.'s perspective, it is not correct to imply that hers is the sole criterion against which society is judged, as one recent critic does.<sup>228</sup> True, there is considerable implied criticism of society and the growth of collectivity: Through the narrator, Wolf is very scathing about the insecurity which led most people to grasp the collective ideal with religious fervour: "Wahrlich, ich sage dir, heute noch wirst du mit mir im Paradiese sein!" (67). Like the religious zealots they were, they were impervious to any outside influence which questioned their faith: "Wir waren vollauf damit beschäftigt, uns unantastbar zu machen. . . . Nur nichts Fremdes in uns aufnehmen . . . --ein Zweifel, ein Verdacht, Beobachtungen, Fragen" (65). But on the other hand, although the millenium was not to be just moments away, the experience was a very valuable one, because it gave those who lived through it a strong sense of common purpose which has lasted, beneath the surface, until the present:

Wir . . . lächeln heute, wenn wir uns gegenseitig daran erinnern. Werden noch einmal, für Minuten einander ähnlich, wie wir es damals durch diesen Glauben jahrelang waren. Können uns heute noch an einem Wort, einer Losung erkennen. Blinzeln uns zu. Das Paradies kann sich rar machen, das ist so seine Art. Soll den Mund verziehen, wer will: Einmal im Leben, zur rechten Zeit, sollte man an Unmögliches geglaubt haben. (67)

And, to excuse the intolerant mood of solidarity in some way, Wolf adds that it was impossible to judge at the time when real hope gave way to abstract faith, or desires to dogma. No-one could say precisely when the spontaneous outbursts of the early days took on an identity of their own as slogans on placards and the sense of collective purpose was transformed into belief in the principle of collectivity per se, existing independently of the real needs and desires of individuals; but it did happen: "So entstand um uns herum, oder auch in uns, was dasselbe war, ein hermetischer Raum der seine Gesetze aus sich selber zog" (72). Collectivity thus became an autonomous, abstract ideal insidiously, just as the "medallions" encouraged a common mythology of the past insidiously.<sup>229</sup>

Christa T. never crossed the imperceptible bridge between enthusiasm and the religion of collectivity, because she recognized very early that her initial enthusiastic reaction had been excessive; she after all had turned to Socialism because it held the promise of being rational, not because it was the antithesis of Nazism. She had burnt all the diaries full of her hopes and promises (39) and had begun to speak hesitantly in "half-sentences" about her life in the post-war, formative years of the GDR (34-36). Whereas words and their precise meaning remain precious to her, they become cheap but dangerous commodities for others. These others gradually build up a façade--"die bloße Hülle, den Namen" (71)--and conceal themselves behind this collective "medallion," the slogans and placards,

which they soon even begin to believe themselves (72). Christa T. could not do that (71). The more definite and uniform others become, the less resolute and sure she is, because she has not been able to suppress her inner self beneath the external role, as others are doing now, since that "evening as a child."

But still she does not withdraw into herself: "sie . . . ging hin und tat, was von ihr verlangt wurde" (71). As a child she had been able to withdraw and had found "Trost . . . in den geschriebenen Zeilen" (28). But her writing now is, according to the narrator, an unconscious expression of her need to assert, or redefine, her priorities as an individual, not a refuge. She invokes the "Kind am Abend" in the hope of being able to see herself more clearly: "Und am Ende 'ich' sagen: Ich bin anders" (73). This compares with the narrator's own writing about her up to this point, exploring her childhood, using imagination where necessary, in order to search for threads of ideas. But whereas the narrator is searching deliberately and consciously and has the advantage of distance and control over her material. Christa T. reacts unconsciously, cannot control her life and cannot view it from a convenient distance and varied perspectives. Her writing, like the words she uses to describe her life at this time, remains "sketchy" (73). She is able to revive her "Kind am Abend" but cannot trace conclusions from it which relate to her life. She seems "wirklichkeitsfremd" but also "wirklichkeitshungrig," eagerly and carelessly absorbing as much experience as possible as if to make up in quantity what she lacks in understanding (73-74).

As East German society becomes clearly defined, it provokes a response in Christa T. which in turn defines her priorities more clearly too, to the observer, if not to herself: "Das Muster schimmert durch" (77).

Now, rather than pursuing tenuous motifs, such as the "darkness" of the formative episodes or the "Kind am Abend," the emphasis turns to major aspects of Christa T.'s life--especially her love life and her health.

The actual catalyst which provokes Christa T.'s crisis seems to be a broken love-affair rather than a social confrontation: Her "Romantic" boyfriend Kostja finds his "blonde Inge," takes her from his best friend, who is publicly humiliated and Christa T. retires to her room, where she considers suicide in a letter to her sister. But the letter makes no mention of the love-affair, talks only of her inability to find her niche in society and, as the narrator points out, is written "im Frühsommer dreiundfünfzig" (90). The connection between the social unrest of June 1953 and Christa T.'s private affairs seems obscure, except that her earlier romances also had clear social connotations, which reached a climax at this crisis-point too.

The most memorable of these was the "Sommerliebe" with the neighbouring schoolmaster, whose favourite expression is "vollständig" and who knows exactly what he wants in life (50-51). This takes place during one of the summers of the late 1940's. The narrator, who recreates a typical evening in this short affair, imagines Christa T.'s barely concealed "Spottlust" (50) and herself destroys any lingering idea of a country idyll through the heavy irony of her description: "Fehlt bloß noch, daß sie quer über eine Wiese laufen und das ausgebreitete Heu duftet" (51). The point of the story however is the irony (Christa T.'s reaction) rather than the idyll (the unreflected experience), because the narrator feels that this or a similar experience must have been the spur Christa T. needed, to move on before being trapped in a predictable world: Christa T. does leave, as she often will later in her life, "dahinter verbirgt sich ein Muster, schon ablesbar



beim erstenmal: hinter sich lassen, was man zu gut kennt, was keine Herausforderung mehr darstellt" (54).

Another pattern emerges here too, namely that Christa T., in her childlike naivety, makes no real distinction, except possibly in degree, between her relationship with one person (however close) and with all others. To this extent, her love affairs typify many of her social attitudes (or are made to, by the narrator). What she learns from her love affairs is very soon translated into a general principle. For example, it is not a very far cry from her parting from the all-too-decisive schoolmaster to her dislike of the kind of bureaucratic socialists, the unimaginative "Tatsachenmenschen" whose sureness and purposefulness make her feel so inferior during her own, and the GDR's, early, formative years (66). The same is also true of the affair with Kostja, which comes at the time when the state, if not she herself, have developed a much more definite identity. The affair, like the times, force her towards a clearer definition of her priorities.

Unlike the schoolteacher, Kostja does not say "vollständig," nor is he a "factual philistine," but he is an idealist with preconceived notions about life, most of them drawn vicariously from books rather than practical life, however. Christa T. becomes involved with him, in what might be called a passionate affair of the head, during the period (1952-53) when she is torn between the inner dictates and the outer obligations in her life and can satisfy neither. She treats him as a Romantic ideal, to be contemplated for his beauty, but not touched--he is the "strangest and least physical of her loves" (78). She devotes herself to this platonic love with reckless lack of self-consideration: "Hingabe, was immer daraus folgt. Mangel an Vorsicht und Zurückhaltung. Das Erlebnis bis auf seinen

dunklen Rest" (97). But this bloodless pursuit of an ideal, however intense, proves to be unfulfilling. The idol falls from his pedestal when reality eventually does touch him, as Christa T. had said it would ("Die Wirklichkeit könnte dich nur noch beschmutzen" [80]). Kostja's ménage à trois dissolves into a pair, because Inge's attraction proves greater than Christa T.'s ethereal devotion.

The fallacy of committing oneself totally to an abstract ideal is demonstrated in the broader context too, at the same time, when Günter, the Party man, allows his individual feelings for Inge to intrude into what is supposed to be an object lesson on the rationalism of socialist man (85). The collective mentality, represented by Frau Mrosow, will not tolerate such lapses into individuality and decides to make an example to preserve the principle of absolute commitment to the ideal. Regardless of personal circumstances and because, rather than in spite of, his responsible Party position, Günter becomes a "case": "der Mensch Günter und der Fall des Subjektivismus wurden voneinander getrennt" (87). This, more than anything else seems to bring home the falseness of contemporary life to Christa T. "Günters Fall" (the pun is intentional) makes a neat story of a fall from grace, from the simplistic perspective of the collective. But--and this is the point at which the narrator's conscious, literary search for the true reality beneath the "Schattenfilm" and Christa T.'s instinctive search for her real priorities as an individual in the face of so many pressures to adapt to an impersonal ideal, come closest together--reality cannot always be packaged so neatly; true reality is more complex: "Soweit, um den Tatsachen Genüge zu tun, die Handlung. Die Wahrheit aber ist das nicht" (87).

The oblique allusion to the uprising of June 1953 which follows

this episode must be intended to reinforce the broader social implications of the personal experience Christa T. has just undergone. The official explanation at the time of the unrest was that Western provocateurs had stirred up latent capitalist instincts in some elements of the populace. But a more direct cause, which most people now accept, was the Party's insistence on pursuing its economic goals at all costs, to prove the success of the planned economy. By raising the work norms by ten per cent, they clearly broke the limits of the workers' toleration and, after the uprising and with some outside pressure from the Russians, they were forced to take more realistic account of the people who were to bear the brunt of their philosophical intransigence.<sup>230</sup> In this respect there is a clear parallel between Christa T.'s personal crisis and the social and political crisis in the GDR. Idealism, whether in love, in political allegiance or in governing society, is bound to conflict with reality at some point. In Wolf's novel, that point is "early summer 1953" in all three cases.

To judge Christa T. by the biographical facts of her life, rather than by her motives, the crisis of 1953 is the beginning of her withdrawal away from reality into what one critic called her "poetische Enklave des Selbst."<sup>231</sup> Until then, she pursues a utopian ideal like everyone else, although her motives and her view of the ideal may differ because of her "naive" approach to life. But it seems to be Wolf's contention that from this time on Christa T. becomes more realistic, in the sense that she tries to come to grips with society and her own personality as they are, rather than as they ideally should be. Significantly, she first withdraws to the country and tries to gain insight into herself and her role through writing, but this time it is even more fragmentary than usual, consisting of little more than lists of titles (108-110). Only one story, "Malina, die Himbeere,"

a childhood reminiscence, goes beyond the barest outline. It seems to the narrator that she was trying to define herself to others too, at this point: "Sie redet, daß man sie sieht." One result of her crisis, which she now seems to recognize, is that writing, as a sole means of self-definition and self-assertion, is inadequate in her society (91). Gradually, after 1953, she relies less and less on her writing to establish a sense of priorities, as she becomes more involved in practicalities. It is left to the narrator to define her in writing, "Daß man sie sehen kann" (156) while her own writing, like her life becomes less concerned with an ideal of selfhood and more with exploring the present reality.

Christa T. begins to make the change to more practical expectations of life at university, when she returns there in 1954. At first it is only an intellectual change. It is signified in her essay on Storm, where for the first time in years she begins to use the first person singular rather than conceal herself behind the collective "Wir" or the escapist "sie" she uses in her creative writings. Her critique of Storm begins in fairly stilted fashion with generalizations from the collective perspective: She criticizes his inability to draw the full consequences of the personal conflict between "Wollen und Nicht-Können" which drove him to seek refuge in a "Lebenswinkel" (123). She is ironic about his avoidance of the huge social upheavals of the times; she calls it "die Rettung der Poesie vor der drohenden Zerstörung der menschlichen Persönlichkeit an den Rand des Geschehens" (121). But then, at the end, she steps off the pedestal to give her own opinion. The tone is discreet but warm, as she obviously appreciates the realism of the country atmosphere and his ability at that limited level to salvage a small corner of life for himself (124).

In her own life however, she is not ready to break away into

such a limited world. She has not accepted the distinction between "Wollen" and "Können" which is the sign of the practical man. She still upholds an ideal view of man's potential, proclaiming to her students the classical idea of mankind fulfilled through the noble aspirations of individuals: "Weil die großen Entwürfe niemals aus sich selber leben, sondern aus uns gespeist werden. Edel sei der Mensch . . . Wir müssen groß von uns denken, sonst ist alles umsonst" (127-128). But here again reality corrects her idealism. All of those alien, "dark" incidents in her past, which had once led her to embrace socialism as the ideal, rational panacea, are recalled in an incident which finally ends her idealism. The "Kröten-geschichte" (134ff) reveals again that she is alone in her sensitivity to man's irrational moments and that all society is concerned about is that its norms be met: The student who barbarously destroys the toad is "einer der fleißigsten;" therefore, in the eyes of society, the episode can be dismissed as a trivial excess. But here, as with the other "dark" episodes, the external show which satisfies the social norms is, to Christa T., superficial and deceptive: "Wenn wir uns bloß nicht täuschen lassen von seiner Tüchtigkeit! Denn--wohin würde das führen?" As far as she is concerned, the only positive aspect of the incident is that at least her society does not encourage acts of brutality: "Anderswo wäre er--sonstwas. Sein Typ ist noch gefragt" (139).

During her time at the school, Christa T. learns that the generations before and after her have adapted in two ways to collectivism. The older generation of former revolutionaries has accepted that the state they struggled to bring into existence is not ideal, but still support it. While their fiery idealism has been tempered, they have remained committed and do have limited personal hopes. The school principal, who represents this

generation, has brought himself up "nur so viel zu wollen, wie er erreichen kann, mit äußerster Kraft" (132-133). The students on the other hand apparently have no social aspirations. The "rules of practical life" they try to teach to their naive instructor, Christa T., are that as long as society's superficial needs are satisfied one can lead one's life as one wants (129). In them, the division between individual incentive ("Wollen") and social aspirations ("Können/Nicht Können") seems complete. There is evidently no conflict for them because they have no demands of society and can easily pay lip service to the few demands made of them at this stage in their lives.

For Christa T. there remains a conflict between "Wollen" and "Können." She continues to aspire to achieve more in life than she, as one individual, can realize. Although she no longer pursues absolute ideals as she did before, she recognizes, as a result of her interview with the old-guard principal, that she still has very high aspirations. But the change which has taken place (the interview was invented by the narrator, to typify the change [134]) is that now she sees certain physical limitations: "Sie ist auf einmal froh, daß sie Wünsche hat, die über sie hinausgehen. Und über die Zeit, die ich erleben werde, sagt sie sich zum erstenmal" (134). From now on, her life is to become more purposeful, as she recognizes the limitations of time.

The significance of time in Christa Wolf's conception of reality has already been mentioned in connection with the narrator's efforts to create literary realism. For her it became necessary to ignore the sequence of events in order to extract the threads running through Christa T.'s life. To a great extent this is what Christa T. had been doing in her own life, unconsciously, and, from the narrator's point of view, with

considerable success, since she had shown up the hypocrisy of rank collectivism. From her own point of view of course this naive insistence on the timelessness of her own instincts had proved almost fatal; she could, or would, not adapt to changing circumstances. While others, such as the schoolmaster of her "Sommerliebe," stressed acceptance of the given circumstances and stability, she took time to test the alternatives, moving from one job to another; at university she saw no point in meeting arbitrary deadlines on arbitrary essay-topics, but wanted to wait until she could contribute "in her own currency" (110). To Kostja, her idealized love had been Romantic and "unzeitgemäß" (79). But now, after her experience in the school, she seems to become suddenly aware of the need to accept the dictates of time: "Mach ich mir auch nichts vor? Wie lange kann man noch warten? Hab' ich wirklich noch Zeit?" (146). Before she marries Justus, she says a symbolic farewell to her previous "timeless" existence at the fancy-dress ball, by renouncing her life of role-playing, and indicating (in the interpreting eyes of the narrator) that the marriage is to be her chosen role now: ". . . erst mal ein paar Rollen durchprobieren, ehe man sich festlegt, diese und jene als Zumutung zurückweisen, andere mit geheimem Neid schon besetzt finden--endlich aber eine annehmen, bei der alles auf die Auslegung ankommt, also von mir selbst abhängt" (151). The marriage is not her ideal though, it is only the most suitable role in pressing circumstances: "Aber versprechen . . . kann ich natürlich nichts" (147).

By the narrator's standards, submitting to the day to day, time-bound existence is to risk losing perspective on life and its underlying reality. But by the standards of 1956, Christa T. is being entirely realistic--perhaps even more consistently realistic than her contemporaries.

Reality, to Christa T.'s contemporaries is the world as it exists

in the present. Realism therefore consists of adapting to present circumstances. Accordingly, Christa T.'s crisis in 1953 is said to be due to her lack of realism--"mangelnde Anpassungsfähigkeit an gegebene Umstände" (92). One result of that crisis is that she recognizes how unrealistic her life had been and determines to overcome her fear of the "Unvermeidlichkeit des Bestehenden" (92). She stops living as haphazardly as before and begins, half-consciously and half-unconsciously, to follow a "plan" (118). The plan is to become more responsive to day to day reality, as has been seen: "Wann--wenn nicht jetzt? Wann soll man leben, wenn nicht in der Zeit, die einem gegeben ist?" (90). But she goes further than her contemporaries. She not only wants to live "jetzt, in diesem Augenblick," she wants to live completely, "ganz und gar" (126); that is, she wants to find some fulfilment in her life, instead of living in the shadow of a future ideal, as her contemporaries do. To them, that future is so far off it is "das gründlich andere," a utopian "Belohnung eines Tages, für unermüdlichen Fleiß" (126).

The problem facing Christa T. at this stage (1953-56), whether she is conscious of it or not, is how to find this realistic, fulfilling way of life in a society which is oriented towards a future no individual can even visualize. In marrying Justus, she is opting for a practical life in which she has a fixed and obvious function. But it is also a Storm-like world of manageable proportions that she is choosing. Rather than remain prey to "unmäßige Ansprüche, phantastische Wünsche, ausschweifende Träume" (154), she opts for the "sichere, scharf abgegrenzte Vorgänge" of the "kleine Welt" of the nineteenth century realists (118).

The marriage, and what leads up to it, is a conscious act on Christa T.'s part, more so than most in her life. She decides, conscious-



ly, to restrict her horizons and curtail other possible roles in life in order to play a limited, but useful, and above all "realistic," role in society. Her skills and capabilities are evidently very limited, and so she selects a world in which she can make best possible use of whatever she has.

If the novel had been designed to end here it would truly resemble the realism of a nineteenth century "Bildungsroman" with a touch of the modern anti-climax. But Wolf is concerned with Christa T.'s inner biography, that is, more with her unconscious or involuntary reactions to the pressures of the times, than her conscious decisions, as the continuation of the novel makes abundantly clear.

Superficially, the marriage follows the bourgeois conventions as Christa T. fulfils her role as housewife and mother and then becomes involved in planning her house by the lake. The deliberate banality of this is so obvious (even to herself) that it scarcely calls for the acrimonious comment of one East German critic that Wolf has almost created a heroine "deren Himmel hinterm Gartenzaun sein Horizont hat."<sup>232</sup> The most obvious sign that the triviality of her existence is straining her endurance is Christa T.'s affair with the huntsman (195ff). Haase accuses Christa Wolf of verging on a literary cliché in this episode: "Muß es denn der Jägersmann sein--Herzensbrecher seit eh und je--der die eheliche Treue der Christa T. auf die Probe stellt?"<sup>233</sup> The point is that it must; the cliché is deliberate, because it emphasizes Wolf's implicit argument that by consciously limiting her world to purely practical proportions, Christa T. has made her life trite: Her own solution to the banality of her chosen life is itself banal--she, after all, chooses to seduce the huntsman, ("die Verführung . . . ist von ihr ausgegangen" [196]), not, as Haase implies, vice versa.

In addition to pointing out the ultimately unfulfilling banality of the existence of those who live for the present only, the huntsman episode raises another of Wolf's arguments against this so-called realism: namely, that it absolves the individual of any sense of moral responsibility for his own actions--at the time she seduces her huntsman, Christa T. neither tries to explain nor excuse her actions, but simply responds to a momentary impulse (197). Wolf introduces this argument about the amorality of living "realistically," for the present, most pointedly, as a "Vorwegnahme," even before describing the marriage and its aftermath, in the scene involving Christa T.'s former pupil (139ff). When she meets him again shortly before her death, the pupil has become a self-assured doctor, the modern equivalent of the "Tatsachenmenschen" or the decisive schoolmaster of the "Sommerliebe." He proudly announces his credo as: "Der Kern der Gesundheit ist Anpassung" (141). He has adapted to circumstances as he finds them almost to perfection. He has no time for what Christa T. had called the "halbphantastische Existenz des Menschen" since, as a doctor, he considers that he must be concerned only with the "reale Existenz" (140). But, as Christa T. comments sardonically afterwards, the fantasy side of man is in reality "unsere moralische Existenz . . . nichts anderes"; it alone enables man to consider past causes and future effects of his actions. Men like the doctor, in her view, do not feel responsible for anything, "was es auch sei" (143).

Although externally Christa T. binds herself to the practical realities of her times, in other ways, with the interpretive help of the narrator, her life continues to indicate the other, transcendent reality, which is Wolf's goal. There are suggestions, for example, that her children are not only an expression of love (or reconciliation), but one way to prolong her presence on earth, in spirit, once she realizes how short her own

span is: "Ein Kind. Später leben" (92). Eventually, it is suggested, the time may come when her kind of contribution will be appreciated: the first child's birth coincides with the Hungarian uprising, which, in this novel, marks the end of Stalinism and the religion of collectivism ("die Rolle der eisern Gläubigen wird abgesetzt" [168]) and the beginning of the time when individuals began to have to look for the essential things in life for themselves without the benefit of "stage-lighting" (168). And the last child is born, phoenix-like, as Christa T. is already dying of leukemia--the birth and her death are placed side by side (230-233), although much happens in the intervening five months which has to be described elsewhere. When this child is born, she sees it as a pledge, "als Lebenspfand" (230). The implication is that, now she has opted to expend her energies in one role, in the present, rather than playing at several to give her the insight future generations will have into the reality of these times (151), she is hoping that her children will have the time, in their lives, to see what she can never see.

Christa T. preserves some of her options in other ways too--particularly in her writing. Although, as has been seen, she commits herself wholeheartedly to her role of wife and mother, she is evidently not convinced that this is the most fulfilling role for her. To the narrator, the huntsman episode is proof that she wanted to try to break out of the role she had chosen (199). But more reliable evidence is available in her writing. Because she cannot say "ich" (she is not certain of her true identity or proper fulfilling role) she writes in the third person (146). Unlike Christa T. herself, this partly imaginary "sie" is not caught up in the frustration of the conflict between "Wollen und Nicht-Können," she "kann, was sie wollen muß" (215). In other words, through this fantasy

self, Christa T. can try out the roles and ideas which she can no longer play at in real life. At one time she had been able to do that in her life, but it had proved "unrealistic"; now she must do it in imagination. The "secret of [this] third person" to the narrator is that, "wenn die Umstände ihr günstig sind, [sie] mehr Wirklichkeit auf sich ziehen kann als die erste: ich. Über die Schwierigkeit, ich zu sagen" (216). For Christa T. conditions were not favourable; the "reality" she had had to accept in choosing to marry Justus was not the one she was looking for, where she could play a full role and be herself ("ich" sagen). And so, in order to keep looking, she resorted once more to writing. But she will not write for others yet. She has a fund of stories, "die merkwürdig wahr sind, obwohl sie nirgendwo passieren" (217); but she will not write them down, because she apparently does not trust her own judgement: "Sie hielt das Leben für verletzbar durch Worte" (217). Writing to her means proclaiming a point of view, but until she knows her own place in the world, she will not, or cannot, impose herself on others: "Schreiben ist groß machen" (213).

The reality Christa T. is looking for, where there is no conflict between individual aspiration ("Wollen") and public, collective obligation ("Können") is the ideal of the novel, as, theoretically, it is of socialist society. Her problem is how to visualize it, now, under less than ideal circumstances ("Wann--wenn nicht jetzt"). She cannot commit herself to present circumstances without the belief that she is on the right track, towards a worthwhile goal. To discover her best course, like the narrator, she must somehow try to escape the limitations of time. First, she tries to place the various possibilities for her life side by side rather than in sequence, playing different roles intensely, for comparison. When this

proves "unrealistic," she decides to play one role very intensely, testing the realities of her times even more fully and consistently than those who continue to play the collective game. (In this case, the remark "Ich grab mich aus" (191) must be interpreted as "I am digging myself out [of the confusion and aimlessness of life in the main stream, by playing a tangibly useful role to my utmost capacity, at a level at which I can function practically in this very practical society].") But unconsciously she continues to believe that the ideal may come (for her children if not for her) and so continues to look for it in her imagination (in the "third person" roles). Her life is not at any stage completely bound by the normal restrictions and necessities of the present, because consciously or unconsciously, in varying degree, she is always trying to escape them to gain insight into herself and the times, by experiencing the utmost that she and the times have to offer: "Wie sie viele Leben mit sich führte, in ihrem Innern aufbewahrte, aufhob, so führte sie mehrere Zeiten mit sich, in denen sie, wie in der 'wirklichen', teilweise unerkant lebte, und was in der einen unmöglich ist, gelingt in der anderen. Von ihren verschiedenen Zeiten aber sagte sie heiter: Unsere Zeit" (221). In her effort to gain perspective she sinks herself more into the times than most--in the variety of roles she explores and the intensity with which she does it. In this sense she represents the times ("Unsere Zeit") more than most individuals could.

Naturally, no one individual can realize a social utopia and obviously it is impossible in life--if not in art--to escape the day-to-day requirements of one's own time to search for it. To this extent Christa T. is unrealistic in her expectations, of herself and of her times. She is, despite everything, only one individual, as Wolf felt it necessary to remind the reader at the outset. Her life does have broader implications,

though, because of its intensity; it represents in part a distillation of the times.

There are many ways of viewing Christa T.'s death. In part it is a reminder, the most memorable of all, that she is only an individual. Her death is not an ideal literary ending. The narrator says at the end that if she had to invent her she would have changed nothing, except the ending: "Ich hätte sie leben lassen" (222). The prematureness of her death also reiterates the point that real life is not as timeless as Christa T. often seemed to believe her own life could be, despite her occasional suspicions that she would die early: "Zeit aber war das einzige, was sie nicht hatte. Ist ihr dies nicht frühzeitig mitgeteilt worden?" (110), and: "so viel Zeit, wie sie sich nimmt, haben wir nicht" (216). But against this "natural" explanation of the death must be weighed the hints that it is symbolic. Wolf suggests for instance that the leukemia may be partly psychosomatic and therefore symptomatic: it begins as a generic illness, "ein Familienübel" (156) and is therefore, so to speak, inherent. It is linked closely to her decision to marry Justus and thereby deliberately limit the potential scope of her life (162). Its main symptom is a debilitating tiredness: "in den letzten Jahren haben wir sie nie anders als müde gesehen" (175). But the tiredness, and therefore the leukemia, may be a symptom even more of her way of life and the frustration of unrealizable opportunity or <sup>fulf</sup>un/illable potential: "Niemals kann man durch das, was man tut, so müde werden wie durch das, was man nicht tut oder nicht tun kann" (175-176).

In the end, her death is like her life--it is highly individual yet also seems to reflect the frustrations of the times. So much can be made of these social implications, though, that the individual is lost.

Although Wolf plainly resists the idea that Christa T. is a social cypher, there are a number of Western critics who leapt at these concealed comments and consequently distort the true picture. Reich-Ranicki for example implies that the leukemia is entirely psychosomatic: "Sagen wir klar: Christa T. stirbt an Leukämie, aber sie leidet an der DDR."<sup>234</sup> And Raddatz even describes her death as suicide, insinuating that she "acts" out of frustration at the restrictions on her life.<sup>235</sup> But Christa T. does not go to her death in despair, any more than she accepts marriage to Justus out of despair. She accepts the need to adapt to the realities, whether that means playing a useful role or admitting that one has a terminal illness. She does find genuine happiness in her marriage--this is the purpose of the image of the "rot-weißer Ball" which runs through as a kind of leitmotif, signifying her one summer of real enjoyment of simple pleasures (7, 95, 188). Similarly, she does find, one night, after she has recognized that she will soon die, that simply to have existed and lived to capacity is to experience as much of true reality as the individual can: "Ihr kam es wunderbar vor, daß sie auf der Welt war, daß man auf der Welt ist . . . . Was gewesen war und was vielleicht niemals sein würde, floß zusammen und machte diese Nacht. Das war so einfach, so verständlich und wirklich. Da war nichts zu bedauern und nichts zu bereuen" (230).

Christa T. does not die in despair. She does recognize the obvious, that she has not been able to realize her full potentialities in present circumstances; the "ich" she refers to at the end of her life is a compromise, not the ideal she was looking for, whose individual priorities blended with the goals of society. In this sense, she feels she lived too early, because she sees that the frustrations she faced in her own life--both social and medical--will soon be resolved: "Es beginnt, was sie so

schmerzhaft vermißt hatte: daß wir uns selber sehen; deutlich fühlt sie, wie die Zeit für sie arbeitet, und muß sich doch sagen: Ich bin zu früh geboren. Denn sie weiß: Nicht mehr lange wird an dieser Krankheit gestorben werden" (231). But against this regret must be weighed the genuine enjoyments of the summer with the beach-ball and especially her sense, on that evening near the birth of her last child, of having experienced the essence of her times, despite the compromises and frustrations (230). The narrator is therefore justified when she suggests that Christa T. remained optimistic to the last:

Zu früh gelebt, hat sie vielleicht gedacht, aber kein Mensch kann sich wünschen, in einer anderen als seiner Zeit geboren zu werden und zu sterben. Nichts kann man sich wünschen, als an den wirklichen Freuden und den wirklichen Leiden seiner Zeit teilzuhaben. Vielleicht hat sie das zuletzt gewünscht, vielleicht hing sie mit diesem Wunsch am Leben, bis zuletzt. (232)

If Christa T. can be described as an outsider figure at all therefore, it is not because she is alienated from her society, but rather that her experience of it, its implications and logical possibilities, is so much more intense than that of her contemporaries that she becomes in a sense more typical than the norm. The essential difference between her and others is really only her greater imagination. Because of it, she explores, in her life and her writing, more of the potentialities within the existing social framework, and in less time, than other individuals, and in this way reveals the practical social and physical limitations which reality always places on ideal aspirations. She is unusual in other words not because she resists or flees from society, but because she explores the relationship between individual and society more fully than normal.

Christa T.'s search for her individual and social identity takes place at a time when, according to Christa Wolf, the practical distinction



between individual and social priorities became entrenched. Her death therefore is to some extent a literary necessity because it links Christa T. specifically to a certain period and therefore emphasizes her paradigmatic function. Because the literary function of Christa T. is to demonstrate the contrast between ideal and reality and how it came about, there is nothing to be gained artistically by having her live on, in a society which still falls short of the ideal, making progressively more and more compromises in order to survive in a practical way. To this extent one must agree with the narrator that it is better that Christa T. does not "arrive" completely in what could at best be a compromise role in society -- "Der Wunsch [ist] unpassend . . . , sie irgendwo für immer ankommen zu sehen" (216)--but disagree, from a literary point of view, that she should have been left to live on (222).

The concluding section of this chapter will attempt to assess this question of the representative or "typical" literary function of Christa T. within the framework of a consideration of the contribution of Christa T. to the socialist realist tradition.

- c. Conclusion: Nachdenken über Christa T. as a contribution to socialist realism: The individual and the collective or an individual?

Because the prevailing theme of all socialist realist literature is the relationship between individual and society and because that relationship is supposed to reflect not the static, pictorial reality of a particular time but the evolutionary (or, in Zhdanov's terms: revolutionary) processes at work in society, the question of how to portray the individual in literature is central to the theory of socialist realism: Is the individual character to be a social paradigm, or is it enough to let the underlying

currents filter through the activities of the individual character, since every individual, according to the Marxist view, is a product of the times anyway?

"Die Frage der Typisierung" as it is called, underwent something of a change in the 1960's as the individual characters changed gradually from "Ideenträger" defending the faith to more widely differentiated individuals within the socialist fold. In the latest massive work on the theory of socialist realism, the authors of the relevant section are careful to point out that even Engels, in his much-quoted remarks to Miss Harkness and Minna Kautsky, had not used the word "typical" in the sense of exemplary or paradigmatic, but had made a distinction between "typical characters under typical conditions" in life, i.e. "dem Typischen in der Wirklichkeit schlechthin" and what is referred to as the "Typisierung als einem wesentlichen Moment im künstlerischen Schaffensprozeß."<sup>236</sup> Reflecting the changes of the 1960's, the study argues that the purpose of socialist realist "Typisierung" is, "durch [das] Einzelne, Individuelle, Besondere zur tieferen Erkenntnis des Allgemeinen, Gesellschaftlichen, Wesentlichen zu gelangen."<sup>237</sup>

An earlier study on the same topic, which was completed in August 1969, shortly after Christa T. appeared, still reflects the emphasis of the early 1960's. According to it, the desired effect on the reader ("Produktivität . . . Streben nach menschlicher Vervollkommnung") is achieved "durch weitgehende Identifizierung mit vorbildhaften Verhaltensweisen," or, at the very least, by causing the reader to reject negative figures: "Sie [die Produktivität] läßt sich jedoch auch dadurch hervorrufen, daß Distanz produziert wird."<sup>238</sup> The aim of this kind of characterization is to reveal the process by which the individual finds greater fulfilment in socialist

society: "Die Darstellung der Dialektik von Individuum und Gesellschaft, das Einordnen der Einzelercheinungen in größere Zusammenhänge ist Voraussetzung für jede realistische und künstlerische Lösung."<sup>239</sup> In the later study, the insistence that the process of assimilation be represented is gone. The criterion of typical characterization is now said to be that the author should "trace, emphasize and, in an artistically convincing way, express" the general principle through the specific, individual example.<sup>240</sup>

Obviously, Christa Wolf accepts in principle that any literary figure is to some degree representative. The narrator says so in so many words, lest there should be any doubt about her conception of literary characterization: "denn nichts anderes ist schreiben als: Beispiele anbieten" (57). Her intention in bringing Christa T. to a wider audience is to extract as realistically as possible the general consequences (i.e. representative function) of her life--"die Linien ihres liegengelassenen Lebens zu verlängern, mit der gebotenen Vorsicht, und in ihrer natürlichen Perspektive. Daß man sie sehen kann" (156). The question of Christa T.'s "typicality" however is not quite the same as the question of how representative she is as a literary figure. "Typicality," as the definitions above have shown, involves how a socialist realist character reflects the general process of social evolution as it is understood in the GDR.

In keeping with the principle, to which both of the above theoretical works adhere, that the character of a socialist realist work should reflect reality and not an abstract "Persönlichkeitsideal,"<sup>241</sup> Wolf begins her novel by emphasizing that Christa T. actually existed (as, apparently, she did)<sup>242</sup> and her narrator persistently emphasizes the personal nature of her relationship and the even more personal nature of the other evidence she has of her dead friend, in the form of the private diaries and sketches

etc. But from a socialist realist point of view, if her protagonist is to rise to any sort of a literary role, Wolf also had to create some perspective or distance from her. As the narrator says, left to herself, Christa T. would have "died again" (8-9). To a degree, despite her closeness, the narrator, as a third party, creates some of the necessary distance, by being able to suggest possible motives for her friend's actions. This would help emphasize Christa T.'s aesthetic, representative function.

But it would not satisfy the requirement that she be in some way "typical," however the word is defined in socialist realist theory. That involves relating her in some way to the "großen historischen Prozeß."<sup>243</sup> According to the 1969 definition, that is exactly what Christa Wolf does not do in Christa T. There, it is argued that, despite her avowed loyalty to the GDR, Christa T. avoids committing herself to her society ("keine Rolle spielen") and when she fails to meet the requirements of the "real" world, goes off to find her own: "Selbstverwirklichung des Menschen im Sozialismus wird als ein Zu-sich-selbst-Finden gestaltet, in dem die Verbindung von Individuellem und Gesellschaftlichem zu zerbrechen droht."<sup>244</sup> But as was shown in the previous section of this chapter, this is a crass misinterpretation of Wolf's intentions: She is critical of Christa T.'s idealism and represents her withdrawal to the country as an attempt to improve rather than ignore her relationship with her less-than-ideal society. As far as is possible within a very restricted world and an equally restricted time, she does begin to reach a fruitful compromise between her own high aspirations and the mundane realities of everyday life.

A much more important criticism that is made in this same context though, is that the modern socialist realist character develops through

a personal struggle; the "typical" protagonists who reveal modern aspects of social development are emphatically said to be the ones, "die sich den Aufgaben dieser Zeit stellen und sie--oft unter großen Schwierigkeiten--kämpfend meistern."<sup>245</sup> The implication is clearly that Christa T.--who, it has already been acknowledged, is loyal to the GDR and so is not one of the "negative examples"--cannot be considered a "typical" protagonist and is not therefore to be seen as a significant contribution to the socialist tradition of literature.

It is true that, as far as the kind of struggle meant here is concerned, Christa T. avoids confrontation: She moves from one setback to another in her attempt to find a role to play, until finally she settles into what is, by the traditional standards of a "typical" character, a trivial existence in an out-of-the-way corner of the world. (Although it is a "role," and she does commit herself sincerely to it.) Even the one obvious sign of her inner struggle--the crisis of 1953--goes unnoticed by the outside world. (She does not mail the letter to her sister expressing her momentary despair.) Seen from the outside, by the standards of the majority who fitted in, she is a failure; even as a writer she is a failure.

The point is that Wolf is not attempting to deal with success or failure of this kind: The narrator raises the question of Christa T.'s success in life almost half way through her "report" (109); she seems to avoid an answer at first, but then suggests that success can consist, "for example," in fame--or, in a much more modest way, "in der späten Gewißheit, daß man dieses und nichts anderes machen muß" (111-112). The veiled reference to that evening near the end of Christa T.'s life, when she recognizes that she has always tried to live as she felt she must in the given circumstances (230) is unmistakable. To make the point more explicit, Wolf

later has the narrator break off her description of the marriage, the birth of the first child and references to the "Haus am Meer"--that is, the most "bieder" aspects of Christa T.'s life--to warn the reader not to misunderstand her motives in bringing Christa T. to light: "Wer den Kopf jetzt weg wendet, wer die Achseln zuckt, wer von ihr, Christa T., weg auf größere, nützlichere Lebensläufe zeigt, hat nichts verstanden. Mir liegt daran, gerade auf sie zu zeigen. Auf den Reichtum, den sie erschloß, auf die Größe, die ihr erreichbar, auf die Nützlichkeit, die ihr zugänglich war" (174). That is to say, Wolf is at pains to emphasize that, judged by the external details of her life, her protagonist is, if not average, certainly ordinary, but that she had a great potential contribution to make, nevertheless.

But if Christa T. is to be considered an acceptable, "typical" character and the novel a valid innovation in the socialist realist tradition, then Wolf must be able to represent this inner struggle between her character's conception of society and social reality in a convincing way. To deal with her story "objectively"--say, through the eyes of an omniscient narrator--means imposing form and perspective and emphasizing the representative aspects of her life. And if her life is to represent certain facets of society, how much more would be made of her premature death? (Suicide? A symbol of the barrenness of social reality? Or simply a capricious modern, "realistic," ending, as unpredictable as life itself?) But if, as she does, Wolf opts for a more subjective approach, emphasizing the narrator's, as well as Christa T.'s, lack of perspective, how is she to evoke the deeper, social implications in order to make her life "typical" in the sense in which she (Wolf) apparently defines the word (because Christa T.'s life must have these implications if "we" do in fact "need

her," as the narrator asserts [9])? One way to do this without emphasizing Christa T.'s representative role at the expense of her individuality, as has been shown, is in the constant ambiguity of the "give-and-take" style in which the narrator presents the material. She may offer a (subjective) description of a scene or a character, or a word even, then counter it with a possible (objective) interpretation or definition, only to withdraw that possibility and reiterate how limited her perspective is. In this way she can suggest a deeper, more objective "typicality" in Christa T.'s life without however committing herself to it. As Mohr says, the form and structure of the novel is not designed to illustrate and define, but to hint and suggest avenues of approach: "Das ernste Spiel der Mutmaßungen soll keine Sicherheit vermitteln; es evoziert Fragen."<sup>246</sup>

The other way in which Wolf points to the "typical" significance of Christa T. is through the characterization, not only of her, but overall. Reference has often been made to the various "stations" of Christa T.'s curriculum vitae, for which, as an East German critic said, "das Klischee eher gesucht als gemieden wird."<sup>247</sup> This applies not only to the coincidence of various turning points in her life with political events (the end of the war and the end of her childhood; her personal, and the GDR's political, crisis of 1953 etc.) but to the different lovers she encounters, who also represent a particular facet of the times, as was shown earlier. And it also applies to the less private stages of her life too (except for the final one): namely, her rural background, schooling, refugee flight at the end of the war and then the physical and later intellectual work. All of these, as they are described in bare detail in the novel, she shares with the narrator and many others (11, 17, 34). In these and other respects her biography reflects that of her generation, as the narrator points out

(117). In her struggle to adapt to the monolithic, Stalinist state, which is represented by the interview with the old-guard school principal, she is described as being "austauschbar gegen eine Menge Personen ihres Alters. Gegen ein Menge, nicht gegen alle." The "time to act individually" to try to find a role in society was approaching but no one yet knew it (134). Apart from her greater imagination, which makes her more sensitive, Christa T. is at this stage a representative of her generation.

However, to Wolf, this generation is critical. The bare curriculum vitae shared by Christa T. and the narrator could be her own, so that the generation involved is essentially her own.<sup>248</sup> But this generation also had the unique fortune--"eine einmalige Lage!"--to grow up with the new society, and therefore, in her view, shared and reflected its tentative search for an identity and its growth pains.<sup>249</sup> In this sense, her generation, and all of its members individually and collectively reflect society as a whole. By providing clear references to important events and times in the early history of the GDR and stressing how they coincide with influential moments in Christa T.'s life, Wolf is relating her life not only to a whole generation, but also to a degree the whole of society. To this extent she is "typical" in the accepted sense.

A second aspect of the characterization which influences Christa T.'s role are the many direct and indirect literary allusions--"Zu viel Literatur gelegentlich, möchte man meinen"<sup>250</sup>--Haase is here concerned that the allusions emphasize Christa T.'s representative qualities too much. This would be true if the allusions were allowed to stand, but in most cases, they are treated like other attempts to interpret Christa T.--i.e. as possibilities, with an element of truth, but by no means exhaustive. To illustrate: When Christa T. calls the narrator to confess her affair



with the huntsman, the narrator immediately thinks of Madame Bovary (195). Later she decides that was not an apt comparison: she feels sure Christa T. would not resort to petty deceit and plan to leave home, "eher würde sie sich selbst zerstören, als . . . . Aber das war ja der Grund für meinen Schreck" (198). The fear is all the greater, because on other occasions Christa T. had quite consciously adopted a literary model for her life, for example in rejecting Thomas Mann for the finite, secure world of the nineteenth-century realists (118), or playing the part of Fräulein von Sternheim to represent a sentimental farewell to her past before descending into provincial life (150).

The two authors most frequently invoked are Storm and Thomas Mann. In the context in which they appear they represent polarities, radically different possibilities for assessing Christa T.'s life. After her crisis of 1953, she turns away from the complex, sophisticated world of Mann (118). But after her marriage and withdrawal into the Storm-like peace of a limited corner of the world, she takes up Mann again: "Sie las den Zauberberg und gab sich Mühe, selbst in eine ungegliederte Zauberberg-Zeit zu versinken, sonst kann man's gar nicht aushalten, sagte sie" (162). Mann's timeless, reflective world is thus set up in contrast to Storm's time-bound, practical world. In the end, it is implied, Mann's world proves the stronger attraction but the most dangerous in terms of her attempt to live a realistic life. The similarity between Mann's tubercular aesthetes, who are consumed by their other-worldly inclinations, and Christa T., who is inwardly sapped by a disease which attacks from the very essence of her physical being, is not to be overlooked. There is also probably some irony in the implied comparison between the bourgeois artist-type whose health suffers in proportion as his aesthetic abilities are enhanced in isolation from society

and Christa T., whose illness and death seem to be related to her lack of intellectual challenge and indirectly to her inability either to participate fully in society or to reflect on it successfully in her "art." While Storm's world is not ideal, neither is Mann's it would seem. From this point of view Haase's complaint is unjustified--the models from bourgeois literature which suggest typical human characteristics in Christa T. prove inadequate as keys to life, and writing, in the GDR.

The third factor to take into account in considering the characterization of Christa T. is the characters who surround her. Reich-Ranicki points out that her husband and virtually all of the other figures, except the narrator, are undeveloped as full characters.<sup>251</sup> This is true in the sense that there is little or no physical description, except for Günter's characteristic freckles. But neither is there any physical description of Christa T. beyond her loping gait and the signs of her deterioration before her death. The lack of external description emphasizes that the focus is on inner not outer biography and the fact that most of the characters represent something to Christa T.--for example the love-affairs with the schoolmaster or Kostja. The narrator is not concerned with a realistic description of the various relationships because in most cases it is not the actual relationships, but their effect on Christa T., which is important--"die Spuren, die die Ereignisse in uns hinterlassen" (218). Since it is her motives that are at issue, a rounded picture of the other figures, for the sake of pictorial realism, is unnecessary.

However, the weak characterization of the narrator is a more serious concern. Despite Reich-Ranicki's insinuation that she is better conceived than the other figures, she is not sufficiently well developed for her role. In the interests of emphasizing Christa T.'s common ex-

perience of the early years, to stress how "typical" she is of her society, Wolf presumably reduces any characteristics which distinguish her from Christa T. to an absolute minimum. Mayer argues that the two protagonists represent different facets of Wolf. Her understanding of her function as a writer and her "generation-consciousness" blend indistinguishably in the two. But, as most East German critics note, because of this very strong autobiographical element, there is imbalance. Christa T. appears to be more of an individualist than she is, because the argument of those who make up the bulk of society, those who "assimilated," is represented by obviously negative characters, such as the self-confident doctor and the bureaucrats "die recht haben, weil sie stärker sind" (91). A Western critic, K. Franke, made the seemingly obvious point that the GDR would not be what it is ("in des Satzes mehrfache Bedeutung") without the unimaginative "joiners" who made it possible for Christa T. to look for her proper role in the first place.<sup>252</sup> One of these, by her own admission, was the narrator, who, along with all the rest, tried to seal herself off from anything which even threatened to disturb the faith in collective solidarity (66). Because this "realistic" argument is not put with sufficient conviction, for example by the narrator herself, critics argue with some justification that there is not enough distance between narrator and narrated and the result is "Verlust an Perspektive und Typik."<sup>253</sup>

According to the older definitions of "typicality," which emphasize assimilation--presumably even if, as here, the society is less than perfect, Christa T. could not be considered "typical." By the standards of the majority in the 1960's Christa T. does withdraw, however realistic her intentions may be, and withdrawal by definition cannot be "typical." But according to the less absolute definition which arose as a

result of the tendencies of the novels of the 1960's, she is not only a representative of the times--more consistently sensitive to the times than those around her--because of the sheer ordinariness of her biography and the tendency to identify her and the narrator (which emphasizes their common general concern) she is also "typical." Her effectiveness as a socialist realist figure does not come from demonstrating the "Einordnen der Einzelercheinungen in größere Zusammenhänge,"<sup>254</sup> but from calling attention to the common purpose beyond the immediate present.

The form of the novel is "open" in the sense that the protagonist dies and the importance of her life proves to be the thoughts it provokes rather than any illustrations of answers it may give. The narrator finds it would have been "unfitting" to see her settle into a single role, which would have been a compromise (216). It is perhaps better so, because if the society foreseen by Christa T. were ever realized, where individual and collective goals were identical, the result would be stagnation, or, to use Jäger's description, "[eine] Horrorutopie[n] vom Orwellschen Typ."<sup>255</sup> A "typical" character however does not have to represent a realistic possibility in the strict sense any longer. What Christa T. hopes for is idealistic, an unrealistic hope that all conflicting interests will one day coincide. The question Wolf poses tacitly through her, and through her constant effort to realize the ideal in her own less-than-ideal circumstances is therefore not: Why can we not try to realize the ideal now? but: What is the ideal we are supposedly pursuing? In 1967, Ulbricht announced as policy what had become quite clear in practice, namely that the present social order, socialism, was no longer to be considered a short-term, transitional phase between capitalism and communism but a "relatively independent socio-economic formation."<sup>256</sup> More than at any other time in the

often seemingly precipitate rush towards a collective utopia, East Germans had both the time and the need to consider their priorities. It is in this sense that the final "Wann--wenn nicht jetzt?" should perhaps best be understood, as an open challenge, which would probably never be so topical again. In Wolf's mind the goal of the novel is to state a question, "dieses Suchen festhalten," but it is a challenge she may never be able to issue at any other time in the same form: "Ich habe einen Weg probiert, den ich hier nicht noch einmal gehen kann."<sup>256</sup>

### Conclusion

The intention of this dissertation has been to illustrate a tendency which virtually began with one novel (Ole Bienkopp), was strengthened in the next (Die Aula) and reached a sort of apotheosis in the third (Christa T.). It may well be that the innovations they introduced and the reaction they caused will influence the nature of East German literature for a considerable time, because they represent the efforts of committed East German authors to evolve a literary approach to their own society which would correspond to the priorities of society as a whole but reflect reality as they perceived it, rather than preconceived dogmatic principles, many of which had evolved under foreign (Soviet) or unusual (cold-war) circumstances.

Although it has not been the purpose of the study to make direct comparisons, there are several general similarities in both form and content between the three novels, which reflect their authors' common concern, and which can now be summarized. Firstly, it is probably no coincidence that all three authors owe their allegiance to the GDR itself, not to an ideology. As C. Cases remarked even as early as 1958, it was very difficult for the established writers of the 1940's and 1950's, who were mostly returning emigrants, to enter into a "critical or dialectical relationship" with the GDR after their experiences in the 1930's and 1940's.<sup>258</sup> The primary purpose of the authors discussed here was not however criticism per se but criticism of those aspects of, and attitudes towards, reality which seek to impose a general, therefore simplified, interpretation on

life at the expense of the individual's more complex experience of it. For this reason each of them attacks the tendency to make collectivity into a dogmatic, religious, principle: Strittmatter has Bienkopp accuse the Party of being a "selbstgefälliger Gott" (195), Kant speaks scathingly of the "scriptures" and "texts" which the proselytes of Stalinist socialism tried to uphold at all costs (95, 102, 273) and Wolf's narrator looks back wryly to the zealotry of the majority, including herself, who believed the collectivist catechism (67).<sup>259</sup> Kant and Wolf go somewhat further, to include anyone who puts their faith in a system or relies on the visible "facts" of a situation without thought for the underlying causes or differing individual perspectives of a situation. They both use the metaphor of filming reality to emphasizing their point, stressing that reality, in the sense of the individual experience of reality, is distorted if it is reduced to a simplified, vivid "picture," because there is no way of assessing either the nature of the involvement of an individual in a given situation, or, therefore, the situation itself (a single incident, or a whole life), without taking into account the background and the expectations of each individual. In Kant's case, this argument is made in the Fiebach affair particularly; and in Christa T. it underlies the narrator's whole approach to her subject, which is to avoid perpetuating a "Schattenfilm" (8). In her case however, the tendency to generalize and extract from reality is shown to be a natural human inclination, whereas in Kant it is often shown as a view of a particular kind of person (Angelhoff, Meibaum). Strittmatter shows a similar tendency to blame individuals, rather than human nature, in his treatment of the various characters who put principle before practice, whether that principle is political (Simson, Kraushaar) or financial (Buchhalter Bäuchler).

It is also indicative of their emphasis that all three authors undertake a re-assessment of the past, formative years, but in each case, from the perspective of the individual. Virtually the whole first half of Ole Bienkopp is concerned with how collectivism (Bienkopp's collective farm) arose spontaneously out of specific local requirements and depended upon a particular combination of highly individual people and circumstances for its particular forms. Similarly, Kant shows the growth of collectivity through the very individualistic stories of the four inmates of the room "Roter Oktober." Wolf makes her re-assessment on two levels, literary and social, but again emphasizes the individual instinct of the narrator and Christa T. which makes the review necessary. All three authors, in varying degree make it clear that they are involved in a retrospective review which has a bearing on the present, not simply a recreation of the past for its own sake. Strittmatter uses the occasional flashback, but above all his division of the story into a pre-history and a history of collectivism, and his periodically addressing his readers as "Genossen," (which stresses that a tale is being told at a different time from the events described) help to imply that his historical story has modern relevance. In Kant's case, the relevance of the past to the present (and future) is ostensibly the reason for Iswall's research into the ABF, as the motto makes clear. The fact that there is virtually no direct relationship shown between what he learns of his own past and his present or future life is one of the major shortcomings of the novel. Christa Wolf on the other hand does consider the implications of the past in some depth, by dwelling on the very real distinction between the ideal and the reality of life in the GDR.

Although the emphasis is on the nature of the individual com-



mitment to socialism and how it evolved originally, none of the three authors advocates individualism as opposed to collectivism. The main individual characters' lives are all related and compared to the historical flow of contemporary events in some way, signifying a certain representative quality. As was shown, Strittmatter follows the orthodox Marxist lines in tracing Bienkopp's conversion from a puppet of the capitalist system to a social activist under the post-war conditions. As with the other two protagonists, Bienkopp's romantic life tends to reflect social conditions (Anngret representing the intensified, and then waning, influence of capitalism between 1932 and the mid-1950's). Individual historical events, such as the founding of the GDR or the June 1953 uprising, or the twentieth congress of the C.P. of the U.S.S.R. (at which Khrushchev gave the official coup-de-grâce to Stalinism) do not play such an important role in Bienkopp's life as they do in Iswall's, or, to a much greater extent in Christa T.'s, (although the twentieth congress is said to mark the end of Wunschgetreu's rigid phase and the beginning of his more sensitive concept of his Party duties [328]). Kant relates the break-up of Iswall's family to the founding of the GDR and 1953 uprising (243) implying a certain affinity, but otherwise mentions few specific dates and historical events. Wolf on the other hand makes very pointed references to the larger political arena --especially to June 1953 and the 1956 Party Congress in Moscow, which are important turning-points in Christa T.'s life. She also, like Kant, relates her protagonist's love-life to political or social tendencies of the times. Both Christa T. and Iswall are involved (as victim and villain respectively) in triangular romantic situations during the early 1950's which are associated with examples of Stalinistic lack of sensitivity towards individuals. But whereas Kant has both Iswall and Trullesand

find contentment in their marriages as they do in their lives generally, marital bliss is not an adequate reflection of life's qualities for Christa T. It is interesting to note that both Kant and Wolf emphasize the state of marriage and its representative function, by reducing the respective marriage partners (Vera, Rose and Justus) to colourless, insignificant characters.

One other way in which Kant and Wolf (but not Strittmatter) emphasize the representative role of their protagonists is through allusions to well-known literary figures. Although the association is most often made ironically, there is usually enough underlying similarity to bring out the general characteristic in the particular character involved.

Apart from examining the content of each of the novels as it reflects the relationship of individual to society, this dissertation has also tried to assess the novels as individual contributions of each author to the form of socialist realism. More directly perhaps than in any other literature, the form of socialist literature reflects the author's declared perception of his times, so that, as Hans Mayer very pointedly said in his (never broadcast) commentary for the East German radio in 1957, "man in einer neuen Welt nicht mehr unbesehen mit alten Formen arbeiten kann."<sup>260</sup> This is born out for instance in Strittmatter's style, which is relatively conservative and, as the example of his use of names showed, still reflects the monistic attitudes of the 1950's--that there is essentially only one right course. The "modern" techniques which Kant uses to great effect to convey Iswall's attempts to reassess his own and the collective past, accurately reflect the intentions, even if they fall short of pointing to any real conclusions. With a limited perspective of himself, Iswall is compelled to look to other sources and follow ideas as they occur to him, which leads

to the associative, episodic and (in comparison with Strittmatter's nineteenth-century form) disjointed pattern of Die Aula. All of these same techniques are then used much more systematically and seriously in Christa T., where the refusal to impose form and overt interpretation permeates even the use of words, as well as the descriptions of events. What began with Strittmatter as a rather brash statement of an individual point of view in an appropriately definite style, evolved through Kant into a much more tentative reflective and balanced consideration of the various pressures at work in society. Consequently, the broad sweep of the "Entwicklungsroman" which was still visible in Ole Bienkopp, as a legacy of the old literature of assimilation, gives way to a form of writing which in appearance, but not in meaning, comes much closer to twentieth century bourgeois literature.<sup>261</sup>

All three of these novels have been compared in some respects to the "Entwicklungsroman."<sup>262</sup> Undoubtedly, the historical period they cover and the theme of the individual trying to adapt to social circumstances, do suggest a strong affinity. Even the principle that the individual should be able to contribute to the fullest possible extent as a rounded personality is reminiscent of the origins of the genre in the classical period, as Tertz (Sinyavsky?) pointed out in his survey of a similar theme in Soviet prose.<sup>263</sup> But in one very significant respect these novels break the tradition, by adopting the "open" rather than the "closed" form. Each of the protagonists has identification with society's goals as his/her ideal, but none reaches, or even comes close to, the ideal. Even Iswall (the only case where death is not used to emphasize the point) admits that indirectly there is still much to be done both in terms of collective self-assessment and individual self-fulfilment. Hildegard

Brenner sees this open-ended approach as entirely positive from the point of view of the social function of socialist realism, in that it preserves the dialectical distinction between individual and collective or reality and ideal: "Ole Bienkopps Tod hält, wie alle andern verwandten literarischen Situationsmetaphern, das Noch-Nicht . . . wach. . . . [Diese Literatur] übernimmt damit eine politische Funktion innerhalb der DDR: Indem sie die Gegenwart offen hält in Richtung auf eine Zukunft, die den Kommunismus als repressionslose Gesellschaft impliziert, wirkt sie als geistige Produktivkraft mit bei der Herstellung."<sup>264</sup>

If one were to summarize the change in East German prose during the 1960's as these three novels represent it, it would be to say that they illustrate the waning influence of the nineteenth century realists over the forms and the content of what has traditionally been the purest yardstick of socialist realism--the novel. The realization that the ideal of a unity of man's collective and individual goals may not be either immediately attainable or even desirable resulted in the demise of the positive, optimistic hero and the confident social perspective and its correspondingly rounded, descriptive style, which were typical of much of the prose up to and including the "Ankunftsliteratur." This in itself represents a radical departure from the original definition of socialist realism, which emphasized above all else the need for social perspective and the gradual assimilation of each individual into the whole. For a time in the early 1970's the term "socialist realism" was even, surreptitiously, dropped from the official vocabulary, to be replaced by "sozialistische Literatur und Kunst."<sup>265</sup> Although it has since been revived, somewhat, it is hard to imagine that literature in East Germany will ever again revert to the outmoded standards that were associated with "socialist realism" before 1963.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> H.Mayer, "Die Literatur der DDR und ihre Widersprüche," Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit (Reinbek, 1967) pp. 375-6.

<sup>2</sup> L. von Balluseck, Dichter im Dienst (Wiesbaden, 1956). J.Rühle, Literatur und Revolution: Die Schriftsteller und der Kommunismus, 2nd ed., (München, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> H.P.Anderle, Mitteldeutsche Erzähler: Eine Studie mit Proben und Porträts (Köln, 1965) p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> K.O.Conrady, "Zur Lage der deutschen Literatur in der DDR," Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 17 (1966). p.738. For a survey of the growing West German interest in East German literature, see J.B.Bilke, "Auf den Spuren der Wirklichkeit. DDR-Literatur: Traditionen, Tendenzen, Möglichkeiten," Der Deutschunterricht, 21 (1969) Heft 5, pp. 53 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Conrady, op. cit., p.738.

<sup>7</sup> "Erklärung des Vorstandes des DSV vom 12.1.1966," quoted in Conrady, op. cit., p.747.

<sup>8</sup> H.Mayer, "Über die Einheit der deutschen Literatur," Deutsche Literatur seit Thomas Mann (Reinbek, 1968) p.105.

<sup>9</sup> A.A.Shdanow, "Rede auf dem 1. Unionskongreß der Sowjetschriftsteller (1934)" in: F.J.Raddatz, Marxismus und Literatur (Reinbek, 1969) Vol.I, p.351.

<sup>10</sup> M.Parkhomenko and A.Myasnikov, Foreword to: Socialist Realism in Literature and Art (Moscow, 1971) pp. 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> P.Demetz, "Literature in Ulbricht's Germany," Problems of Communism, XI (1962) p.16.

<sup>13</sup> "Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur," Einheit, 6 (1951) p.588.

<sup>14</sup> op. cit., p.582.

<sup>15</sup> Bilke, "Spuren....," p.33.

<sup>16</sup> Mayer, "Über die Einheit....," p.111.

- 17 See for example O.Gotsche, Tiefe Furchen (1949) and E.Claudius, Menschen an unserer Seite (1951), the respective models for many similar "Bodenreform-" or "Industrie-Romane."
- 18 H.J.Geerdts, "Gedanken zur Diskussion über die sozialistische Nationalliteratur nach 1945," Weimarer Beiträge (WB), 9 (1963). p.116.
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- 24 J.B.Bilke, "Planziel Literaturgesellschaft oder Gibt es zwei deutsche Literaturen?" Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament, 18.12.1971, p.12.
- 25 W.Ulbricht, "Referat auf dem VII. Parteitag der SED," Neues Deutschland (ND), 18.4.1967, p.15.
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- 27 A.Hiersche, "Dialektik des Individuellen und Gesellschaftlichen in der Gegenwartsprosa der Sowjetunion und der DDR," Zeitschrift für Slawistik, XIII (1968) p.430.
- 28 Trommler, "Nachwuchs....," p.95.
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- 31 M.W.Schulz "Humanismus und Realismus - Erbe und Auftrag," Sonntag, Nr. 49, p.7.

- 32 H.Redeker, "Individuum...", p.11-27.
- 33 op. cit., p.20.
- 34 op. cit., p.27.
- 35 Ibid. (My emphasis).
- 36 Ibid.
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- 39 See: H.Redeker, Abbildung und Aktion: Versuch über die Dialektik des Realismus (Halle, 1966) p.101: "Das große Thema aller realistischen Literatur ist die Dialektik von Individuum und Gemeinschaft." (Quoted in Hiersche, "Dialektik...", p.425).
- 40 Trommler, "Nachwuchs...", pp.46-47.
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- 122 Krenzlin's, pp.881-882.
- 123 op. cit., p.882.
- 124 F.J.Raddatz, Tradition und Tendenzen: Materialien zur Literatur der DDR (Frankfurt am Main, 1972) p.356.
- 125 Redeker, "Individuum...", p.20.
- 126 Krenzlin's (p.382) refer to another association of the name "Simson" which is a brand of motorcycle in the GDR. One scene in particular, where Simson, in conversation with Lehrer Sigel "fährt mit Vollgas," lässt die Motoren aufheulen," and finally "überrollt" Sigel (Bienkopp, p.299) may point to a more direct and (for East German readers who are unfamiliar with the biblical namesake) powerful association.
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- 128 Neubert, "Satire," p.75.
- 129 Koch, Literaturgesellschaft..., pp.151 and 155.
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132 Strittmatter, "Hochzeitsnacht," p.434.

133 Koch, Literaturgesellschaft..., p.161.

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136 op. cit., (1969 ed.) p.31.

137 H.Mohr, "Produktive Sehnsucht," Basis, III (1972) p.225.

138 Spiewok, op. cit., p.416.

139 F.Schonauer, "Hermann Kant: Die Aula," NR, 77 (1966) p.311.

140 cf. for example: H.Kahler, "Die Aula: Eine Laudatio auf die DDR," Kritik..., ed. Jarmatz, p.736.

141 M.Reich-Ranicki, "The Writer in East Germany," Survey, 61 (October 1966) p.194.

142 Kähler, "Laudatio...", p.738.

143 Spiewok, p.417 and Kähler, p.736.

144 Sonntag, 24 (1965) quoted in Spiewok, p.416.

145 Spiewok, p.421.

146 Ibid.

147 Spiewok, p.419.

148 Helga Herting, Das sozialistische Menschenbild in der Gegenwartsliteratur (Berlin, 1966) p.35.

149 Herting, p.37.

150 Schonauer, op. cit., p.317.

151 Kähler, p.739.

152 "'Maßvoll' und 'vernünftig' sind Schlüsselworte des Autors, Worte einer Generation, die auf Dogmatismus und enthusiastische Futurologie

nüchtern reagiert, die einmal die Pioniergeneration war, aber heute sich mit dem Erreichten zu arrangieren sucht." W.Brettschneider, Zwischen literarischer Autonomie und Staatsdienst: Die Literatur der DDR (Berlin, 1974) 2nd ed., improved and enlarged, p.128.

153 Comrade Wigg of the Ministry for Higher Education comes to announce the opportunity for a study trip to China. His presence virtually sanctifies Iswall's misuse of his Party office to dispose of Trullesand, because Trullesand is even less likely than usual to protest at having his name put forward in the presence of such a high official. The presence of the Party and Iswall's autocratic actions represent an implicit comparison of methods (294-297).

154 The phrase is: "Wenn von Kommunisten die Rede war" (172). The distinction is made between the old (KPD) party members and the modern "socialists" of the SED.

155 Presumably it is no coincidence that it is Riek, the strongest adherent of collective solidarity, who introduces fines for swearing (220).

156 W.Ulbricht, "Fragen der Entwicklung der Sozialistischen Literatur und Kultur," in: Greif zur Feder, Kumpel, p.99.

157 Fr. Engels, "Brief an Miss Harkness," in: Raddatz, Marxismus und Literatur, I, pp.157 ff.

158 Ulbricht, "Fragen....," p.103.

159 A.Shdanow "Rede....," p.347.

160 Neues Deutschland, 24/6/53, quoted in: Smith, Germany..., p.225.

161 cf. title of article by H.Kähler (Note 140 above).

162 Brettschneider, op. cit., p.128.

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- 169 Mohr, op. cit., p.217 (footnote).
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- 175 Mohr, p.217 (footnote).
- 176 Mohr (p.216) says over 200,000 copies were published in W. Germany in two years.
- 177 Kürbiskern, 4 (1968) pp.555 ff.
- 178 This article was not published in the GDR until 1971, in: Christa Wolf, Lesen und Schreiben (Berlin 1971) pp.80 ff.
- 179 Wallmann, p.150 and Mohr, p.222 mention favourable articles in Poland and the USSR.
- 180 H.Mayer, "Christa Wolf/Nachdenken....," NR 1 (1970) p.180.
- 181 Haase (p.185) acknowledges this point: "Es ist schwer, Kritik zu üben, und zwar nicht zuletzt deshalb, weil die Autorin die Möglichkeiten des Reflektionsstils dazu nützt, kritischen Einwänden auf die verschiedenste Weise vorzubeugen."
- 182 Raddatz, "Zur Entwicklung..." p.342.
- 183 Mayer, "Christa Wolf....," p.182.
- 184 M.W.Schulz "Das Neue und das Bleibende in unserer Literatur," NDL, 9 (1969) p.47.
- 185 P.Gugisch, "Christa Wolf," Literatur der DDR, ed. Geerdts, p.407.
- 186 Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben," p.237. Future references to this essay will describe it as "L.u.S."
- 187 L.u.S., p.236.
- 188 Mayer, "Christa Wolf....," p.181.

- 189 M.Reich-Ranicki, "Eine unruhige Elegie" in: M.R.-R., Zur Literatur der DDR (München, 1974) p.114.
- 190 Mohr, p.191.
- 191 Haase, p.184.
- 192 Schulz, "Das Neue...", p.47.
- 193 Haase (p.175): "Der sprachlichen Fügung und dem Klang einzelner Worte wird nachgelauscht, um neuen Sinnzusammenhängen auf die Spur zu kommen."
- 194 Mohr, p.196.
- 195 Schulz, op. cit., p.11: "Besinn dich auf dein Herkommen . . . wenn du mit deiner klugen Feder der deutschen Arbeiterklasse . . . dienen willst."
- 196 "Christa Wolf: Nachdenken...," Literatur und Kritik, 6 (1970) p.373.
- 197 "Natürlich hat jemand, der 1969 der Hauptfigur eines Romans den Namen Christa T. gibt, den Namen Franz Kafka genannt." F.J.Raddatz, "Mein Name sei Tonio K.," Der Spiegel, 23 (2/6/1969) p.154.
- 198 cf. Mohr, pp.203-204.
- 199 Kähler, "Elegie...", p.258.
- 200 Becher's motto receives, in Christa T. "eine andere Tonlage," according to F.Trommler "DDR-Erzählung und Bitterfelder Weg," Basis, III (1972) p.97.
- 201 Jäger, "Sozialliteraten..." p.15.
- 202 Trommler, "DDR-Ersählung," pp.92-93.
- 203 H.Koch, quoted in Trommler, op. cit., p.94.
- 204 Christa Wolf, Introduction to: J.Kasakow, Larifari und andere Erzählungen (Berlin, 1967) p.8. Quoted in: Jäger, p.61.
- 205 Trommler, "DDR-Erzählung," p.93.
- 206 Jäger, pp.55 ff., quotes from: Christa Wolf, Der Geteilte Himmel, 11th ed. (Halle [Saale]) p.222.
- 207 Th.Feitknecht, Die sozialistische Heimat: Zum Selbstverständnis neuerer DDR-Romane (Bern, 1971) p.72.
- 208 Haase, "Nachdenken...", pp.182-183.
- 209 Jäger, p.60.
- 210 L.u.S., pp.216-217.

- 211 L.u.S., p.225.
- 212 L.u.S., p.217.
- 213 L.u.S., p.223.
- 214 L.u.S., p.217.
- 215 Mohr, p.211.
- 216 A.Hochmuth, "Zum Problem der Massenwirksamkeit," pp.10-11.
- 217 Sozialistischer Realismus..., ed. Pracht/Neubert, p.167.
- 218 cf. Trommler, "DDR-Erzählung," p.96; Bilke, "Planziel...", p.19.
- 219 Feitknecht, op. cit., pp.82 ff.
- 220 Kähler, "Elegie," p.256.
- 221 L.u.S., pp.216 f.
- 222 L.u.S., p.212.
- 223 L.u.S., pp.212-213.
- 224 L.u.S., p.213.
- 225 Mohr, p.194.
- 226 Jäger, p.71.
- 227 (anon.) T.L.S., 13/8/1971.
- 228 Parteilichkeit und Volksverbundenheit: Zu theoretischen Grundfragen unserer Literaturentwicklung, eds. H.Herting and W.Jehser (Berlin, 1972) p.230: "Gesellschaftliche Realität wird fast ausschließlich daran gemessen, ob sie der gefühlsgetragenen, auf Verinnerlichung und Steigerung bestimmter seelisch-psychischer Potenzen gerichteten Lebenskonzeption der Christa T. dienlich ist."
- 229 cf. H.D.Sander who quotes Havemann's argument that the change went unnoticed, until it was too late. Geschichte der schönen Literatur in der DDR (Freiburg, 1972) p.84 (footnote).
- 230 cf. Sander, pp.130-136 and also: R.Hardin, "Western approaches to East German history," New German Critique, 2 (Spring, 1974) p.122.
- 231 Kähler, "Elegie," p.258.
- 232 Kähler, op. cit., p.255.
- 233 Haase, "Nachdenken...", p.176.



- 234 Reich-Ranicki, "Unruhige Elegie," p.118
- 235 "Es ist die Geschichte eines Selbstmordes." Raddatz, "Mein Name sei....," p.153.
- 236 Kollektiv (Leitung Cl. Träger), "Zur Auffassung vom Typischen," in: Zur Theorie des sozialistischen Realismus, ed H.Koch, pp.600 f.
- 237 op. cit., p.603.
- 238 (My emphasis) Sozialistischer Realismus, ed. Pracht/Neubert, p.163.
- 239 op. cit., p.167.
- 240 Kollektiv, Zur Theorie..., p.603 (see note 236 above).
- 241 Pracht/Neubert, op. cit., p.168: "Grundlage dieses Menschenbildes ist also kein Persönlichkeitsideal, das aus abstrakten, allgemeinen Menschheitsforderungen abgeleitet werden könnte."
- 242 "Ein Mensch, der mir nahe war, starb zu früh." Christa Wolf, "Selbstinterview," p.555.
- 243 Pracht/Neubert, op. cit., p.169.
- 244 Ibid.
- 245 op. cit., p.170 (Emphasis in original).
- 246 Mohr, p.229.
- 247 Gugisch, "C.Wolf," p.408.
- 248 Reich-Ranicki, "Unruhige Elegie," p.117.
- 249 Christa Wolf, "Einiges....," p.13.
- 250 Haase, "Nachdenken....," p.176.
- 251 Reich-Ranicki, op. cit., p.115.
- 252 K.Franke "Ihrer Generation voraus," Frankfurter Hefte, 7 (1970), p.526.
- 253 Parteilichkeit und Volksverbundenheit, ed. Herting/Jehser, p.237.
- 254 Pracht/Neubert, op. cit., p.167.
- 255 Jäger, p.69.
- 256 Sander, op. cit., p.233.
- 257 "Selbstinterview," pp.555, 558.

### Conclusion

- 258 Quoted in F.Trommler, "Nachwuchs...", p.51.
- 259 Parenthetical references in this section are to the respective works of each author, as used in previous sections.
- 260 H.Mayer, "Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur," in: H.M., Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit (Reinbek, 1967) p.370.
- 261 H.Mayer, "Über die Einheit der deutschen Literatur," in: H.M., Deutsche Literatur seit Thomas Mann (Reinbek, 1967) pp.103-116.
- 262 cf.F.Trommler, "Von Stalin zu Hölderlin," pp.141-190.
- 263 A.Tertz, The Trial Begins and On Socialist Realism. p.171.
- 264 Nachrichten aus Deutschland: Lyrik, Prosa, Dramatik; eine Anthologie der neueren DDR-Literatur, ed. H.Brenner (Reinbek, 1967) p.14.
- 265 Sander, op. cit., pp.267-268.

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