CHAPTER SIX

CASE STUDY NO. 1:

SINN UND FORM AND THE TREACHERY OF LANGUAGE

The problems of legitimacy experienced by the GDR regime, involving the difficulty of maintaining long-term stability as successor to the Third Reich and competitor with the Federal Republic, were brought into the open on a number of occasions in literary controversies. The apparent stability of the system between 1956 and 1989 has led to a particular kind of kremlinological literary criticism, with texts scoured for traces of oppositional or transgressive intent. The problem with this approach is that it treats the text purely as a political object from which the author's intentions can be read off by those who know the code. All too often, 'Politics' is reduced to the schematic opposition of 'Geist' and 'Macht'. Although this polarity motivated the oppositional activity of many dissidents, such a model is not a good basis for historical or literary critical discourse, since it attempts to fit the all-pervasive ambiguities into a pre-conceived scheme, and relies on a narrow definition of 'political' art.

While it is true that 'many intellectuals continued to regard cultural politicization as a way of placing art and literature at the disposal of a single party whose program they declined to consider an exclusive set of remedies for Germany's political and cultural ills', this should not lead us to dismiss as worthless all attempts by artists close to the Communist Party to come to terms with the legacy of Nazism.[1] The word 'politicisation', when used in this dismissive manner, prevents us from carrying out a differentiated analysis of various approaches to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In circumstances such as prevailed in 1945, literature is *always* political; what is important is whether it takes its responsibilities seriously.

[1] Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, p. 176.

Several serious attempts were made to develop a responsible literary culture after 1945, and their development, successes and failures should be taken on their own merits, instead of simply trying to locate them within the East-West axis. Alfred Kantorowicz's journal *Ost und West*, which appeared between 1947 and 1949, had the subtitle 'Beiträge zukulturellen und politischen Fragen der Zeit. Herausgegeben von Alfred Kantorowicz'. The programme is explicit and the accent is on the personality of the editor, who envisages a particular role for himself, creating a 'Präzedenzfall': 'Glauben Sie nichts blindlings; lassen Sie sich nichts einreden.'[2] Kantorowicz hoped that a publication license would be granted by all four occupying powers, but in the end, only the Soviet authorities granted a license. These initial difficulties may have something to do with the problems which Kantorowicz's KPD background had caused for him in the USA; in any case, his association with, and dependence on, a single occupying power weakened his position considerably.

The high-profile presence of an editorial voice in each issue, ensuring that the overtly political stance of the journal could not be overlooked, did not leave space for the flexibility or subtlety which the absence of explicit authorial comment allowed in the case of *Sinn und Form*. Although Kantorowicz's voice could be strident,[3] it was also passionately committed to a pluralism which was simply untenable by 1949. It seems to me that Kantorowicz's conviction, 'daß es sich nicht um eine Versöhnung unvereinbarer Gegensätze handele, sondern um einen modus vivendi der Gegensätze',[4] is undermined to a certain extent by an insistence on *making explicit*. This conviction that there is an ultimate truth to be found in language led to conflict with Soviet authorities who stood by a different version of that truth.

The willingness of *Ost und West* to offer space to voices critical of extremist tendencies in the Soviet Zone was bound to lead to difficulties. Of

[2] Alfred Kantorowicz, 'Einführung', *Ost und West*, 1 (1947), 3–8 (6).

[3] See, for example, his essay, 'Stalin als Lehrmeister der nationalen Selbstbestimmung', *Ost und West*, 3 (1949), no. 12, 3–9.

[4] Alfred Kantorowicz, 'Abschied', *Ost und West*, 3 (1949), 94. The contrast with Becher's synthesising instincts is instructive, demonstrating the variety of individual responses to an ideological system whose effectiveness lies in its flexibility and the potency of 'Stalin' as structuring element.

particular interest is Axel Eggebrecht's condemnation of divisive voices at the First Writers' Congress, in which he criticises Wolfgang Harich's justification of political violence.[5] Kantorowicz shares many of these beliefs with Becher, but his awareness of the practical consequences of his actions prevents him from engaging in compromises to such an extent. Many of the contributions to *Ost und West* are characterised by remarkable insights into current cultural politics (a factor which naturally counted against the journal) but it is the drive to take up a position, to secure the ineradicable presence of meaning corresponding to the personality and convictions of Kantorowicz and his editor-in-chief from November 1947, Maximilian Scheer, in which we find both the journal's strength and its weakness.

These brief remarks are intended simply to illustrate something of the context for the foundation and survival of *Sinn und Form*, and provide a useful contrast with the latter's deliberately ill-defined programme. The development of *Sinn und Form*, and the attempts of an SED grouping in the Academy around Alexander Abusch to undermine Peter Huchel's editorship, have been amply documented.[6] It is beyond the scope of this study to deal in such detail with these events, although some of this material will be drawn on in the discussion of the events of June 1953 in the next chapter. I intend instead to make some comments about the attitudes to language and culture which emerge in *Sinn und Form*, in order to complement my discussion of

[5] Axel Eggebrecht, 'Kritik und Verbindlichkeit', *Ost und West*, 1 (1947), no. 4, 52–58. Note in particular his apt description of the functioning of this kind of rhetoric: 'Unser Freund Wolfgang Harich hat ausein-andergesetzt, daß die Anwendung von Gewalt unter Umständen gerechtfertigt, ja notwendig sei. Dagegen ist weder von der Logik, noch von der Ethik her etwas einzuwenden, so lange der Beweis in sich allein geschlossen dasteht, ohne Bezug auf die ganze Realität. Denken wir aber an die Wirklichkeit des Atomzeitalters, dann wird dieser Beweis für die Gewalt mit einem Male unverbindlich' (pp. 55–56).

[6] See Uwe Schoor, *Das geheime Journal der Nation* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1992); Stephen Parker, '"Sinn und Form". Peter Huchel und der 17.Juni 1953: Bertolt Brechts Rettungsaktion', *Sinn und Form*, 45 (1994), 738–51; Stephen Parker, 'Peter Huchel und "Sinn und Form"', *Sinn und Form*, 43 (1992), no. 5, 724–38, and the accompanying documentation: 'Der Fall von Peter Huchel und "Sinn und Form"', *Sinn und Form*, 43 (1992), no. 5, 739–822. For an analysis which, it seems to me, sacrifices accuracy through the author's political stance, see Ian Hilton, 'Sinn und Form: "Ein schlimmes Kapitel ..."', in *Peter Huchel*, ed. by Axel Vieregg (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 249–64. Other important material on *Sinn und Form* can be found in Hans Mayer, 'Erinnerungen eines Mitarbeiters von "Sinn und Form"', in *Über Peter Huchel*, ed. by Hans Mayer (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), pp. 173–80; and in the correspondence between Huchel and Hans Henny Jahnn: Bernd Goldmann (ed.), *Peter Huchel/ Hans Henny Jahnn. Ein Briefwechsel. 1951–1959* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler, 1974). Huchel's own comments on his editorship are rare: see 'Der Fall von "Sinn und Form"', Peter Huchel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Axel Vieregg, 2 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1984), II, pp. 326–29.

the ideological issues arising from Becher's cultural-political work. In fact, it is only after giving serious consideration to these issues that we are able to locate *Sinn und Form* meaningfully in the context of cultural life in the Soviet Zone and GDR.

If we accept that the *Bündnispolitik* was simply a tactical manoeuvre on the part of the Soviets and their German communist allies, that the 'German road' theory was simply a temporary softening of emphasis in a consistent strategy, and that Becher was simply a consummate master of manipulative rhetoric, then it is possible to argue, with Ian Hilton, that Becher intended *Sinn und Form* to be 'Werkzeug einer unmittelbar künftigen sozialistischen Kulturrevolution'.[7] This view relies on a vision of the origins of the Cold War which still takes seriously certain aspects of the 'two camps' theory which has informed, and oversimplified, the closed system of Cold War ideological discourse. As we have seen, the 'two camps' theory, and the purposes which it was intended to fulfil are by no means as clear-cut as many commentators on cultural politics often assume; the monolithic view of SED policy and of cultural 'Zhdanovism' which this produces leads to statements to the effect that 'by 1948 the Communists hoped to use intellectuals in East *and* West to help win the cold war'.[8] It seems to me that such sweeping interpretations are entirely inadequate in the face of the evidence: Who are 'the Communists'? What could it possibly mean in 1948 to 'win the cold war'? Contemporary interpretations cannot rely on the imposition of a bipolar model which ignores the ambiguities and uncertainties which the 'integrationist' line within the SED itself failed to eradicate. The very existence of *Sinn und Form* gives the lie to such models.

Sinn und Form occupied such an anomalous institutional position, even after it was taken into the fold of the Academy in 1950, that commentators have often been unsure how to approach it, on occasion leaving it out of consideration altogether (as does David Pike). Other, more sensitive, analyses concentrate on the ability of Huchel to create spaces for himself which allowed him to pursue his own artistic agenda. Both Uwe Schoor and Gerd

[7] Hilton, p. 250.
[8] Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, p. 454.

Dietrich point to the links between the conception of *Sinn und Form* and the programme ofthe Kulturbund (with Becher as the obvious linking factor): *Sinn und Form* was set up 'im ursprünglichen Geist des weltoffenen Kulturbund-Konzepts',[9]and 'läßt enge Beziehungen nicht nur zu den "Leitsätzen", sondern zum gesamten Anliegen des Kulturbundes erkennen, vor allem auch in bezug auf die Wiederherstellung fruchtbarer Beziehungen zum Ausland'.[10]

There seems to meto be a problem of emphasis with these characterisations: although they are concerned to take issue with superficial analyses which see nothing of value in the literary life of the early GDR, they rely on a conception of the Kulturbund which overlooks the extent to which it was from the very outset enmeshed in the internal political processes of the KPD, and with the direction of Stalin's *Deutschlandpolitik.* In fact, we need to understand this much broader context if the very different institutional positions of the Kulturbund and of *Sinn und Form* are to make sense.

Without this context, and a fuller understanding of the ideological ambiguity of issues of complicity and resistance, analyses of *Sinn und Form* can fall back on the schematic opposition of 'Geist' and 'Macht': 'Chefredakteur wurde Peter Huchel, der für über ein Jahrzehnt [die] Qualität ohne ideologische Scheuklappen bewahren konnte.'[11] As a response to the complex manoeuvring and stern insistence on high literary quality which characterised Huchel's editorship, this description is somewhat inadequate. I have already discussed at length the entanglement of Becher's personality with the Kulturbund, and his flight, from political failure and the unbearable complex of feelings connected with his experience of Soviet terror and his involvement in a new dictatorship, into literary abstraction (which he, perversely, thought of as 'concrete' as opposed to 'formalist'). It seems to me, therefore, that to equate *Sinn und Form* with the Kulturbund's 'openness' is to miss the point: the emphasis on tradition, on 'objective' standards, on the values inherent in the German language, and on

[9] Dietrich, *Politik und Kultur*, p. 188.

[10] Schoor, pp. 21–22. Before 1950, Huchel reported to the Kulturbund's literary commission on editorial policy for *Sinn und Form.*

[11] Dietrich, *Politik und Kultur*, p. 188.

communication amongst an intellectual elite in all parts of Germany, bear the unmistakable stamp of Becher's authorship.[12] The banning of the Kulturbund in the US and British Zones, and Becher's recurrent feuds with the SED leadership (for example, over the Kulturbund's initial exclusion from the Volkskongreß) had thrown Becher onto the defensive, and, as always in such situations, he retreated behind the barriers between elite and mass culture, and between free speech in the rarefied communication between intellectuals and oppressive political action.

However, as we have seen, the stress on literary quality was inseparable from a commitment to the unity of German culture; thus, *Sinn und Form* is located at a point of tension where the various exclusionary practices conflict. Hans Mayer's comments on this issue are interesting: Becher's '"subkutaner" Konservatismus' coincided after 1945 with a legitimising strategy of the 'Leute um Ulbricht' which consisted in, 'den Bereich Deutschlands, den sie zu regieren vermochten, so stark wie möglich durch bereits vorhandene und im Volk bekannte Zeichen, Chiffren und Symbole kenntlich zu machen'.[13] The word 'kenntlich' is well-chosen in the light of the SED's efforts to create a form of national self-consciousness. However, there is more to the matter than a simple attempt, prevented only by Brecht and Huchel, to create in *Sinn und Form* another cultural-political tool.

Schoor examines Becher's 'Traditionswahl',[14] an appropriate description given Becher's selective approach to the German intellectual tradition; as Schoor rightly points out, Becher's choices deliberately mirror Thomas Mann's *Maß und Wert*, both in the title and the typographic style: 'Beide Publikationen setzten ganz auf die Texte, auf den Geist der literarischen Beiträge wie auf die Fähigkeit der Leser, ihn wahrzunehmen.'[15] There was to be no editorial comment or explicit programme; the power of the literary word was considered sufficient for those who were able to follow it.

[12] Cf. Mayer, p. 174: 'Der Anstoß ging, wie hätte es anders sein können? von Becher aus. Der einstige Rebell, Expressionist und Dadaist erglühte seit je in geheimer Liebe zu traditionellen Ordnungen und Ritualen. Er hatte sich aus alledem eine sonderbare Synthese zur Lebens- und Kunstführung zurechtgemacht: lange vor der offiziellen Wendung sowjetischer Kulturpolitik zum Neoklassizismus.'

[13] Mayer, p. 174.

[14] Schoor, p. 20.

[15] Schoor, p. 22.

In the light of the analysis presented in this study of the attitudes of German intellectuals after 1945, such an intense preoccupation with the values inherent in language raises important questions. Schoor maintains that the extraordinary openness of *Sinn und Form* to contributors from all parts of the world demonstrates, 'daß mit dem Konzept "Sinn und Form" ein möglichst breites Bündnis für den demokratischen Wiederaufbau befördert werden sollte'.[16] It seems to me that the choice of vocabulary in this statement links *Sinn und Form* too closely with the aims of the Kulturbund. We have seen how the language of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the political effectiveness of culture had begun to slip out of Becher's control; the conception of *Sinn und Form*, as well as that of the Academy, should therefore be seen as manifestations of a desire to reassert some kind of control, whether in terms of administrative influence (in the case of the Academy), of control over the meanings of words, or in terms of his own mental health, which depended to a great extent on the perceived success of his work.

As we have seen, one of these defensive strategies was to refer obsessively to great individuals, such as Goethe and Heinrich Mann, as examples of the kind of unified personality (an idealised Enlightenment humanism) to which Becher aspired. In essence, the deliberate reference to a model used by a writer whose good opinion Becher craved[17]and the appointment of Peter Huchel (who was, after all, a non-party poet who had remained in Germany between 1933 and 1945 and was therefore an outsider among the returned exiles who wielded influence in the SED) reflected a side of Becher's personality which he wanted to keep separate from the sordid business of political compromise and failure.

The problems with Becher's view of language and the continuation of an Enlightenment project of the communication of 'objective' values through the literary language have already been discussed: the questions raised by the ambivalences which emerge in a study of *Sinn und Form* show that, under

[16] Schoor, p. 29.

[17] Cf. letter to Thomas Mann, 11 June 1948: 'Nun haben wir doch einen Titel gefunden, der zwar in einer gewissen Weise erinnern kann an "Maß und Wert"' (Becher, *Briefe*, p. 380).

Huchel's editorship, the journal explored territory which took it far beyond Becher's intentions. The austere emphasis on the text, which is intended to reveal the truths within a language of humanism salvaged from the wreckage of Nazism, in fact increases the interpretative scope of the individual reader. This was a form of pluralism available only to a highly literate elite, but nevertheless, in the context of the GDR, an important locus of resistance against the imposition of official interpretations. By shifting the burden of judgement towards the reader, *Sinn und Form* avoids both the pitfalls of earnest explicitness (the downfall of *Ost und West*) and the problematic 'pluralism' of Becher, who, by assuming that reasoned discussion of literature would lead to a single truth and ultimate synthesis, laid himself open to manipulation by those who defined his truths for him.

The conception of the moral-political function of art which arises through *Sinn und Form* is, however, also problematic. Peter Huchel had, since 1945, made a (not entirely convincing) effort to reinvent himself as a committed left-wing artist, while leaving his relationship with the tenets of Marxism deliberately vague. The key concept which emerges in his cultural-political work is the concept of 'Verantwortung': this refers not only to the admission that the German intellectual community capitulated in the face of Nazism, but also, more specifically, to the idea that artistic and political responsibility are inseparable.[18]

We find a similar conception in many of the contributions to *Sinn und Form*, for example in Hermann Kasack's introduction to a collection of Oskar Loerke's poetry. Kasack differentiates between 'genuine' resistance writing and an inner emigration in which the poet feels obliged, 'sich in ein Reich der Schönheit flüchten zu müssen', or to confine poetic utterance to a vague humanism. In this sense, political and artistic responsibility are inseparable:

[18] See Peter Huchel, 'Rede zum "Tag des freien Buches"', *Gesammelte Werke*, II, pp. 261–65.

In Loerkes Gedichten seit 1933 [...] bilden die beiden Faktoren des Ewigen und Zeitlichen, der poetischen und der politischen Verantwortung eine untrennbare Einheit für das dichterische Erlebnis.[19]

This 'Polemik gegen den Ästhetizismus'[20] is a theme which links the thinking of Huchel, Becher and the contributors to *Sinn und Form*.

We have already tested Becher's conception of literary responsibility and examined its peculiar strengths and weaknesses; Huchel's publication practice in *Sinn und Form* raises a related set of questions, although the contrasts with Becher's theorising are instructive. Although the contributors to *Sinn und Form* are clear in their acknowledgement of the need to restore a sense of intellectual responsibility, the question of whether the requirement to respond to the contemporary world validates or invalidates the idea of 'eternal' (literary or moral) values pervades the journal. Thomas Mann intended *Maß und Wert* to preserve certain values against a climate of barbarism, and *Sinn und Form* places itself in this tradition, rather than making what might be called positive interventions in the reconstruction of Germany.

There are perfectly legitimate questions which could be asked of this elitism such as: Is 'bad' resistance poetry not 'true' resistance poetry? Loerke is praised as much for the quality of his verse as for his personal courage.[21] I have already discussed the consequences for Becher of the idea that 'Literature' resisted Nazism, and the first issue of *Sinn und Form*, with its contrasting voices on the social role of the writer, also occupies this ground. As we have seen, this view of literature was a double-edged sword, implying a defensive attitude to cultural values which left German intellectuals vulnerable to manipulation by those who claimed to offer a social use for the writer. Huchel avoids this dilemma by ignoring it, leaving the reader to find his/her own answers. However, on a careful reading of the early issues before

[19] Introduction to Oskar Loerke, 'Die Jahre des Unheils. Gedichte aus dem Nachlaß', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 1, 39–41 (40).

[20] Schoor, p. 53.

[21] In his editorial practice, Huchel wasted no time agonising about the ideological legitimacy of judgements on literary quality: the editor decided, and that was that. This policy continued after 1950, and although he submitted 'difficult' pieces for consideration to Becher, Brecht or Zweig, Huchel reserved the right to reject contributions from the Sektion Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege of the Academy.

the journal was taken over by the Academy, one gains the impression that *Sinn und Form* was founded more as an act of resistance to contemporary developments than as a contribution to reconstruction. This also suggests that *Sinn und Form* represents a kind of ideal *alter ego* for Becher, as a contrast with the sordidness of current politics.

Huchel's motivation seems different: the search for evidence of German resistance writing to parallel the French examples given in the first issue suggests a further step in Huchel's efforts to redefine his relationship with his past.[22] The poetry of resistance is contrasted with the self-aggrandising brilliance of Mayakovsky who represents, supposedly, the unity of the poet's social and literary responsibility.[23] However, in the light of the worsening political atmosphere in the Soviet Zone, all such contributions to *Sinn und Form* must be treated with caution, and the reader must take note of the ironies which arise from contexts unforeseen by the authors. As Schoor comments: 'Alle Texte sind, unabhängig von ihrer Enstehungszeit, in einen Gegenwartszusammenhang gerückt.'[24] The physical business of putting together the journal allows Huchel to suggest meanings which arise in the assonance or dissonance between juxtaposed texts. Even texts which appear to comment directly on current problems must be read in juxtaposition with the overall practice of the journal. For example, the hard-edged tone in Ernst Niekisch's essay, 'Zum Problem der Elite', in which he castigates bourgeois liberalism for its failure in the face of authoritarian regimes[25] (which, in the context of the journal's first issue, may *appear* to be a programmatic statement) should be contrasted with the actual *practice* of the journal, with its emphasis on quality and 'eternal values'. When we consider that this type of Marxist critique suggests a more historicist analysis of a 'bourgeois' ideology of eternal values, we can begin to make connections which should make us hesitate before equating *Sinn und Form* too closely with the positive programme of the Kulturbund. Through such attempts to engage the reader's

[22] Louis Aragon, Loys Masson, Pierre Seghers, Edith Thomas: 'Gedichte aus der Résistance', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 1, 98–102.

[23] Vladimir Mayakovsky, 'Ich selbst', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 1, 52–69.

[24] Schoor, p. 38.

[25] 'Der Ruf nach der Freiheit des Geistes war nur eine Spielart des Rufes nach der Freiheit des privaten Eigentums überhaupt', Ernst Niekisch, 'Zum Problem der Elite', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 1, p. 127.

critical faculties, and by relying on an established elite of writers of an older generation, Huchel resists the propagandistic versifying to which Becher was prone. The self-conscious elitism of *Sinn und Form* relies on an acceptance of irony and juxtaposition, a genuine, though not unlimited, pluralism of viewpoints, which allowed it to resist and undermine the imposition of rhetorical meanings and the narrowing definition of Realism.

Although the editorial policy of ironic juxtaposition might imply a valueless relativism, reference to contemporary events shows us that Huchel's controlling intelligence intends a more committed response on the part of the reader. For example, Werner Krauss' essay, 'Über den Standort einer Sprachbesinnung',[26] which calls for the restoration of language to a sense of responsibility in a communicative community, is commented on by Gaston Baissette's story, 'Die große Verbindungsstraße',[27] which describes in symbolic form the disrupted communication caused by war, and contrasts with a poem by Brecht which depicts the class antagonism inherent in language;[28] yet the implication in these and other items, that the potential exists to restore broken communications, is contrasted with the Enlightenment critique of Adorno and Horkheimer.[29]

In the overall context of the 'Goethe-Jahr' 1949, these comments on humanism and its successes and failures are pertinent, and *Sinn und Form*'s silence on the subject of Goethe is the most perceptive commentary on Becher's ideological acrobatics. We have seen how Becher used the figure of Goethe to justify the SED's proscription of further attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and to suppress memories of Soviet and Nazi dictatorship; for *Sinn und Form* to begin a painstaking analysis of German responsibility in 1949 marks it out as a powerful protest against the tendency of increasing Cold War divisions to function as convenient barriers against painful memories.

[26] *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 1, 104–31.

[27] *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 5, 92–102.

[28] Bertolt Brecht, 'Aus allem etwas machen', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 5, 103.

[29] Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Odysseus oder Mythos und Aufklärung', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 4, 145–82. The platform which Huchel offered to Frankfurt School writers was an uncomfortable reminder, not only of the illegitimacy of the SED's claim to historical justification, but of the complicity of left-wing intellectuals in a series of myths which led to their compromise with the regime.

Huchel's attitude to language inevitably shares many features with Becher's, and Huchel's expressed aspirations to contribute to the *Bündnispolitik* suffer from similar elitist reflexes.[30] However, *Sinn und Form* in its first year makes no explicit claims to social effectiveness, and accepts paradox and contradiction rather than attempting any artificial synthesis. This is where we find the fundamental difference between Huchel's practice and Kantorowicz's highly politicised 'modus vivendi der Gegensätze', which overestimates the externalised effectiveness of cultural-political discourse, rather than concentrating on the provocation of the reader's critical faculties.

In terms of my analysis of the shifting and conflicting barriers which characterised the cultural life of the Soviet Zone/GDR, *Sinn und Form* accepts its distance from the 'masses' without the self-doubt and arrogance of Becher, while refusing to impose interpretations or set up artificial semantic limits to the ambiguity of language and symbol.[31] Also, as we have seen, the aspiration to German cultural unity is inseparable from the attitude to language which is Becher's legacy to *Sinn und Form*. However, in contrast to Becher, Huchel refuses to take part in the rhetoric of German national self-assertion, preferring to avoid compromise with the exclusionary practices of a political line which derives its legitimacy from conceptions of German nationhood dependent on integration of the GDR into the Soviet sphere. Huchel finds, at the cost of sacrificing a certain social effectiveness, an ingenious method of avoiding the vulnerability of German intellectuals who sought fixed meanings in language. By posing questions, rather than imposing answers, *Sinn und Form* remains enough of a threat to expose this claim to legitimacy as a sham.

[30] It is for this reason that, in my opinion, Schoor's analysis suffers from a tendency to overemphasise the 'openness' of *Sinn und Form* in the context of the *Bündnispolitik*: it is the unabashed elitism of the journal's practice, the kind of elitism against which committed writers like Hans Lorbeer understandably protested, which allowed Huchel to avoid the ideological minefield which leads Becher, Brecht and others into compromise with the regime.

[31] Cf. Hermann Kasack, 'Der Webstuhl', *Sinn und Form* 1 (1949), no. 1, 143–63, and Anna Seghers, 'Das Argonautenschiff', *Sinn und Form*, 1 (1949), no. 6, 38–51, for two stories characteristic of *Sinn und Form*, in which the interpretation of an ambiguous central symbol is left very much to the reader's understanding of the contemporary world.

'SPRACHROHR' OR 'GEISTIGES VISIER'? *SINN UND FORM* UNDER THE WING OF THE ACADEMY

In an essay on the literary development of Johannes R. Becher, Paul Rilla writes:

> Und wenn Brechts Größe darin besteht, daß die Person des Dichters völlig hinter die unerbittlich aussagende Sachformel zurücktritt, so besteht Bechers Größe darin, daß die Person des Dichters nicht die Sache überlagert, vielmehr von Wandlung zu Wandlung sich in der Sache bekennt.[32]

If we can dismiss the assessment of Brecht's work as polemical exaggeration, there is something about the idea of the constant presence of Becher's poetic personality in his work which rings true; the unity of work, life, thought and political activity to which Becher aspired was an obsessive motivation. However, we should not succumb to the temptation for literary criticism to seek these unities of life and work, as such assumptions themselves form the common thread which links the 'bourgeois-liberal', Marxist-avantgardist, and Socialist Realist ideologies, elements of which coexist precariously both within Becher's personality and in the membership of the Academy. It is the illusion of unity, and the effort required to sustain that illusion, which is the key issue; after the exertions of events like the First Writers' Congress and the founding of the Academy on an 'all-German' basis, the struggle for control of *Sinn und Form*, and Becher's final painful break with Huchel, marks the point at which the effort becomes unsustainable.

The assured institutional and financial position which the Academy offered *Sinn und Form* brought with it certain costs, although it did not become an exclusive 'Stimme der Akademie'.[33] Those who were inclined to defend Huchel's editorship were nevertheless obliged to define their own position within the ideological concern for the social usefulness of art. The contrast between, for example, the liberal-democratic view of Zweig and the more utilitarian stance of Brecht becomes clearer in the period 1950–53, not only in

[32] Paul Rilla, 'Der Weg Johannes R. Bechers', *Sinn und Form*, 2 (1950), no. 4, 35–49 (p. 48).
[33] Schoor, p. 66.

their ideological position, but also in their style of resistance to the imposition of a particular form of Realism; in each case, the stand that they were required to make defined the terms for conflict and accommodation with the regime. In the case of *Sinn und Form*, the fact that the journal became, against Huchel's wishes, the carrier for many of the key debates within the Academy, for example on *Das Verhör des Lukullus*, the Barlach exhibition, or Eisler's *Johann Faustus*, forms an area of considerable tension between Huchel's editorial practice and attempts to clarify meanings and responses to works of art. In fact, Huchel generally published what the writers themselves wanted, without knowing if an SED-inspired debate would result; certainly, Brecht wanted to intervene publically in the debate over the Barlach exhibition when he was denied a platform in *Neues Deutschland*, and Eisler's publication of excerpts from his libretto was the action of a principled, and therefore naive, Marxist artist wanting to be involved in the public development of the arts in the new society. Huchel, however, had no interest in provoking such debates and the endless round of criticism and self-criticism which accompanied them.

In this respect, it seems to me that Schoor attempts to construct something of an artificial unity by overstating the correlation between the function which was demanded of *Sinn und Form* after 1950 and Huchel's artistic practice. This can at times be quite misleading. For instance, when discussing the journal's role as a showcase for defining debates within the Academy, Schoor states:

> Hiermit wird eine Form des Diskurses über Literatur, Kunst überhaupt und gesellschaftliche Zustände demonstriert und gefordert, die geeignet ist, durchschaubar zu machen und Veränderung vorzubereiten. Dieser Diskurs lehrt, den Prozeß Literatur — die Annäherung an Literatur als Medium, in dem über gesellschaftliche Zustände und deren Veränderung verhandelt wird — als Prozeß der Auseinandersetzung zu begreifen, in dem Übereinstimmung gewonnen wird oder ein Verbleiben im fortzusetzenden Streit erforderlich ist.[34]

There is, though, a considerable difference between the dialectical form of debate promoted here ('Auseinander-setzen') and the process of searching for significance in the shifting relationships between the texts. The key issue is the amount of control over meaning which the arranger of the texts claims for

[34] Schoor, p. 67.

himself: once *Sinn und Form* is required to include contrasting contributions to a debate (as with the 'Faustus Debate'), then a potential resolution, or synthesis, is already implied in the juxtaposition. In my discussion in Chapter Four, I made it clear that I regard this tendency to think dialectically (a habit of mind which Huchel did not share) as a major factor in the vulnerability of a type of German intellectual to accommodation with the GDR regime in the years up to 1953. The requirement for *Sinn und Form* to contribute directly, rather than obliquely, to these contemporary debates, intended as exemplary set-pieces for the attention of the German intelligentsia, contrasts sharply with the journal's original conception. A debate which takes for granted that a conclusion can and will be reached within a set period is less of a threat to a cultural ideology based on the existence of an objective truth, than is a form of artistic practice in which the debate is an end in itself.

There is of course a considerable overlap between Huchel's position and, say, the liberal humanism of Arnold Zweig. Nevertheless, the tension between the two views arises from the contrasting attitude to the explicit spelling-out of meanings; in this sense, the requirement for *Sinn und Form* to take a more explicit stance on aesthetic and political matters represents a gesture of compromise with the ideological system which ensnared other left-wing intellectuals. Zweig writes:

> Unsere Absicht ist es, in dieser Zeitschrift "Sinn und Form" wie bisher, nur noch geordneter um ein Ziel, das Notwendige zu gestalten, kristallinisch, blumenhaft oder im Lied, wie sich's uns aufdrängt und vorschreibt.[35]

By 'das Notwendige', Zweig means the necessity to contribute to a change in the 'Grundbau der Gesellschaft', in order to achieve 'eine gerechtere Ordnung'. His somewhat coy description of the First World War, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich as the 'Jahrzehnte[n] seit dem Ende des Naturalismus' is an indication of the way in which intellectuals steeped in the German cultural tradition consistently overestimated the importance and social impact of literature. The periodisation of literature implied in Zweig's statement has much

[35] Arnold Zweig, 'Zur Übernahme der Zeitschrift durch die Deutsche Akademie der Künste', *Sinn und Form*, 2 (1950), no. 5, 5.

in common with the way in which such periodisations were used to separate a rationalist and progressive line in German culture (exemplified by Goethe) from the 'irrationalism' of figures such as Nietzsche, which supposedly culminated in Nazism. This combination of intellectual self-image and common ground with the tenets of Socialist Realism and of cultural theories intended to justify the political hegemony of the SED led individuals like Zweig to compromise, to varying extents, their sense of intellectual responsibility.

Huchel himself, despite his efforts to stay aloof, was increasingly drawn into these controversies; to use Zweig's words, the function of *Sinn und Form* as 'Sprachrohr' for the Academy's debates began to overshadow its role as 'geistiges Visier', in other words, as promoter of the kind of open-ended exchange which would contribute more to German culture than attempts to locate an 'objective truth' immanent in language. Nevertheless, Huchel managed to preserve a remarkable degree of editorial independence, refusing to print all the contributions he was offered by the Sektion Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege, and did not usually feel the need to offer an explanation (an attitude which accounts for the personal nature of the attacks on him by writers such as Friedrich Wolf). It was in fact relatively difficult for German writers to publish in *Sinn und Form* if they were not already friends or colleagues of Huchel, and contacts with foreign writers were often made simply through friendships with German writers who had lived in exile. The journal represented the 'alte Intelligenz' and made few concessions to younger writers. This younger generation was catered for by journals such as *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, which was set up by Willi Bredel in direct competition with Becher and with *Sinn und Form*, and which acted as a forum for young authors.

In exploring how Huchel positioned *Sinn und Form* in GDR cultural life, it is important to consider some of the compromises which he had to make. For example, the image of the Soviet Union which emerges from *Sinn und Form* is almost exclusively positive. There are some shameful examples of the genre of travel writing by foreign visitors to the Soviet Union, and, although these reports concentrate largely on aesthetic matters, the implication, that the healthy

state of Soviet art is the sign of a healthy society, is unavoidable.[36] Works by German authors dealing with the Soviet Union are also positive.[37] Interestingly, though, contemporary Soviet literature is under-represented, particularly in comparison with the depth of critical appreciation devoted to nineteenth-century Russian literature: Huchel's stubborn insistence on high standards of quality prevents *Sinn und Form* becoming an unquestioning vehicle for Socialist Realism. As in the case of *Noviy Mir* under Alexander Tvardovsky, Huchel's policy of calculated compromise allowed him space to pursue his own ends. The demands of *Deutschlandpolitik*, that is, the coincidence of *Sinn und Form*'s internationalist stance with the tension between 'integrationist' and 'all-German' lines within the SED, and with Stalin's diplomatic efforts, gave Huchel far more leeway than Tvardovsky could have dreamed of (instructive parallels and contrasts might also be made between Tvardovsky's work at *Novy mir* and the very different circumstances of Wilhelm Girnus's editorship of *Sinn und Form*, 1964–1981). The later years of Huchel's editorship saw the publication of Soviet writers of the 'Thaw', such as Il'ya Ehrenburg, and of writers persecuted under Stalin such as Isaak Babel'.

Another interesting aspect of the response to the Soviet Union in *Sinn und Form* is the emphasis, in those contemporary Soviet works which are published, on the Soviet state as multi-national and representing a union of many traditions. Huchel is careful to include works by writers from outside the Great Russian mainstream, such as the Ukrainian Vasil Stefanik,[38] or Kimonko Dzhansi, from the tiny Udehé nation.[39] While this picture passes over in silence the forcible 'russification' of Soviet society, it does provide a voice for writers whose national identity was undervalued in their homeland. It seems to me, therefore, that Huchel's aim in presenting works from the Soviet Union is less to provide an 'objective' or 'realistic' picture of the country, but to provide a series of instructive contrasts with Germany; Soviet culture is still used as a tool for

[36] See, for example, Konrad Farner, 'Aus dem Reisetagebuch eines Schweizers. Gespräch mit Moskauer Künstlern', *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 2, 138–51; Georges Sadoul, 'Ein Besuch in den Moskauer Ateliers', *Sinn und Form*, 4 (1953), no. 1, 168–71.

[37] Note, in particular, Becher's exercise in ultra-loyalism, 'Die Sowjetunion in meinem Gedicht', *Sonderheft Johannes R. Becher*, 1951.

[38] 'Zwei Erzählungen', *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 5, 39–53.

[39] 'Wo der Sukpaj fließt ...', *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 3, 62–72.

analysis of the German past and present, but some of the sense of freshness and open exchange has been replaced by the construction of a somewhat clichéd picture of a multicultural nation which provides a benchmark against which German culture can be judged.

By contrast, a pictureof American society emerges which is formed by authors, such as Langston Hughes and Clifford Odets, whose work was excluded from publications in the FRG. As Schoor says, this picture of US society is 'gezielt einseitig',[40] although it is consistent with Huchel's policy of publishing poetry of protest and revolution from around the world. However, the images which emerge here are signs of a change of emphasis after the journal was taken over by the Academy; the original aim of restoring German literature to its rightful place amongst the nations is still apparent, but the delicate process of literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* which was begun in the journal's first year is gradually overshadowed by Cold War concerns.

The Soviet Union and the USA emerge as opposing poles, between which Germany exists in a state of tension, on the threshold of a decision about its future. The development of the German nation thus depends on the exercise of political maturity in a choice between one of the two camps. This choice is not without reservations and ambiguities, but *Sinn und Form* has let itself into the struggle between the geographical and political expressions of the 'two camps' theory which was, in early 1952, dominated by those who backed the 'integrationist' line and who had fewer illusions about German unity. The emphasis is increasingly on the restoration of German nationhood in the choice between opposing clichéd images (the classic ideological operation of the Cold War) and less on the careful, drawn-out process of piecing together a sense of intellectual responsibility.

Huchel's determined stance, that the intellectual has no right to withdraw from the world, necessarily led *Sinn und Form* into the polarities of international politics in the 1950s, and explicit support for Stalin's initiatives in March and April 1952 made support for the GDR seem like the natural precondition for campaigning for German unity. The use of *Sinn und Form* for official pronouncements and commissions from the Academy, such as the 'Manifest' in

[40] Schoor, p. 71.

support of Stalin's March Note[41] or the special edition devoted to the 'Weltfestspiele der Jugend' (5–19 August 1951),[42] contributed to the alignment of the journal with the GDR. However, as with the Academy, this alignment, though real, was critical and relatively open-minded rather than unquestioning; the contributions to *Sinn und Form* and the images of the outside world projected through them are selected for their relevance to acutely contemporary questions of German culture, and that meant unequivocally the whole of Germany. This is the issue over which Huchel could not compromise, and which led him to ignore all calls for the publication of reportage about the GDR.

A form of critical Marxism is being developed alongside the liberal humanism of writers like Zweig: the most important representative of this line is Ernst Bloch who, like Brecht, found that *Sinn und Form* was the only GDR publication which allowed him complete freedom of expression. Bloch's intellectual playfulness and his command of language were no doubt a threat to colleagues who justified their lesser talent with an increasing dogmatism, and contributions to *Sinn und Form* which argued, in a language familiar to the dogmatists, for a freer intellectual approach to political and aesthetic problems, were an effective intervention in the 'Realism Debate'. *Sinn und Form*'s approach is to avoid explicit definitions of Realism, but to register a protest against ever-narrowing aesthetic norms by keeping the debate open.[43]

Despite the increasingly strident nature of some of the contributions to *Sinn und Form*, and the inclusion of overtly political appeals, such as Brecht's call for freedom of expression,[44] Huchel and the writers whose interventions he published maintained the 'all-German' line of the journal. Brecht appeals for an end to division: 'Wenn [Deutsche] nicht miteinander sprechen, werden sie aufeinander schießen.' Even though it seemed possible to appeal to a significant

[41] As an insert in *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 2.

[42] *Sinn und Form*, 2 (1951), no. 4.

[43] See, for example, the contrasting views in Paul Eluard's polemic against the imposition of Socialist Realist forms ('Die Gelegenheitsdichtung', *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 4, 5–17), and, in the same issue, Becher's 'Verteidigung der Poesie' (27–61), which is essentially a plea for classical forms in literature.

[44] 'An die Künstler und Schriftsteller Deutschlands', *Sinn und Form*, 2 (1951), no. 5, 5. Similarly, Hanns Eisler's critical response to the Western music industry is intended as a means of promoting mutual understanding, as a protest against the separation of popular and avant-garde music in Western culture, and as a rejection of the simplistic *Volkstümlichkeit* demanded of GDR composers: 'Wir Komponisten müssen von den Hörern denselben Realismus verlangen, der mit Recht von uns gefordert wird' ('Brief nach Westdeutschland', *Sinn und Form*, 2 (1951), no. 6, 23).

opposition in the West to Adenauer's policy of rearmament and *Westintegration,* it should benoted,however, that this is simply a more pointed version of Becher's 'Beseitigung von Mißverständnissen', which presupposes identification with the GDR (with suitable criticism of 'bureaucratic excesses') as the embodiment of a peaceful policy. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the good will which *Sinn und Form* could draw on in all parts of Germany, and Huchel avoided all-out polemics with the West, realising that each small step in the direction of cultural division was likely to be irrevocable. This was a delicate process, involving the cultivation of a West German readership and sympathetic voices in the press.

Huchel could count on support from colleagues in the Academy who shared his preoccupation with German cultural unity. The problem was that the maintenance of the Academy's declared 'all-German' line depended to a great extent on the good will of the membership, and since the Academy's institutional status was only vaguely defined, statements of principle had limited resonance within GDR society. As indicated previously, the tendency of artists to shrink from the minutiae of bureaucratic procedure left them unable to fully exploit their considerable room for manoeuvre. However, the Sektion Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege was able to ensure that Western writers were able to publish in *Sinn und Form*, and Becher went out of his way to try to overcome exchange rate problems so that West German writers could be paid in hard currency, or in GDR currency at three times the usual rate.[45] Similarly, the Sektion Dichtkunst passed a resolution criticising the GDR press for 'unkluge und schädliche polemische Artikel gegen westdeutsche Kulturschaffende und kulturelle Institutionen', and campaigned for the consideration of West German writers such as Hans Henny Jahnn for GDR national prizes.[46]

However, the notion of critical dialogue with the West was problematic for GDR artists who thought in terms of a dialectical *Auseinandersetzung* whose aim was to clear up misunderstandings about what they saw as the essentially peaceful policy of the SED. For example, Brecht suggested in November 1951 that *Sinn und Form*, because of the respect which it enjoyed in the FRG, should

[45] Protocol of 20 December 1950, cit., Schoor, pp. 129–30.
[46] Protocol of 6 November 1951, cit., Schoor, p. 129.

carry reportage about the achievements of the GDR, written by authors such as Kuba, Ludwig Renn, Michael Tschesno-Hell and Friedrich Wolf. This suggestion, which was not taken up, concerning what Schoor calls 'kulturelle Aufklärungsarbeit'[47] is a good example of the peculiar mixture of tactical astuteness and ideological naivety which characterises Brecht's interventions in GDR cultural politics. While recognising that a certain amount of compromise was necessary in order to protect *Sinn und Form* from attacks from an increasingly dominant 'integrationist' tendency in the Academy (although, as we have seen, the SED members in the Academy were far from forming a united front), Brecht's belief that the unity of Germany was an ideological necessity based on the unfolding of the dialectic blinded him to the fact that the inclusion of reportage in the journal would increase friction with the West rather than contributing to the clearing-up of misunderstandings. This seems to be the heart of the issue of the proposed changes to *Sinn und Form* in the run-up to June 1953. Huchel's original conception, based on irony, multiple viewpoints and continual open-ended dialogue as an end in itself, is defended by people who, probably without realising it, have an entirely different conception of culture; in other words, a dialectics of debate, which presupposes a final truth in line with the aims, if not necessarily the bureaucratic practice, of the SED, led to compromises with the regime which need not have been made.

For the time being, Becher was firmly in favour of this continued contact with Western artists and he defended Huchel's rejection of Friedrich Wolf's polemical article, 'Talent und Aussage', with the statement that *Sinn und Form* was 'hauptsächlich für Westdeutschland bestimmt'.[48] As we have seen, Becher's desire to cultivate dialogue with Western artists was genuine, but his words are ominous: if he is now simply concerned with the effect which the journal will have on opinion in the West, then its value as a means of promoting dialogue and intellectual responsibility inside the GDR is undermined. High-profile meetings and association with *Sinn und Form* were for Becher a useful

[47] Schoor, p. 133.

[48] Letter to Friedrich Wolf, 12 July 1951, Schoor, p. 127. Becher is referring to the need to prepare the ground for the meeting of the international PEN club meeting in Lausanne. Huchel's apparently curt rejection of Wolf's article was the cause of considerable bitterness: Wolf describes it as 'eine Verletzung des primitivsten Anstandes unter Schriftstellern' (letter to Becher, 10 July 1951, cit., Schoor, p. 233).

means of self-promotion, but they represented a retreat from a confrontation with the sordid realities of his involvement with the regime, and thus could be discarded in the interests of Party discipline. Becher was too weak and compromised to provide support for his pet projects after the declaration of the 'Aufbau des Sozialismus'.

The ideological consolidation which accompanied the rearmament of the GDR and the build-up to the Second Conference of the SED in July 1952 allowed the SED to tighten up Party discipline in cultural organisations, although this was by no means as simple in the Academy as it might have been in other institutions. As yet, the Party group was not strong or united enough in any of the Academy's sections to enable a direct bid for control, because internal discipline was still lacking. Nevertheless, the founding by Willi Bredel of *Neue Deutsche Literatur* during October 1952, as a forum for the development of Socialist Realism, provided a useful counter-example to use against *Sinn und Form*, which neglected the younger generation of GDR authors. Bredel's personal animus against Becher and Huchel was certainly a factor in the development of *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, souring the atmosphere in the Academy considerably. That personal rivalries could have such a profound effect on the development of GDR cultural institutions and policy is another indication of the lack of a coherent strategy on the part of the SED.

Plans to change the conception of *Sinn und Form* were already being discussed by the SED in the Autumn of 1952, although doubts among senior *Genossen* about Becher's protégé Alexander Abusch meant that the required consistency and unity of purpose was never achieved. Becher, who had always shown little inclination for organisational work, seems to have gone through a period of doubt or failing mental and physical health in mid-1952, and he cemented his recovery in a comforting return to Party discipline. The repercussions for *Sinn und Form* were serious, and Becher began to prepare to abandon Huchel, in order to secure his own career.

In November 1952, F. C. Weiskopf claimed that Becher had hinted to him that *Sinn und Form* was to undergo a change of character necessitating the replacement of Huchel, and that Weiskopf was to be considered for the editor's

position.[49] The meeting of the Academy's Presidium on 9 December 1952 marked the point at which the differences between Zweig and Becher, who coveted the post of President, came out into the open. Becher prepares the ground for the coming attacks on *Sinn und Form* by declaring that the journal 'mehr und mehr an literarischem Wert verliere'. Becher does not give concrete examples to justify this criticism, presumably because it goes against his instinctive respect for literary quality and his frequent criticisms of shallow propagandistic poetry. He goes on to suggest that *Sinn und Form* should act as 'die ideologische Führung' for the Academy, indicating that the 'all-German' policy and relative independence of the journal, for which Becher had himself been largely responsible, were to be abandoned.[50]

The uneasy consensus between the leading members of the Academy's Presidium began to unravel, reflecting the defeat of the genuine aspiration to German unity which had formed the common ground between otherwise irreconcilable ideological positions. The repercussions of Stalin's decisive abandonment, at the Nineteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, of diplomatic efforts to secure German unity were filtering through the complex causal network described in the course of this study; in ideological terms, Stalin's new policy of integration of the GDR into Soviet security structures was now in line with the use to which his authority had been put by Walter Ulbricht. Since one of the reasons that the chains of command in Germany had been so uncertain since 1945 was this friction between Stalin's ideological authority and his actual ability to exercise power, the new alignment of forces in late 1952 provided a powerful boost to the 'integrationists' in the SED (amongst whom we must now count Becher, in his capitulation to Party discipline).

The campaign to impose ideological conformity on the Academy took on a new sense of purpose now that Becher was fully behind it and prepared to pull his weight. The final case study will explore the controversies around *Sinn und Form* and Hanns Eisler's *Faustus*, since the two issues are too interdependent to be conveniently separated. However, the questions raised by the new

[49] Letter to Bredel, 12 November 1952, cit., Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', pp. 739–40.

[50] Cit., Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', p. 740.

constellation of forces ranged around *Sinn und Form* in the winter of 1952 are worth commenting on at this point, because they demonstrate the ways in which individuals interrelate with the ideological system.

Huchel's original conception for *Sinn und Form* had, in many ways, been compromised by its institutional association with the Academy, but this was compensated for by the measure of protection which the Academy offered for Huchel's continued (relative) independence. In terms of the journal's approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the increasing polarisation of Cold War politics had necessitated a change of emphasis from a certain humility and a desire to avoid imposing unequivocal interpretations, a compromise with the reader over authority which was intended to demonstrate the value of open-minded critical thought as an end in itself, to a form of debate which presupposed that there was a truth towards which objective thought could proceed. That this latter, dialectical approach to literary and intellectual discourse could be at once tolerant and rigorous is clear from the case of Brecht; however, it could lead simultaneously to serious compromises with a regime which shared this predilection for imposing conformity to fixed meanings (for example, in the demand for 'Stellungnahme'). It is in the debate over *Sinn und Form* in 1953 that the irreconcilable differences between the protagonists, previously disguised by the common consensus over German unity, become obvious.

The changing conception of German nationhood which emerges in a careful reading of *Sinn und Form* was a calculated response to the SED's attempts to construct aform oflegitimacy from German cultural history, although we must be carefulnot to assume that there is an absolute opposition between the two ideas; this would be to impose an unacceptable model of 'dissidence' onto a situation which is far too ambiguous to be seen in terms of such polarities. The aspiration, expressed through *Sinn und Form*, to ease German culture back into the European mainstream by locating and developing values which were once held in common with the cultures of other countries, is played off against a critical scepticism about the ability of writer, intellectual or politician to define such values. No attempt is made on behalf of the reader to resolve this tension, which is at the heart of the vulnerability of GDR intellectuals to compromise with Party cultural policy: sometimes openly, as with Huchel's none-too-subtle

digs at Becher, and sometimes with a sly, undermining irony undetectable even to Huchel and his contemporaries, *Sinn und Form* exposes the weaknesses of its own contributors.

CASE STUDY NO. 2:

BRECHT AND 'DAS VERHÖR DES LUKULLUS':

A STUDY IN REALPOLITIK?

The publication in 1993 of Joachim Lucchesi's documentation of the performance and banning of Bertolt Brecht and Paul Dessau's opera, *Das Verhör des Lukullus*,[51] was an important contribution to debate on GDR cultural policy which began to broaden with the assimilation of the mass of material which emerged after reunification. Detailed documentation and considered contextualisation of cultural-political controversies has provided an insight into the functioning of power in the GDR which calls into question many orthodox categories of debate. In this section, therefore, I intend to examine Lucchesi's documentation in the light of my analysis of the political and ideological context of the work of the Deutsche Akademie der Künste, not in order to retell the story of the controversy over Brecht and Dessau's work (which emerges with remarkable clarity in *Das Verhör in der Oper*) but to shed light on issues of intellectual accommodation with the GDR regime. It will become clear in the detail of this analysis, that the schematic 'Geist–Macht' dichotomy, which underlies the frequent categorisations of Brecht as either dissident or apologist, is untenable, and that we need to find new ways of understanding the role of German intellectuals in legitimising institutions of political authority.

Access to previously unpublished documents, particularly protocols of discussions in the Academy and the Central Committee of the SED, allows us to assess the extent of disagreement over the value of *Lukullus*, and provides an insight into the tactical uncertainty among thecultural functionaries which was all but obscured by the simplistic public rhetoric of the 'Formalism Debate'. Similarly, clashes of competence are brought to light between the Kulturabteilung of the Central Committee and the Ministerium für

[51] Joachim Lucchesi (ed.), *Das Verhör in der Oper. Die Debatte um die Aufführung 'Das Verhör des Lukullus' von Bertolt Brecht und Paul Dessau* (Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag, 1993). Several of the documents collected by Lucchesi also appear in abridged form in Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 105–11.

Volksbildung, and later concerning assertions of authority by the Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten. Most importantly, though, we gain a historically contextualised view of Brecht, allowing us to move beyond any tendency to try to impose a spurious unity onto his work, abstracted from the political considerations of his time, which can then be set in opposition to the exercise of power in the GDR. As we have seen, this model of 'dissidence' is a highly limiting view of responsibility which, in ignoring the complexities of power relations, contributed as much to the legitimisation of a 'West German' identity as to an understanding of GDR cultural policy. We should therefore take seriously Brecht's own interventions in the attempted creation of a national identity for the GDR, particularly with respect to the preservation of German cultural traditions.

The artists like Brecht and Dessau who were products of the avantgardism of the Twenties hoped to find in the GDR an atmosphere congenial to their needs; in this sense, they shared with the Neo-Classicism of Becher a hope that the new society would catch up with its artists. Less dogmatic than many of his contemporaries, Brecht refused to make an immutable principle out of this idea, hoping to avoid a fruitless polarisation of the debate between those who believed that artistic appreciation had to be learned, and those who declared that the arts 'bisher noch weit zurückgeblieben sind hinter den Forderungen des Tages'.[52] In his *Arbeitsjournal* for 25.3.1951, Brecht wrote:

> Was die Absetzung des "Lukullus" angeht: es ist vorauszusehen, daß bei Umwälzungen von solchem Ausmaß die Künste selbst da in Schwierigkeiten kommen, wo sie führend mitwirken. Zusammenstoßen die Zurückgebliebenheit der Künste und die Zurückgebliebenheit des neuen Massenpublikums. Einige Künstler haben, in Protest gegen die bürgerliche Ästhetik (und den bürgerlichen Kunstbetrieb) gewisse neue Formen entwickelt; nunmehr werden sie von proletarischer Seite darauf aufmerksam gemacht, daß es nicht die Formen für die neuen Inhalte seien, dies stimmt manchmal, und manchmal stimmt es nicht. Manchmal nämlich werden die gewohnten Formen verlangt, weil die neuen Inhalte noch keineswegs allgemein

[52] Johannes R. Becher, 'Diskussionsbeitrag Johannes R. Bechers auf dem III. Parteitag der SED', 20. bis 24. Juli 1950, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. by Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), p. 152.

bei der zur Herrschaft gelangten Klasse durchgesetzt sind und man die irrige Meinung hat, neuer Inhalt *und* neue Form sei schwerer durchzusetzen als nur eines von beiden.[53]

What emerges very clearly from Brecht's attitude here is the extent to which, for all his concern to avoid polarisation in the debate, he thinks in sociological categories which link him with the Proletkult theories which he absorbed during the Twenties.[54] Brecht felt that if one developed new forms suitable for a new age, there could be a direct meeting between 'Volk' and artist, without the mediation of functionaries: '[Gewisse Formalismus-Bekämpfer] selbst scheinen zum Volk nicht zu gehören. Dafür wissen sie genau, was das Volk will, und erkennen das Volk daran, daß es will, was sie wollen.'[55]

We come here to a central question: To what extent did Brecht idealise the 'Volk' for tactical reasons, that is, as a polemical weapon against his political opponents, and to what extent was it a sincerely held belief? It is tempting to reply that Brecht idealised the 'Volk' to exactly the same extent to which he compromised with the regime, that the ideological common ground was the source of his vulnerability. However, this would suggest consistency in ideological and administrative practice within the SED which cannot be supported by the evidence. It has become clear in the course of this study that there is no absolute distinction to be made between 'ideology' and 'real political practice' (a distinction which underlies many studies of GDR politics), so perhaps we should formulate the question in a different way: Was Brecht's favoured style of tactically combining theoretical and administrative self-defence a product of rational calculation or itself an expression of an ideologised view of the situation in which he worked? This question will underlie the analysis which follows.

Brecht and the regime were in a relationship of mutual need: each drew legitimacy from the other, and the SED's inconsistency and confusion reflect

[53] Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. by Jan Knopf, Werner Hecht, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Dieter Müller, 30 vols (Berlin: Aufbau and Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989-1998), XXVII, p. 318. This edition hereafter referred to as *BFA*.

[54] Thus there is a certain amount of truth in Fred Oelßner's description of Brecht's adaptation of Gorky's 'Die Mutter' at the Central Committee meeting on 17 March 1951: '[...] das ist irgendwie eine Kreuzung oder Synthese von Meyer-hold und Proletkult' (cit. Lucchesi, p. 173).

[55] Brecht, *BFA*, XXVII, p. 528.

this problem. An obvious difficulty was Brecht's high international profile, which he exploited in order to protect more vulnerable colleagues. Paul Wandel summed up the leadership's dilemma succinctly during a discussion after the open rehearsal of *Lukullus* on 13 March 1951: 'Wenn wir nicht aufführen werden, wird man schreien. Wenn wir aufführen werden, wird man das, was wir im kleinen versucht haben, auch im großen versuchen.'[56] The SED leadership was genuinely feeling its way into new territory, and they were not sure how to proceed. International considerations, and the still incomplete victory of the 'integrationist' line, which needed to overcome the 'persönliche Sympathie' of Wilhelm Pieck for Brecht's work,[57] meant that a full-scale assault could not yet be made on such a well-known figure, and the prestige of the Academy provided some protection.[58]

Because of the continuing need to give public support to Stalin's campaign for German unity, there is an uncomfortable clash of principles, forming an area of tension in which a quick-witted artist like Brecht can move and create. The need to project the GDR as a society where artists can work openly, keeping the 'all-German' option open, clashes irreconcilably with the urgent necessity of creating a national identity based on the exclusion of the Federal Republic. Since the latter option was the only possible way of justifying the rule of the SED, these were difficult times. We have seen where Becher and Peter Huchel were positioned in this scheme, the former trying to pursue both aims at once, the latter retreating into an indirect, allusive, but often highly effective form of political engagement. However, Brecht is perhaps a more challenging case.

In terms of his political role in the GDR, Brecht's international profile and his relative independence of action were both an advantage and a disadvantage. They were a disadvantage in the sense that he had a tendency to misjudge the

[56] Cit. Lucchesi, p. 120. There are two protocols of this meeting on 13 March 1951, the first (Lucchesi, pp. 83–101) the official protocol of the Ministerium für Volksbildung, and the second taken by Käthe Rülicke of the Berliner Ensemble (pp. 101–22).

[57] Werner Mittenzwei, *Das Leben des Bertolt Brecht, oder Der Umgang mit den Welträtseln*, 2 vols (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), II, p. 358. Ulbricht's attitude was very different, rooted in the educational aspiration of the early socialist movement. Experiments such as Brecht's, which relied on an attitude of healthy disrespect for German classical traditions, were seen as an affront to the efforts of ordinary workers to master the great works of German literature.

[58] It was in early 1952 that attacks from the Party became deadly earnest without the concession of extensive discussions with Brecht. Cf. Resolution of Abteilung Kultur of the Central Committee, 2 February 1952, demanding 'ein Exposé über die Arbeit des formalistischen Brecht-Kreises', cit. Lucchesi, p. 278.

deeper causes of problems which he felt were merely temporary manifestations of petty bureaucracy;[59] this presumably explains his constant engagement and his willingness to arrive meticulously prepared for any fight.[60] The reason for such a paradoxical combination of clear-sightedness and self-delusion is, of course, that Brecht genuinely believed in 'the cause'. There is a revealing entry in Käthe Rülicke's diary for 12 March 1951: 'Gestern Sonntag mit Brecht: Außer von Becher und sich selbst glaube er von niemandem, daß sie ehrlich für die Republik seien. Sie "machen mit".'[61] Brecht's sense of his significance as an artist depended very much on the legitimacy which the existence of the GDR gave to his experimentation and his antifascism. He therefore took great care with his public interventions, always considering the damage which overt criticism could do to the image of the GDR in the West, and his most damning statements were left unpublished. As Manfred Jäger puts it: '[...] ein Potential war da, das Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv war da: auch späte Wirkungen waren noch Wirkungen',[62] but we should be careful to distinguish between the use to which Brecht's work was put after his death and the considerations which motivated him at the time.

One of the most important of these ideological considerations was Brecht's particular interpretation of the 'deutsche Misere' theory, according to which Germany had failed to take its destiny into its own hands and follow the 'progressive' step of consolidating as a nation out of the end of feudalism, and thus had failed to bring about a bourgeois revolution in 1848. The 'progressive' classes in Germany had consequently never been able to fulfil their responsibility as historical actors, and German politics had been the province of foreign powers and the reactionary classes. The failure of the German people to overthrow Hitler was the major difficulty; the Soviet Union, in its war of

[59] Brecht's ideologised view of the circumstances in the GDR, and his displacement of blame for the development of the dictatorship on to the remnants of Nazi bureaucracy, is demonstrated in his 'Vorwort zu Turandot' of 1953, *BFA*, XXIV, pp. 409–10.

[60] A particularly good example is the effective self-defence which Brecht and HeleneWeigel, who was also a master of this kind of fight, carried off at the Stanislavsky Conference, 17–19 April 1953: cf. the account in Jäger, pp. 61–65.

[61] Cit. Lucchesi, p. 78. The entry continues: 'B. für die Notwendigkeit einer Übergangsdiktatur, die zwar viele Härten und Ungerechtigkeiten mit sich bringt, aber in der es um Sein oder Nichtsein geht. Ästhetische Probleme sind da zweitrangig.' Brecht was perfectly well aware of the nature of Soviet dictatorship, and yet he was still capable of considering it a lesser evil. Perhaps he imagined it was a dictatorship of people who 'mitmachen' (Käthe Rülicke was a production assistant at the Berliner Ensemble 1950–1956.)

[62] Jäger, p. 67.

liberation, had taken on the role which the German proletariat was supposed to perform. In other words, class consciousness was lagging behind the historical situation in which the population of the Soviet-occupied part of Germany found itself, and Brecht's dramatic technique was designed to help in the creation of a new consciousness. By shifting the burden of interpretation towards the spectator, Brecht's plays were designed to begin the slow process of forging a sense of historical responsibility which could not come from the action of outside parties like the Soviet Union, however beneficial their influence. His later poetry works in a similar way, and this technique is what gives his criticisms of the regime their memorable resonance.

Brecht, in his proposed solution to the 'deutsche Misere', attempts a unity of political and artistic theory and practice: responsibility lies in being able to create one's own meanings. This unity is naturally rather strained, requiring a set of theoretical acrobatics familiar in left-wing German intellectuals struggling to fit fascism into the dialectic. It also depends on a view of the GDR as embodying, at least in potential, the unity of theory and practice promised by Marxism, and in which Marxist intellectuals saw their own self-justification. Thus, in a way which contrasts fascinatingly with Becher, Brecht's theoretical stance and his self-image as an intellectual provide the context for both resistance and complicity; his aspirations to *Realpolitik* are only part of the story.

The extensive discussions over *Das Verhör des Lukullus* offer an important insight into the ways in which the theoretical principles outlined above were applied in practice. The interpretation which emerges from Lucchesi's documentation, that the early formalism campaigns were characterised by uncertainty and disunity within the SED and between Party and state institutions, and that the discussions were concerned with serious issues of legitimacy and freedom of expression as well as being part of a bid for dominance by a harder line associated with Walter Ulbricht, is supported by the evidence discussed in previous chapters. However, this interpretation suffers from a lack of contextualisation which underplays the significance of *Lukullus* for the SED's search for sources of legitimacy. What is lacking is an understanding of the fundamental reasons for moving against Brecht and

Dessau, beyond the assertion of administrative control over the 'intelligentsia' and the expression of the personal prejudices of various functionaries.

The 'integrationists' within the SED were attempting to walk a delicate ideological tightrope (a balancing act which became easier as their administrative dominance increased): a positive national identity had to be developed which could present the GDR as the continuation of progressive and rationalistic traditions in German history, which had finally found a physical expression in a separate state. Thus, any interpretation of history which shows that the German people (or a particular class: peasantry, proletariat, intelligentsia) was unable to make history in its own right, would inevitably threaten that identity, and thus the legitimacy of the SED, whose members saw themselves as the embodiment of the active and progressive historical principle. However, the only possible physical source of legitimacy was the Soviet Union, and so this feeling of national resurgence had somehow to be reconciled with a policy of absolute dependence on Soviet military power and on 'Stalin' as the ultimate source of all legitimacy. The ambivalence of the Soviet leadership towards the GDR complicated this matter considerably; the 'integrationists' were obliged to pursue a policy of increasing identification with Stalin, who was interested in detaching Germany from the immediate Soviet sphere. Walter Ulbricht gradually turned this situation to his own advantage, by creating a sense of his own legitimacy as Stalin's representative, so that Stalin was obliged to use Ulbricht as his only means of access to influence in internal German politics. However, until Stalin's concession of the remilitarisation of the GDR in early 1952, the 'integrationist' line lacked the final confirmation of the Germans' ability to make their own history.

For this reason, the accusation that the passivity of the Roman peasants in *Lukullus* and the trial in the Underworld were an admission of political powerlessness was more than just an ideological weapon designed to keep an unruly artist in line; it actually went to the very heart of the SED's problems of legitimacy:

Das Weltfriedenslager mit seinen mehr als 800 Millionen unter der Führung der Sowjetunion ist nicht nur kein 'Schattengericht', sondern es hat die reale Macht, alle Kriegsverbrecher einer sehr irdischen Gerichtsbarkeit zu unterwerfen.[63]

The tone of aggressive self-assertion which characterised the hysterical press campaign accompanying the debate is deceptive, and it would be a mistake to infer any kind of united strategy or ideological conformity from public pronouncements designed to give an impression of strength; Lucchesi's work confirms that this was a conflict, 'dessen Fronten quer durch die Lager der Diskutanten verliefen'.[64] At times, the fate of *Lukullus* seems to hang from the outcome of an administrative war of attrition, which neither side could afford to lose: the Party keeps up the pressure by concentrating on petty details, such as criticising the writer of the programme notes at the Deutsche Staatsoper[65] or requesting reserved tickets for the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit.[66] Brecht and Dessau's delaying tactics, persuading Party officials that the music should not be judged on the basis of a piano score, in order to present them with a *fait accompli* when the production was ready to be performed, met with irritation[67] but were partially successful, because the leadership realised the significance of the debate. Brecht and Dessau had achieved the desired resonance in the Federal Republic through a production in Frankfurt am Main in January and February 1952.[68]

The debate over the Berlin production of *Lukullus* was intended as a showpiece for artists in the GDR, and a proposed production in Dresden in

[63] Review by Heinz Lüdecke, '"Das Verhör des Lukullus": Ein mißlungenes Experiment in der Deutschen Staatsoper', *Neues Deutschland*, 22 March 1951, text in Schubbe, pp. 186–87. In the next day's edition, *Neues Deutschland* printed excerpts from Hans Lauter's speech at the vital Central Committee meeting of 15–17 March, in which *Lukullus* was condemned as 'ein Beispiel des Formalismus', thus attempting to create, entirely unconvincingly, the impression of a response to public pressure.

[64] Lucchesi, p. 19.

[65] Lucchesi, p. 52.

[66] Lucchesi, pp. 66–67.

[67] Cf. repeated requests from the Ministerium für Volksbildung, Lucchesi, pp. 57–58, and Paul Wandel's con-descending tone at the meeting on 13 March 1951, to which Brecht replies that the as yet incomplete staging will produce and entirely different effect on the audience, and that the production team should be given more time: 'Sie hören eine Musik vollkommen anders, wenn Sie dazu etwas anderes sehen. Sie ist geschrieben zu etwas, was Sie sehen sollen.' Note how, with Brecht, tactical manoeuvre and artistic principle are inseparable, reflecting Brecht's belief that the GDR embodies the *potential* to fulfil his ideological needs, and that it is just a question of clearing obstacles out of his way (Lucchesi, pp. 120–21).

[68] Cf. letter from the conductor Hermann Scherchen to Brecht, 2 February 1952: '[...] trotz der gespannten Atmo-sphäre — : 26 Vorhänge!' (Lucchesi, p. 277.)

early 1951 was banned by the Central Committee.[69] The uncertainty which this demonstrates about the effect of the production on its audiences is reflected in the decision of the Ministerium für Volksbildung in February 1951 that the Staatsoper's tickets should have slogans printed on them.[70] Once again, this nervous tinkering should by no means be seens as a sign of confidence on the part of the administration, but it reflects a fear of misinterpretations, of unpredictable audience responses forming independent meanings. Brecht's theatrical practice embodies this threat to the authority over language implied in the communist *Führungsanspruch*, although he consciously leads his audiences towards a particular interpretation. If we compare this practice with the pluralism of *Sinn und Form*, a telling contrast emerges: in both cases, the *production* of meaning on the part of the reader/spectator is what counts, but whereas with Brecht, there is an end to the process, a final synthesis at which the dialectic of his plays are aimed, *Sinn und Form* is guided by the principle that significance lies in the *absence* of a final meaning, that the process is an end in itself. Thus, although both Brecht and Peter Huchel work by the principle that political and artistic responsibility consists in allowing the reader/spectator space to construct meanings (which requires an equally serious engagement in return), only Brecht could believe that appeals to the sensibilities of Walter Ulbricht would contribute to the removal of bureaucratic obstacles.[71] Ideological preconceptions have immensely practical consequences, and cannot be considered in isolation from administrative methods.

Dessau's music presented similar ideological problems for the administration: not only was it not immediately approachable for listeners brought up on a pedantic respect for classical norms (although the responses of representatives from various mass organisations at the discussion after the open rehearsal on 13 March 1951 are by no means all negative), but, in conjunction with the text, it raised disturbing questions of meaning and interpretation. The fragmentary nature of the music, with no higher strings and an impressive array

[69] Resolution of Abteilung Kultur of Central Committee, 1 February 1951, Lucchesi, pp. 63–64.

[70] Lucchesi, p. 71.

[71] Cf. letter from Brecht to Ulbricht, 12 March 1951, Lucchesi, p. 81. There are echoes here of Becher's concern with 'Beseitigung von Mißverständnissen', and a similar inability to challenge ideology in the light of experience, rather than vice versa.

of percussion, is challenging, although it is by no means as tuneless as many of Dessau's accusers claim. However, Dessau's approach to melody, and his response to the text, are of a piece with avantgardistic concerns to explore cognitive responses to musical form. A melody structured with the harmonic and rhythmic balance characteristic of Classicism strives for a resolution or closure which is an end in itself. Naturally, the greatest composers exploited and undermined the listener's expectations of balance and resolution, but listeners in later ages, with different assumptions, may no longer experience this formal experimentation as shock, humour or a means of achieving psychological depth: the meaning of the musical passage, which consisted precisely in the undermining of a formal structure, is lost in the experience of closure.[72] Dessau seems to me to be trying to force a response to Brecht's text by not allowing the listener to take refuge in fulfilled expectations: perhaps a contemporary response to Beethoven's formal experi-mentation (such as his approach to word-setting in the *Missa Solemnis,* in which he exposes the contradictions, tensions and dramatic potential of the over-familiar Latin mass).

As a Party member, Dessau comes under more serious attack than Brecht; the music is an easier target for the SED, as most of its members can rally round in their dislike of it. It does not seem to embody unresolved ideological problems in the way that Brecht's text does, although Brecht is right in insisting that the two cannot be considered separately (another example of a point of principle coinciding with the tactical need to protect the more vulnerable Dessau). Dessau's experience of the pressures under which he had to work contrasts strikingly with Brecht's. Dessau responds with an affronted irony, a tone which Eisler was to adopt after the banning of his *Faustus* libretto:

[...] Ich bin angeklagt der Isolation.
Ich kann nicht sprechen und wollte gar nicht sprechen.

[72] Brecht makes a similar point: 'Wenn man nur alte Musik als exemplarisch hinstellt, benutzt man Musik, die konfliktlos erscheint, weil die Konflikte, die sie gestaltet, heute in der Realität gelöst sind. Wie sollen wir mit diesen Exempeln vor den Ohren die Konflikte unserer Zeit, die ungelösten, gestalten?' (cit. Lucchesi, p. 185). The dialectic is everything for Brecht, and his identification of musical form with social change is too close. However, statements like this make clear the task which Brecht and Dessau set themselves. Brecht's private assessment of the music is typically reserved: 'Ihre Schönheit ist mit verhältnismäßig wenig Studium erfaßbar' (cit. Lucchesi, p. 191).

Ich bin in keiner Isolation [...] Ich bin mit großer Freude dem Ruf der FDJ gefolgt, einen Chor zu übernehmen. Heute stehe ich im Werk Oberschönweide als Leiter eines neu aufzubauenden Chores. Ich tue das aus Liebe nicht nur zu unserer Bevölkerung, sondern aus Liebe zur Musik. Es ist nicht so, daß ich die Werktätigen hasse, aber ich hasse aus tiefstem Herzen den schlechten Geschmack der Massen. Auch das ist der Grund, daß ich morgen um 5 Uhr im Traktorenwerk Oberschönweide arbeite.
Ich bin nicht isoliert, ich bin isoliert von einer kleinen Schicht der Bevölkerung, einer kleinen Schicht. Ich fühle mich zu Hause in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik wie in keinem Lande der Welt.[73]

By contrast, Brecht can continue to examine even the most hostile criticism for instructive lessons, and can profess to find the discussion 'erfrischend und lehrreich'.[74]

For all the attempts by various parties to turn the debate into a direct confrontation, Lucchesi is right to state, 'es ging hier nicht um pure Gegnerschaft, um unlösbare Widersprüche'.[75] There is a considerable overlap between, say, the positions of Brecht and Dessau and that of Kuba: 'Unser Volk ist unser Publikum und unser Auftraggeber.'[76] The difference lies in the willingness of one side to use administrative measures to impose a set of meanings. With his belief in a truth which the spectator will reach given the correct set of directions, Brecht belongs partially in this camp, although he, like Dessau, believes that the new type of audience, whom the GDR offers the opportunity to claim the theatre for their own, need to be educated in the understanding of art. For Brecht, this is a dialectical problem, whereas Dessau simply deplores 'bad taste'. While those in the leadership who had some sympathy for this view were able to hold their own against Ulbricht's line, the discussions could be carried out in an atmosphere that was not entirely hostile.

The Central Committee meeting of 15–17 March 1951 was a landmark in the development of the formalism campaign.[77] An example was to be made of

[73] Dessau at the meeting on 13 March 1951, Lucchesi, p. 113. Eva Fritzsche makes the following statement on Dessau's style: 'Ich habe den Eindruck, daß Paul Dessau den schlechten Geschmack mehr haßt, als den imperialistischen Krieg' (Lucchesi, p. 119).

[74] Letter to Berthold Viertel, June/July 1951, cit. Lucchesi, p. 243.

[75] Lucchesi, p. 21.

[76] Cit. Lucchesi, p. 95.

[77] See Lucchesi, pp. 127–77, for the protocol of the discussion on point 7 of the agenda ('Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in der Kunst') on 17 March, with Hans Lauter's speech. The resolution, 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur', is in Schubbe, pp. 178–86.

Lukullus, and the premiere was arranged for 17 March as a closed performance, so that press reaction could be coordinated with the Central Committee deliberations, and a meeting of the Sektion Musik of the Academy had produced the unedifying spectacle of senior musicians distancing themselves from Dessau.[78] Hans Lauter's speech on the motion condemning formalism in the arts forms the basis of the ideological attacks on Brecht and others, and it is notable that the definition of formalism is vague enough so that the whole leadership can agree to it; this is the semantic flexibility of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric discussed in Chapter Four, and which ultimately favours the most hard-line position.

As far as *Lukullus* is concerned, the core of the issue is the attitude to tradition and national legitimacy which emerges in Lauter's speech:

> Der Kosmopolitismus, der das nationale Bewußtsein der Völker zerstören soll, ist die Wurzel des Formalismus, der nämlich das nationale Kulturerbe, der die Grundlage der nationalen Kultur in seiner Art von einer anderen Seite aus zerstört und darum von dieser Seite aus dazu beiträgt, das Nationalbewußtsein zu unterminieren, es zu schwächen und zu zerstören.[79]

Formalism casts doubt on the existence of 'progressive' currents in German culture, and thus jeopardises the legitimacy of the SED, as the embodiment of these currents, and, by extension, the legitimacy of the GDR. It is thus intimately linked with the 'deutsche Misere' theory. Brecht's questioning attitude towards the 'classics' was incompatible with the definition of Realism which emerges here, although he would claim that his methods better fulfilled the demands of a Marxist Realism, namely, to depict 'die Probleme des Volkes richtig, und was die Hauptsache ist, in ihrer Entwicklung'.[80] By exposing the ideological contradictions in artistic products of a particular period, Brecht hoped to demonstrate the direction of the dialectic concealed in social conditions, rather than projecting current conditions (suitably idealised)

[78] Lucchesi, pp. 124–25. The criticisms expressed here are far harsher than among the lay public of 13 March, speaking of professional jealousy and careerism. The protocol closes with members falling over each other to declare their enthusiasm for writing 'correct' music.

[79] Cit. Lucchesi, p. 137.

[80] Cit. Lucchesi, p. 135.

backwards into the past.[81] That the distinction between these two positions is subtle, to say the least, is one of the reasons for Brecht's continued willingness to go along with criticism from the Party. The central difference lies in the idea of responsibility: Brecht's insistence that the 'Volk' can be allowed to find its own way to the only possible conclusion threatens not only the *Führungsanspruch*, but also the self-image of Party intellectuals who found their justification in 'consciousness-raising'.

There is an interesting text in Lucchesi's documentation which comes to grips with this question of political and artistic responsibility in defence of *Lukullus*[82]:

> [...] wer nicht des ungewohnten, aufrührenden, und *formellen* Kunstgenusses fähig ist, ist auch nicht der aktiven und sogar schöpferischen Teilnahme an der Politik fähig.
> Die unmittelbare Hingabe der Werktätigen an Tschaikowsky, Mussorgsky, Lehár, Chopin, Offenbach usw. ist wesentlich derselbe Vorgang, wie das unmittelbare Mißfallen der Werktätigen an allem Krieg und an aller Staatsaktion und am Staat: es ist die Bestätigung der praktischen Machtlosigkeit und Unmenschlichkeit.[83]

The author takes direct issue with the now official SED position, that *Lukullus* reflects a form of elitism which, in claiming that the 'masses' require education before they can take over responsibility for their own governance, simply bolsters the class dominance of the 'bourgeois'. The seriousness of this debate should not be underestimated: the SED, as direct *representative* of the working class gains its legitimacy from the idea that this class has already achieved political power. Any signs of independence of thought or action on the part of individuals from the 'masses' is thus understood as a challenge to the overall dominance of the working class.

In these terms, the debate rapidly becomes polarised, so that ideas, which previously shared a remarkable amount of common ground, are simplified, and participants in the debate are forced to identify themselves with one of the

[81] This is the implication of the criticism of *Lukullus* in *Neues Deutschland*, cited above.

[82] May, 1951, Lucchesi, pp. 216–20. The author of these notes is unknown; they seem to be in the form of a *Diskussionsbeitrag* for a meeting.

[83] Lucchesi, p. 220. Emphasis in original. The author is referring to the accusations that *Lukullus* advocated a policy of complete pacifism.

camps. The example cited above, which expresses the intentions behind *Lukullus* in somewhat extreme terms, shows that those who wanted to defend Brecht and Dessau were finding themselves increasingly exposed. Sympathisers in the Academy, particularly in the notably obstreperous Sektion Darstellende Kunst, which consisted at this point largely of old friends of Brecht and Helene Weigel, protested about the proposed banning of the opera,[84] and there are examples of extraordinary courage on the part of people like Ernst Legal, Arnold Zweig, who defied the Central Committee on 17 March in defence of his friends,[85] and Hermann Scherchen, who dedicated himself to performances of *Lukullus* in all parts of Germany.[86] Brecht, knowing that Dessau was running a far greater risk because of his Party membership, wrote the text for the cantata *Herrnburger Bericht*, 'nicht zuletzt, um ihm [Dessau] Gelegenheit zu geben, verhältnismäßig einfache Musik beizusteuern'.[87]

Nevertheless, Brecht was obliged to agree to alterations to the text, after a meeting with Wilhelm Pieck on 24 March. Although Pieck was willing to allow further performances after suitable alterations, internal SED communications show no such awareness of the subleties of the debate: *Lukullus* is simply a 'formalistische Oper'.[88] In ideological terms, the functionaries whom Ulbricht was winning over to his line were capable of understanding the debate only where it concerned threats to their authority. The changes which were agreed by Brecht, Pieck and Dessau were a response to this tendency to fix meaning into cliché; the ideological message of the opera is to be made more explicit, so that the spectator is given less space to form interpretations independently. This is reflected in the alteration of the title to *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*, as if to suggest that, previously, the audience could have come away from the production favourably disposed towards the figure of Lukullus.

The alterations, including the insertion of scenes suggesting that big business is behind Lukullus' wars of conquest, that the common people actively

[84] Cf. Lucchesi, pp. 203–4.

[85] Cf. his speech in Lucchesi, pp. 168–72.

[86] Scherchen was fired from his job as Musical Director of Radio Beromünster, Switzerland, in 1950, for his insistance on conducting behind the 'Iron Curtain'.

[87] Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal* entry, 3 July 1951, in *BFA*, XXVII, p. 322.

[88] Letter from Egon Rentzsch at the Kulturabteilung of the Central Committee to the local Party leadership, Erfurt, 27 April 1951, cit. Lucchesi, p. 213.

condemn him, and that the text is directed only against wars of aggression, not of self-defence, satisfied the Politburo sufficiently for permission to be granted for a new production in the Autumn.[89] Brecht sets about publicly justifying the changes, and the Formalism Debate, out of his concern for the international standing of the GDR:

> In Wirklichkeit sind Erscheinungen wie die Formalismus-Realismus-Debatte ohne Kenntnis der großen [gesellschaftlichen] Umwälzungen nicht zu verstehen und also auch nicht zu beurteilen.
> Daß die Neu-Organisation, schon durch die ökonomische und politische Umwälzung, auf dem kulturellen Gebiet ohne Irrtümer und Fehler vor sich geht, kann kein vernünftiger Mensch erwarten.[90]

Considering that the Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten had been working since Summer 1951, systematically obstructing the work of artists in the GDR, the veneer of Brecht's *Realpolitik* is wearing very thin. It is beginning to look as if he needs the GDR to legitimise his life's work more than the GDR needs him: after January 1952, the 'integrationists' have solved their problems of legitimacy by achieving remilitarisation, and any reminder of the 'deutsche Misere', which questions the German people's role as positive historical actor, is an obstacle.

Nevertheless, the Kunstkommission was still unable to exert its authority over the proposed new production of *Lukullus*, indicating possible conflicts of interest between state and Party institutions, and the performances went ahead in October 1951.[91] This is a moment of respite before attacks on Brecht begin

[89] Resolution of Politburo, 15 May 1951.

[90] Letter to Günther Strupp, 18 January 1952, cit. Lucchesi, pp. 275–76. Note that this date marks the beginning of the run-up to the declaration of the 'Aufbau des Sozialismus' with Stalin's agreement to the remilitarisation of the GDR. See also Brecht's speech at the Cultural Congress, 16–18 May 1951, 'Einige Bemerkungen über mein Fach', in *BFA*, XXIII, pp. 150–52.

[91] Cf. the series of exasperated letters in September 1951 (Lucchesi, pp. 263–65) from Kurt Bork at the Kunst-kommission to Ernst Legal, demanding to see the new score, before permission can be granted for performance: 'Wir hatten Ihnen mitgeteilt, daß eine Terminierung in der Angelegenheit "Lukullus" nur nach Genehmigung der neuen Partitur erfolgen könne. Einem Gespräch mit Ihnen entnehmen wir, daß die Aufführung des "Lukullus" bereits für den 11. Oktober 1951 angesetzt worden ist. Bei der Festsetzung des Termins stützen Sie sich auf eine Unterredung, die bei uns stattgefunden hat. Erlauben Sie uns, doch darauf hinzuweisen, daß hier ein Mißverständnis vorliegen muß' (29 September 1951, Lucchesi, p. 265). With evident relish, Lucchesi follows these letters with Legal's reply, in which he states bluntly that the performance will go ahead anyway (1 October 1951, Lucchesi, p. 266).

again in 1952, but it seems to have been enough to convince him that the GDR has the potential to become the kind of society where his art is appreciated.

Brecht deliberately evades confrontation with the realities of cultural life in the GDR, considering that the changes to *Lukullus* represent 'die Beseitigung einiger möglicher Mißverständnisse'.[92] This phrase, with its echo of Becher's self-justifications, lies at the heart of the problem: Brecht cannot help considering problems in the light of his dedication to the practical application of the dialectic (in this, he is much more down-to-earth than Becher). For this reason, he searches all criticisms for the point of principle, so that he can project a positive image of the GDR both to the West and to himself.

The changes to *Lukullus* are a case in point. Brecht's dramatic technique consists in allowing the spectator to arrive independently at a predefined conclusion; the compromise which he comes to with the SED is thus a natural one. Since both sides were agreed on the nature of the conclusion, making explicit the meaning at the end of the opera could be seen as a compromise over methodology, rather than on principle, and Brecht could justify it in terms of historical change:

> [...] als ich vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg 'Das Verhör des Lukullus' schrieb, schien es mir überflüssig, die Verurteilung des Angreifers hinzuzufügen. Jetzt, nach diesem Krieg, scheint es mir nötig, und mein Vertrauen auf die Urteilskraft der Leute kommt mir nur noch merkwürdig vor.[93]

However, the abandonment of a committment to the inculcation of a sense of responsibility in the German people was far more than a mere methodological matter; it contributed directly to the legitimisation of a political line which strove for the further integration of the GDR into the Soviet sphere (although, as became clear in June 1953, the triumph of this line was by no means as secure as it seemed).

Brecht's remarkable ability to combine tactical manoeuvre and principled argument was in many ways his greatest strength, and yet his need for the legitimacy which the GDR granted to his work drove this ability to a point

[92] Letter to Wilhelm Pieck, 6 April 1951, cit. Lucchesi, p. 206.
[93] Letter to Dolf Sternberger, March 1952, cit. Lucchesi, p. 278.

where he was unable himself to distinguish tactic and principle. Since the progression of his life's work would have had no goal were it not for the existence of the GDR (as a necessary synthesis emerging from the defeat of Nazism), he had to believe that this society would develop further in a positive direction. The privileges which he was granted by the regime naturally helped his thought processes along this path, and, paradoxically, his non-Party status gave him a rosier view of SED rule than might otherwise have been the case.

Thus, we can identify precisely the area in which Brecht fought out issues of resistance and complicity. He cultivated with remarkable dedication his self-image as *Realpolitiker*, making compromises with power for the sake of his work, which he hoped would contribute to the long-term improvement of the GDR. However, he could not foresee the consequences of his compromises because his understanding of the nature of SED rule was in itself highly ideologised. The GDR in which he pursued his *Realpolitik* was not the GDR in which he lived.

CASE STUDY NO. 3:

'ICH MEIN DAS GANZE: DEUTSCHLAND!'[1]

HANNS EISLER'S *FAUSTUS* AND THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

This final case study will examine the controversy within the Academy over Eisler's libretto for his planned opera, *Johann Faustus*, which was to be a model for 'die deutsche Nationaloper' in the GDR.[2] Eisler's work was seized on by the increasingly confident 'integrationist' grouping amongst the Party members in the Academy as 'das Exempel, um den Künstlern das Rückgrat zu brechen'.[3] This debate, along with the attempts to impose alterations on *Sinn und Form*, is important in several respects. First, it was intended to demonstrate the security of the SED's grip on power. Such a demonstration was vital since, despite the triumph of the 'integrationist' line at the Second Conference, the rearmament of the GDR, and the state's acceptance into the Soviet Bloc, the leadership had only just managed to prevent Ulbricht falling victim to the Slánský purge in December 1952. The problems became more acute after Stalin's death when factional conflicts within the Soviet Politburo began to have repercussions in Germany.

Second, the SED had, since the Third Party Congress in 1950, attempted to construct a new sense of national identity which would justify the Party's leading role and portray the GDR as the legitimate successor to all progressive movements in German history. This new sense of national resurgence depended on a suspension of all literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which might stir up uncomfortable questions about past KPD failures and the complicity of ordinary Germans in National Socialism. Since this concept of nationhood depended

[1] Hanns Eisler, *Johann Faustus: Oper* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1952), act 1, scene 6, p. 32. Extracts from Eisler's libretto also appeared in *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), no. 6, 21–58.

[2] Ernst Fischer, 'Doktor Faustus und der deutsche Bauernkrieg', *Sinn und Form*, 3 (1952), 59–73 (73).

[3] Hans Bunge, *Die Debatte um Hanns Eislers 'Johann Faustus'. Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag, 1991), p. 19.

crucially on identification with the Soviet Union as guarantor of German unity, any further independent thinking about Nazism had to be suppressed in case it led to problematic comparisons with Soviet terror or criticism (or even mention) of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. For SED functionaries who had survived the years of exile in the Soviet Union, it was particularly important that these matters should not be discussed.

The tenuousness of the SED's claim to power is clear to us with the benefit of hindsight, but the ideological arguments had a great influence on many politicians and intellectuals at the time, as they seemed to offer a justification for their efforts. Perhaps Walter Ulbricht saw the danger with greater clarity than his colleagues and rivals: he understood that the SED could only hope to retain any influence in German politics if the GDR was fully protected by Soviet military power. Any reunification of Germany or liberalisation (as Beria proposed) would expose the SED's unpopularity and end in electoral disaster. Many in the GDR only became aware of the Party's lack of legitimacy and support in June 1953.

Thus, the ideological issues were a matter of real importance in this crucial period, and anything which threatened the SED's drive to bind the intelligentsia into its camp was liable to expose the fraudulence of the new Party approach to history and national identity. The controversy over the *Faustus* libretto both reflects and intervenes in this tense political atmosphere. It is the key issue in an understanding of the relationship of the older generation of intellectuals in the GDR to the establishment of SED power, and the debate is important not only as an example of SED tactics, but also in the substance of the arguments.

'DEUTSCHE MISERE' AND 'DEUTSCHER WEG': ANTIFASCISM AND INTELLECTUAL RESPONSIBILITY

The *Bündnispolitik* of the KPD in 1945 reflected a set of political realities: the need for the Soviet Union to maintain its relations with the Allies required a definition of the origins of Nazism which excluded all but monopoly capitalists, and the heads of government and military. The broad-based conception which

emerged from ambitious enterprises such as the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland and the Bund Deutscher Offiziere failed to produce the intended German uprising against Hitler, but formed the basis of a strategy which represented the only realistic opportunity for the KPD to exercise any kind of influence on post-war politics. For this reason, and to the disgust of many ordinary KPD members, the Party's programme of 1945 was less radical than that of the SPD, leading to considerable problems with Party discipline.[4]

Nevertheless, for all its dependence on political expediency, the antifascist-democratic concept of the KPD did provide the context for a number of serious attempts to come to terms with the significance of fascism in German history, and to extend the analysis of responsibility beyond the targets sanctioned by the leadership. One of the most important of these early Marxist analyses in the Soviet Zone is Alexander Abusch's *Irrweg einer Nation*, which represents a genuine reworking of history, with National Socialism as the key moment.[5] Whatever the shortcomings of the Marxist historical paradigm which Abusch employs, there is a certain independence of thought which comes as something of a surprise when one considers the shameful role which he was later to play in the Academy and the Ministry of Culture. In his adaptation of motifs from Friedrich Engels' *Bauernkrieg*, Abusch reaches back to an earlier stage of Marxist theory which owes little to standard Leninist views of imperialism and fascism, and the emphasis on independent Marxism and on the exceptional nature of German history clearly links *Irrweg einer Nation* with the 'German Road to Socialism' as an attempt to assert a renewed sense of political responsibility. Sigrid Meuschel calls the book 'ein veritables Werk des Antifaschismus', despite its obvious utility as 'eine politische Kampfschrift'.[6] Many examples in the course of this study have shown that, in the years 1945–1953, the coexistence of principle and expediency was absolutely characteristic of the ideological system: to attempt to separate 'rhetoric' from 'real political intentions' is to misunderstand both, particularly where Marxist

[4] See Stefan Creuzberger, 'Die Liquidierung antifaschistischer Organisationen in Berlin', *Deutschland Archiv*, 26 (1993), 1266–78.

[5] Alexander Abusch, *Irrweg einer Nation* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1946).

[6] Sigrid Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 66.

historians are concerned, for whom historiography 'functions as an active history-making force on behalf of different classes and groups'.[7]

According to Abusch, the origins of the 'deutsche Misere' lay in the defeat of the Peasants' Revolt of 1525, and the establishment of feudal princely particularism which set back the cause of German unity and the development of capitalist production. In this conception, Martin Luther and the development of Protestantism were, in the final reckoning, historically retrograde. The final balance of Luther's work is assigned to the Counter-Reformation, because he turned against a peasantry which had taken inspiration from his ideas, and the 'kleinstaatliche Untertanentum' of Lutheranism set back the development of the humanist universalism of Renaissance Rome.[8] Not only did this stall economic development, but it also prevented the unification of Germany under an absolutist monarchy, as was occurring throughout the rest of Western Europe. In terms of historical materialism, the establishment of monarchical absolutism on the French or English model was a progressive step, in the sense that a unified national government removed many of the obstacles from the development of capitalist forms of production, thus contributing to the growth of a bourgeois class which would eventually take up the revolutionary struggle for freedom.

In Germany, however, no such developments could take place in the petty princedoms; instead, 'deutsche "Verinnerlichung" unter der Allmacht der Fürsten'[9] developed into characteristic German submissiveness and Prussian militarism, chauvinism and bureaucracy. The failure of the bourgeoisie in 1848 is ascribed to its willingness to compromise with the nobility, and the weakness and passivity of the peasantry and the developing proletariat stemmed from disunity and poor leadership. A clear line of historical development is posited from this failure to unite Germany, through the defeat of the 1848 revolutions, to nationalism and fascism. Nationalism is thus shown to be profoundly *antinational*, contributing to division and defeat, and, conversely, national division is seen as the direct cause of fascism; the German *Sonderweg* is

[7] Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), p. 46.

[8] Abusch, *Irrweg*, p. 27.

[9] Abusch, *Irrweg*, p. 28.

conceived in terms of setting the nation back onto the path of historical progress by coming to an understanding of the causes of National Socialism: 'Um zu wissen, wohin Deutschland nun gehen soll, muß geklärt sein, woher das Deutschland Hitlers kam.'[10]

This is the theoretical justification for the ideological precept of the *Bündnispolitik*, namely, the 'Vollendung der Revolution von 1848'.[11] It is problematic because the 'Misere' concept clearly implies a far broader share of responsibility for the disaster than the politically expedient need to blame it all on the monopolists and militarists, and yet the concept was designed to encourage the cooperation of the middle classes in the construction of a 'bourgeois-democratic' republic. However, this concept contained at least the potential for a genuine reassessment of national responsibility, and, for all the weaknesses of Marxist historiography, is an attempt to analyse the social origins of Nazism for a mass audience. Many contributions to the early issues of *Aufbau* are characterised by attempts to explore and deepen the 'Misere' concept, with results which are more differentiated than the official KPD/SED line.

However, the idea that German history had been characterised by the failure of all progressive movements led the SED to move against the 'Misere' concept. Criticisms had been voiced against the theory during 1942/3, when the KPD leadership in exile required a more positive and nationalistic history for its work with the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland, particularly since the concentration of the 'Misere' theory on the failure of revolutionary movements might suggest that German resistance to Nazism was minimal. Indeed, the 'Misere' theory could provide a convenient explanation as to why the Soviet Union had to liberate Germany at all, but this would have clearly demonstrated the inadequacy and illegitimacy of the KPD. Thus, for the purposes of recruitment, the Party leadership expanded resistance from 'eine kleine Arbeitergarde' into 'das große Kulturvolk'.[12]

[10] Abusch, 'Einleitung' to *Irrweg einer Nation*, n.p.

[11] Cf. *Gründungsaufruf* of KPD, 1945.

[12] Cf. Meuschel, p. 67.

After 1945, the criticisms abated for a while, as Abusch's diagnosis that the blame for the rise of Hitler lay in the disunity of the working class was Party orthodoxy, a point which contributed a powerful emotional resonance to the campaign for the unity of KPD and SPD. As we have seen, however, the SED needed a different approach by 1950, which conflated Party with national history. Speakers at the Third Congress in 1950 took up the nationalistic theme once more, and warned against 'nihilistic' approaches to history. By the time of the Second Conference in 1952, Ulbricht could call explicitly for a 'nationale Geschichtsbetrachtung',[13] and advocate the replacement of the 'Misere' theory with a story of successful national-revolutionary struggles, with a new pantheon of heroes including military figures such as Blücher. Similarly, Kurt Hager, head of the propaganda department of the Central Committee, demanded in 1952 that GDR historians should study and master historical materialism.[14] This was to put an end to the German inferiority complex which Grotewohl had spoken of in 1950; in other words, it represented the end of any serious attempt at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Other aspects of German history were also reassessed, so that the 1918 uprising could now be seen as a proletarian revolution in solidarity with the Bolsheviks, rather than as an attempt to complete the task unfinished in 1848. The 'integrationists' within the SED, whose survival depended on a nationalism which claimed all progressive ideas and historical figures and on a tie with an ambivalent Soviet Union which precluded all independent thought about the nature of dictatorship, were liable to crack down hard on anything which questioned that legitimacy.

This was the atmosphere in which Hanns Eisler chose to present his *Johann Faustus* for discussion as a principled approach to German history.

[13] Meuschel, pp. 67–68.

[14] Cf. Dorpalen, p. 49.

FAUST AND THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

The historiography of the Peasants' Revolt went through a series of shifts in emphasis in the GDR, depending on the current needs of the SED Politburo.[15] In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Reformation was seen as a revolutionary situation, in which Martin Luther laid the foundations of an ideology, expressed in religious terms, which fused incoherent class struggles into a social revolution culminating in the Peasants' Revolt. Luther's teachings were seen as part of the struggle of the embryonic bourgeoisie and the peasantry against a reactionary church, and the 'treachery' of the bourgeois classes was held to have prevented the unification of Germany. Later, when prospects for the reunification of GDR and FRG had faded, the emphasis changed, and historians stressed that national unity had not been an option in the sixteenth century, and the figure of Luther was rehabilitated to a certain extent as a member of the progressive bourgeoisie, in order to prevent West German historians 'claiming' him for their cause.

This shift in interpretation of the Reformation had the consequence of contributing to the ideological reassessment of German national identity which the SED had begun to undertake since 1950. If the Peasants' Revolt had a genuinely positive effect on German history, by contributing to the development of capitalist modes of production, then the peasantry need no longer be portrayed as passive, and Thomas Müntzer's doctrines could be shown to have foreshadowed Marx, Engels, and even Lenin.[16] A positive German revolutionary tradition is discovered, which reestablishes German history in the mainstream of European development, in that it follows the same dialectical laws as other countries. GDR authors spent a considerable amount of effort trying to demonstrate that the class struggle continued after 1525, and that the peasantry was by no means passive in the face of defeat.[17]

[15] See the chapter, 'From Feudalism to Capitalism: The Reformation to the Thirty Years War', in Dorpalen, pp. 99–137.

[16] Cf. Dorpalen, pp. 115–16.

[17] Cf. Dorpalen, p. 128.

The 'deutsche Misere' theory needed to be discarded, because it suggested that the German people were unable to determine their own fate, and had to rely on outside parties (such as the Soviet Union) to carry out their revolutions for them. At the same time, the admission of the GDR among the People's Democracies required the rigorous refutation of any remnant of an independent German road to socialism. The squaring of this circle depended on a renewed nationalist assertiveness, which served the purpose of entrenching German division (the progressive and reactionary traditions having crystallised into the two German states), strengthening the integration of the GDR into the Soviet sphere, and avoiding a principled assessment of Nazi and Soviet dictatorship.

The figure of Faust portrayed by Eisler appears in a sixteenth-century social context which is very close to the view of history which the SED leadership was repudiating. The peasantry has been defeated by the forces of reaction, but survives unbowed in the figure of the crippled Karl. Eisler's Faust shares many characteristics with Luther, unwilling to follow through the logic of his ideology, 'die humanitas in gesellschaftliche Tat umzusetzen'.[18] By failing to provide the ideological leadership which is the task of the intellectual and by opposing a historically progressive movement which would lead to German unity, Faust shirks his historical task. Shamed by Karl's wounds, he says: 'Man hätte nicht zu den Waffen greifen sollen', and is roundly condemned.[19] In this scene with Karl, Eisler shows the consequences of the disunity of the intellectual and the masses, of 'Geist' and 'Volk': Karl's body is broken, so he cannot fulfil his social function, but his spirit is strong, whereas Faust is healthy, because he stayed out of the war, but his mind, cut off from the source of its strength (that is, Faust's peasant roots), cannot contribute to progress. Whatever his intentions, history condemns the German humanist as a renegade. In words which would come back to haunt him, Ernst Fischer calls Eisler's Faust 'eine Zentralgestalt der deutschen Misere'.[20]

[18] Fischer, p. 63. Fischer's article is important, in that the interpretation which he presents becomes the focus for the attacks on Eisler and *Sinn und Form*. The Austrian Marxist Fischer, writing from Vienna, was not wholly in touch with developments in East Berlin.

[19] *Faustus*, act 1, scene 2, p. 18.

[20] Fischer, p. 63.

The scenes set in a more modern era reflect a Marxist analysis of the past in terms of its development into the present; Faust's journey to Italy in the traditional puppet play is replaced by a satire on American capitalism, which show the durability of traditions of resistance through a chorus of slaves. The lord of the Underworld is a capitalist boss, who summons his agents like a Mafia don. Mephisto appears dressed as a Junker, to underline Faust's betrayal of his peasant roots. In order to escape his feelings of guilt at his own treachery, Faust commands Mephisto to make him forget the battle songs of the Junkers and the Peasants in an attempt to remain aloof from the class struggle.

Another humiliation is Mephisto's demand that Faust renounce love. Faust protests, but Mephisto shows him that there is nothing for him to love; he cannot love Germany, because it is divided geographically and along class lines. Faust despises the Germany of the Princes, is despised by the Germany of the rising bourgeoisie, and has forfeited his right to speak for the peasants. In his 'Confessio', Faust comes to an understanding that neutrality serves only the enemies of progress, but it is too late, and he is dragged back from his position in front of the curtain into the continuing action, from which he cannot escape (a dangerously formalist device).[21]

Eisler's juxtaposition of themes from the sixteenth century with scenes condemning imperialism, in order to demonstrate the historical continuity proposed by the 'Misere' theory, is ambitious. It demonstrates that Eisler was confident (as he had every right to be) that his music would act as the carrier of the message of continuity, linking the Junkers with the imperialists and the German peasants with the chorus of slaves. As was the case in the debate over *Das Verhör des Lukullus*, the idea that music and text were inseparable, and should be considered as an artistic unity, was alien to Eisler's attackers.

The literary form of the text is a clear challenge to Socialist Realist orthodoxies, although Eisler naturally considered himself a Realist, and was simply concerned with exploring broader possibilities for the genre. As an intervention in the 'Realism Debate', *Faustus*, and Fischer's article, with its

[21] *Faustus*, act 3, scene 5, pp. 73–77.

enthusiasm for 'das Phantastisch-Sagenhafte',[22] became a hostage to fortune for a whole group of like-minded intellectuals and artists in the GDR.

DIALECTIC WITHOUT DEVELOPMENT: TRAPPING A GOOD COMMUNIST

What strikes the reader of the transcripts of the discussions in the Academy concerning *Faustus* and *Sinn und Form* in May and June 1953 is not only the stubbornness and bankruptcy of the arguments brought against Eisler, but also the willingness of Eisler's defenders to give ground to their opponents.[23] Naturally, the threat of coercion hung over the meetings, and one should not underestimate the atmosphere of fear and suspicion generated by accusations of ideological error. However, between 1945 and 1953, it was still possible for those who sympathised with the SED's declared aims to believe that the regime enjoyed popular legitimacy, as well as ideological justification. Eisler was concerned to make a serious statement about the function of art in the new society, and his unwise decision to present his text for discussion reflects the feeling, which we have already seen in Brecht, that reasoned debate and comradely criticism were the best way to ensure that intellectuals and artists fulfilled their social role. Similarly, Eisler's decision to take up the Faust legend seems to have something provocative about it in the light of the use to which the figure of Goethe had been put in the GDR, and the questions which his text and his audacious choice of subject brought up were urgent and uncomfortable.

Not only did the text challenge many assumptions about German history, the role of German intellectuals and their attitudes to culture, but it is also in many ways the continuation of a line in the debates on the 'kulturelles Erbe' which had caused rancour amongst German artists in exile. Brecht's influence is

[22] Fischer, p. 70.

[23] The selection of documents in Dietzel and Geißler gives a somewhat limited view of the 'Faustus Debate'; the interaction of the most important personalities, principally Brecht, Eisler, Becher, Abusch and Zweig, is more complex than this documentation might at first suggest. The outcome of the debate before the 17 June was not quite the unambiguous defeat for Eisler's defenders which, for example, Hans Mayer considers it to be: 'Im Falle von Hanns Eisler verzeichneten Girnus und seine Mitstreiter einen vollen Erfolg.' Hans Mayer, *Brecht* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 70.

tangible in Eisler's writing, and Brecht's journals (25 to 30 August 1952) record that he had a hand in its composition. A Marxist-avantgardist sensibility is at work here, derived from the 1920s experimentation of Erwin Piscator, who saw past cultural artifacts as texts whose internal contradictions need to be forcibly exposed, the better to learn from them. A necessary violence is done to the text in order to show it in the light of social conditions contemporary to both the text's author and to its later adaptor, thus exposing the underlying connections and the development of the historical dialectic. The radical juxtaposition achieved by reaching back from the present to a past moment of defeat or victory, and the ambiguities of interpretation which arise from a view which sees history and culture as a text to be manipulated by the artist are of no use in justifying a regime's hold on power.

Eisler's approach to the 'Erbe' was, arguably, entirely appropriate for an artist influenced by the 'Misere' theory, and his examination of the role of the German intellectual and of the limits to the usefulness of cultural traditions in promoting a progressive ideology is powerful and pertinent. Eisler's defence ('Eine Parodierung [Goethes] ist wirklich nicht gemeint'[24]) is somewhat disingenuous, as some of the jokes at the expense of Goethe's language serve to bring the religious overtones down to earth, or to comment on the veneration in which Goethe's *Faust* has been held by later generations. As Deborah Viëtor-Engländer comments, '[Eislers] Umgang mit dem Erbe war also im höchsten Maße aktualitätsbezogen'.[25] With the prospect of the Federal Republic's entry into NATO, the pressure on German intellectuals to make a firm stand on one side or the other was growing, and Eisler's *Faustus* is a clear statement of support for the GDR. We can partly explain the vehemence of the attacks on such a loyal communist with reference to the campaign for legitimacy of a particular line within the SED, whose proponents had a clearer idea than less hard-line communists of the potential threat to the regime posed by any ambivalence on the question of German division. Avantgardist experimentation with history and culture was not only a perceived affront to the sensibilities of

[24] Protocol of 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft', 13 May 1953, Bunge, p. 69.

[25] Deborah Viëtor-Engländer, *Faust in der DDR* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 178.

the working class (not to mention the conservative middle classes), but also left interpretation dangerously open.

Proponents of this avantgardist line had always run into trouble with the KPD, and it shows a great faith in the political processes of the GDR that Eisler felt able to offer up his libretto for public debate. As we have seen, the changing circumstances of late 1952, the ramifications of rearmament and the Slánský trial, had led the SED leadership to prepare an assault on the artistic community which they only now felt strong enough to carry through. However, because of the regime's continuing need for the legitimacy which its intellectuals, and the existence of the Academy, brought it, the appearance of open debate had to be maintained.

The preceding chapters of this study have shown how artists like Brecht and Becher could convince themselves that the discussions were generally constructive, and have commented on the ways in which an intellectual schooled in the application of the dialectic to problems of culture and history could be persuaded to compromise with a regime which exercises power over the production of meaning. This case study will examine the debates in the 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaften' in the light of this analysis of the relationship of these intellectuals to the ideological system. If we analyse the statements of the participants in the debates in terms of the dialectic, in other words, we take seriously the way in which intellectuals like Brecht and Eisler understood intellectual progress, then we begin to understand how they could have been led into compromise.

We have seen the way in which many of the members of the Academy saw the high-profile debates and pronouncements in the various Sektionen as a means for the 'Beseitigung von Mißverständnissen', and as a way of overcoming bureaucratic obstacles. However, Eisler's opponents do not give any ground at all, backed up as they are by simplistic statements in the press, and by healthy majorities, ensured by the machinations of Abusch, in the 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaften'. Thus, if one term of the dialectic does not move its ground, then the proponents of the antithesis, in this case, the side whose lack of access to administrative power leaves them unable to determine the orthodoxy, are forced to compromise their own position, and mistake this

compromise for an attempt to move towards a synthesis. In this way, a process of compromise which seems inexplicable to observers outside the ideological system begins to make more sense. The attitude of Peter Huchel, for example, forms a useful contrasting case: although Huchel shared with Marxist colleagues such as Becher a number of assumptions about the value of literary discourse, he is influenced by a very different tradition, and the undialectical nature of his attitude to language (with its implication that there is no ultimate truth to be found in seemingly unequivocal statements) leads him to resist the imposition of ideological orthodoxy in a very different way from the committed communist Eisler.

FAUSTUS AND THE 'MITTWOCH-GESELLSCHAFTEN'

Seen in this light, the controversy over Eisler's *Faustus* is a key issue in our understanding of the SED's attempted consolidation of power in the months leading up to June 1953. The administrative measures were prepared in order to exploit the loyalty of SED members by leaving them exposed outside the mainstream; as in the case of Dessau, it was very hard for communist artists to defend themselves from this position, as the legitimacy of their belief system derived from the all-inclusive authority of 'Stalin'. Once exposed in this way, contradictions become visible which were hidden before, and the communist must either explore these contradictions or return chastened to the fold.

The ground for the moves against Eisler and *Sinn und Form* was prepared by the 'Drahtzieher'[26] Abusch, and Becher was back in line by January 1953, having overcome the mental and physical crises of the year before. *Sinn und Form* came in for criticism at the meeting of the Academy's Presidium on 15 January,[27] with the article by Ernst Fischer on *Faustus* seen as 'den letzten Anstoß', criticised by Wolfgang Langhoff as 'eine unseren Bemühungen entgegengesetzte Arbeit'. Becher suggested that Huchel should be replaced by

[26] Stephen Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953: Bertolt Brechts Rettungsaktion', *Sinn und Form*, 45 (1994), 738–51, p. 741.

[27] Cf. excerpt from protocol in Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 141–42.

the more reliable F. C. Weiskopf, but despite the disappearance of the official sanction which Huchel had enjoyed, the continuing insecurity of the 'integrationist' line within the Academy, and within the regime itself, meant that he was not to be dislodged at the stroke of a pen.

In contrast to the hesitancy over *Das Verhör des Lukullus*, the hard-line SED members in the Academy had a clearer line of attack right from the start. They had learnt a lesson about organisation: the 'Faustus Debate' does not give the impression that the cadres are improvising without a set institutional context for their arguments. However, although the 'integrationist' line had become more secure since the Summer of 1952, incidents like the Slánský trial showed that the leadership could take nothing for granted. In fact, the ideological issues raised by Eisler's libretto had become all the more important in the light of Ulbricht's survival at the end of 1952, as the SED needed to bind the GDR, along with its intellectual community, more securely into the 'Soviet Bloc'.

The accusations that Eisler, and especially Fischer, had a dangerously distorted view of German history began at once: Friedrich Wolf attacked *Faustus* in the Sektion Dichtkunst on 21 January,[28] and the editorial staff of *Neues Deutschland* discussed the publication of a critical article.[29] While Abusch was carefully preparing a majority against Eisler for the first 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft', he and Becher were conspiring to unseat Huchel. A vicious attack by Friedrich Wolf in the plenary session of the Sektion Dichtkunst on 26 March, in which he declared an absolute lack of confidence in Huchel and demanded that the Sektion deal with the 'Eisler/Fischer-Komplex', was followed by Becher's request that Abusch write the *Faustus* article; this final break with Huchel led the latter to declare, 'daß er die Konsequenzen daraus ziehen müsse'.[30]

[28] Cf. Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', p. 741.

[29] Cf. Viëtor-Engländer, pp. 182–83. Hans Mayer wrote to Brecht in February 1952 that he had declined to write on *Faustus* for *Neues Deutschland*, as he felt that his views would be used as an officially-sanctioned personal attack on Eisler rather than as a contribution to debate. On 5 March, Wilhelm Girnus wrote to Eisler making it clear that planned attacks on *Faustus* were agreed with the Central Committee, stating that the editorial staff of *Neues Deutschland* 'in solchen grundlegenden Fragen niemals ohne vorherige Fühlungsnahme mit dem ZK handeln', and that Girnus felt that Eisler had been influenced 'in ungünstiger Weise' by people such as Ernst Fischer. It seems that Eisler, as a GDR artist, was to be distanced from Fischer and subjected to discipline.

[30] Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', p. 742.

In contrast to the carefully-prepared debates on *Faustus*, Abusch ensured that the Sektion Dichtkunst did not discuss the case of *Sinn und Form* further, preferring to push for Huchel's dismissal without open debate within the Academy's Presidium. Huchel was certainly not susceptible to any form of ideological persuasion, and so different measures were called for. If we consider the differing attitudes to culture which have emerged during the course of this study, we can see that the editorial practice of *Sinn und Form* represented a conception of language which could not be brought into line with any recognisably Marxist theory. The only way to come to terms with the dangerous ambiguity, both of this conception of language, and of *Sinn und Form*'s institutional position, was by administrative measures. On the other hand, the issues of national legitimacy and loyalty in the 'Eisler/Fischer-Komplex' had to be turned into an open demonstration. By this time, Huchel was a unique figure in GDR cultural life, representing noone but himself, whereas there were many like Eisler, principled Marxist artists vulnerable to threats, the promise of progress and a fake dialectic. The attacks on Eisler and Fischer ran parallel with the campaign against *Sinn und Form*, touching at moments when the *Faustus* debate could be used to attack Huchel for refusing to take an unequivocal stand.

The regime's austerity drive was used as a pretext for threatening to cut off *Sinn und Form*'s subsidy until the journal had undergone fundamental changes. At a meeting of the Presidium on 29 April, the day before Huchel left for Moscow with a delegation of the Schriftstellerverband, it was decided that a commission, consisting of Abusch, Brecht, Bredel and Wolf would meet to discuss the changes; Huchel was to have no part in these discussions. On 13 May, the day of the first 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft', the Presidium passed a series of resolutions concerning *Sinn und Form*, according to which Huchel was to be relieved of his post after the required period of notice. This meant that his contract would run until 30 November, and the last four editions of *Sinn und Form* under his editorship would appear as two double numbers, the first of which was to be devoted to Walter Ulbricht's 60th birthday. Ulbricht's absurd personality cult was to cement the authority of his line in the SED, and his figure, 'der deutsche Arbeitersohn', was to embody the legitimacy of the

progressive line in German culture and history, a line which was put into question by aspects of the 'Misere' theory, and by any continuing efforts to maintain contacts with the West. *Sinn und Form* was required to take sides unequivocally, to *make explicit* conclusions which the reader had previously been expected to draw independently. To this end, the resolutions passed on the 13 May removed *Sinn und Form* from the Sektion Dichtkunst, making it a journal of the whole Academy, effectively under the control of Abusch, and Huchel was dismissed *in absentia*.[31]

Although the campaigns against Eisler and *Sinn und Form* are closely entwined, the differing responses of the 'integrationist' grouping within the Academy are an indication of the strengths and weaknesses of the SED's ideological legitimacy. Both *Faustus* and *Sinn und Form* depend on a form of literary discourse which locates them in a space between the polarities of the nascent Cold War. In this sense, their own political standpoints (ambivalent in the case of Huchel, and committed in the case of Eisler) are only part of the story; however much Eisler may have believed himself to be firmly on one side of the 'two camps' equation, the issues surrounding the integration of the GDR into the Soviet sphere were, as we know, more complex than he suspected. By making use of a literary form, influenced by Brecht, which left interpretation open (at least to a certain extent), Eisler's principled approach to German history genuinely, and without Eisler being wholly aware of it, questioned the legitimacy of a line which claimed to be the arbiter of all meaning. In this sense, the 'integrationists' were entirely justified in their moves against *Faustus*.

The increasing polarisation between the two German states was also currently under threat from the precipitate actions of Beria, and, perhaps, from some last-ditch diplomatic efforts by Churchill which displeased Adenauer.[32] In the GDR, this meant that any form of political or literary discourse which called into question the meanings, fixed into cliché, which legitimised the dominance of Walter Ulbricht and his line, needed to be brought into step. As we have seen when comparing the relationship of the non-Marxist Huchel and intellectuals

[31] Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 144–45. See also Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', p. 743.

[32] See Josef Foschepoth, 'Churchill, Adenauer und die Neutralisierung Deutschlands', *Deutschland Archiv*, 17 (1984), 1286–1301.

such as Brecht and Becher with the SED's attempts to claim legitimacy, the ideological system acted in different ways on each individual. Although the development of 'Marxism-Leninism', used here as an overarching term for these varying exclusionary and legitimising practices, was by no means under the control of any individual or faction certain individuals were more vulnerable to the combination of coercion and persuasion than others.

This vulnerability can be traced back to the different kinds of ambiguity which pervade their ideological outlooks. It is at this point, when the legitimacy of the SED's claim to power rests on its intellectual community taking sides unequivocally and explicitly, that the differences become clear. Artists who shared a dialectical world-view, and thus depended on the existence of the GDR as justification for their beliefs and their work, could be persuaded to compromise in this coercive, one-sided dialectic. Artists such as Brecht and Eisler, who used literary devices which grant the reader or spectator a certain interpretive freedom as a means of reaching an expected synthesis or conclusion, were vulnerable to compromise with a regime which demanded that they make their conclusions, and thus their loyalty, explicit from the beginning.

The nuances in the responses of intellectuals which this kind of analysis exposes allows us to make more satisfactory judgements about responsibility and compromise than has often been possible, not least in the fevered debates immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the terms of this study, a sign of literary responsibility even where the artist did not break with the prevailing ideological system (which would in any case have been impossible for many who had found in it a source of strength in resisting Nazism) is resistance to the administrative imposition of meaning. This resistance took on an unexpected significance in the context of the upheavals of June 1953.

FIRST 'MITTWOCH-GESELLSCHAFT': 13 MAY 1953

While Becher and Abusch were plotting to force Huchel into an act of public self-criticism, which would have removed the troublesome problem of an intellectual whose presence in the GDR would have acted as a silent question

mark over the legitimacy of the regime,[33] an extensive discussion took place in the Academy in order to intimidate Eisler into repudiating his views and withdrawing his text. The first 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft' was introduced by Abusch, who read his essay, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat in der deutschen Nationalliteratur',[34] in which Abusch tries to redeem himself for his earlier ideological errors by repositioning his *Irrweg einer Nation* as a text which supported the SED line of 1953.

The differences between the views expressed by Abusch and by Eisler and Brecht are small, but significant; Abusch's text, and the standpoint of all the official criticism, attempts to claim a direct line of legitimacy through all progressive movements in German history. As we have seen, the Reformation is a key period for Marxists, and the struggle to claim a text like Goethe's *Faust* is important because Goethe links the Peasants' War with the period after the French Revolution, and represents the 'Gipfel des Denkens [...], der für das Bürgertum geschichtlich erreichbar war'.[35] Similarly, Mephisto, as 'Geist der steten Verneinung',[36] is taken to be a sign of the development of the dialectic in bourgeois thought, and thus an important precursor of Marx and Engels. Goethe instinctively understands the development of history, 'ohne die gesellschaftlichen Bewegungsgesetze schon wissenschaftlich zu erfassen';[37] this conclusion mirrors Becher's earlier suggestion that the contradictions in Goethe's work are resolved in the GDR. For the purposes of Abusch's argument, Goethe's Faustis seen as a purely positive figure,'ein großer positiver Held des klassischen Nationaldramas',[38] and thus as a literary antecedent of Socialist Realism. He therefore represents the spirit of progressive striving, driven by the mephistophelian antithesis, and by his own desire for knowledge, to attain the highest level of achievement possible for a bourgeois intellectual. By contrast, Eisler's Faustus embarks on his quest for knowledge as a way of

[33] Cf. Parker, '"Sinn und Form", Peter Huchel und der 17. Juni 1953', p. 744. While her husband was in Moscow, Monica Huchel was approached by Becher, who showed her a text in which Peter Huchel confessed to ideological errors. She refused to have anything to do with it.

[34] Abusch's essay appeared in *Sonntag*, 17 May 1953, and in *Sinn und Form*, 4 (1953), no. 3+4, 179–94.

[35] Abusch, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat', p. 181.

[36] Abusch, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat', p. 186.

[37] Abusch, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat', p. 182.

[38] Abusch, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat', p. 185.

escaping from his bad conscience, and therefore the spirit of progress which he embodies is separated from the revolutionary peasantry; bourgeois intellectual and peasant revolutionary are shown to be irrevocably at odds. What is at stake here is a vision of GDR society in 1953, where the 'integrationist' line requires a long-standing tradition of progressive thinkers (not including Eisler's Faustus) in order to present the consolidation of the GDR and a new sense of national identity as the logical conclusion of historical development. It is not simply a question of justifying the SED's rule, but of legitimising the dominance of a particular line within the SED. If intellectuals and artists depart from that line, Ulbricht's hold on power is threatened, particularly at a time when Soviet leaders like Beria and Malenkov are beginning to demand liberalisation.

Abusch's essay hovers between what might pass for scholarly analysis and a form of diction which just falls short of calling Eisler an apologist for fascism; in other words, Abusch is hedging his bets by supplying ammunition for potential use, depending on how the discussion progresses. It is notable that Ernst Fischer, as a convenient scapegoat, comes in for considerably stronger condemnation than Eisler, allowing Eisler an escape route back into discipline if he so chooses. However, by linking Eisler's attempt to return to earlier sources of the Faustus story with Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, whose protagonist, the modernist composer Adrian Leverkühn, proposes the 'Zurücknahme' of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (and thus of German humanism), Abusch manoeuvres Eisler into opposition to the progressive intelligentsia, linking him implicitly with ideological enemies such as Nietzsche. The fact that Thomas Mann himself approved of Eisler's work goes unmentioned.[39]

The discussion in the Academy revolves around whether Faustus can be seen as a truly representative figure. The fundamental difference between the parties centres on the concept of 'das Typische', that is, whether Eisler's Faustus represents the German intellectual stratum in its 'objective' role in the

[39] Cf. Viëtor-Engländer, pp. 176–77.

continuing historical process.[40] The official view of the intelligentsia has changed with the rejection of the 'Misere' theory: in order to reclaim figures such as Luther (who is portrayed negatively in *Faustus*), the 'typical' intellectual is no longer seen as a renegade, but as an ally of the progressive forces. If the progressive forces are weak or defeated in German history, then it might seem as if the SED owed its legitimacy purely to the presence of the Soviet military, instead of 'die real vorhandenen, seit langem kämpfenden freiheitlichen Kräfte im deutschen Volk'.[41] Similarly, the division of Germany is legitimised by the rigid identification of progressive and reactionary camps, which have now solidified into the two German states; this is another indication of the importance of the tension between the geographical and political expressions of the 'two camps' theory as a tool in our understanding of the development of the GDR.

Internal conflict within a literary figure is therefore not 'typical', and Girnus can make the connection between a failure to follow the central tenets of Socialist Realism ('Wenn [Faust] eine große dichterische Gestalt sein soll, muß er ein Typus sein') and a slander on the names of Marx, Engels, Goethe, etc. ('Eisler verdammt in dieser Gestalt die ganze deutsche Geistesgeschichte.'[42]) Each figure must embody one of the conflicting social forces in its era, so that the conflict is externalised on the stage; any ambiguity in the linguistic cliché or crack in the monolithic image is a threat, made all the more urgent by the ambivalent signals coming out of Moscow. The significance of Nazism for an understanding of German history has been suppressed, but the experience of dictatorship underlies the discussions as an unspoken question: if the German intelligentsia, working class and progressive bourgeoisie have always opposed the reactionary forces in German history, who supported Hitler? Why was there no German revolution? Uncomfortable parallels with the Soviet regime have

[40] Malenkov's speech at the Nineteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party underlies the Socialist Realist orthodoxy. They are quoted by Girnus as a sacred text: 'Nach marxistisch-leninistischer Auffassung bedeutet das Typische keineswegs irgendeinen statistischen Durchschnitt. Typisch ist, was dem Wesen der gegebenen sozialen und historischen Erscheinung entspricht, und es ist nicht einfach das am häufigsten Verbreitete, oft Wiederkehrende, Gewöhnliche' (cit. Bunge, p. 65).

[41] Abusch, 'Faust: Held oder Renegat', p. 190.

[42] Bunge, p. 67.

also to be suppressed, and so renegades have to be demonised in the manner of Arthur Koestler or Tito.

Brecht's defence, in keeping with his theoretical stance, that a negative character can have a positive effect, depends on the idea of the bourgeois intellectual as unable to demonstrate complete commitment to either side: 'Wir haben hier einen Verräter, der aber seinen Verrat nicht wirklich vollziehen kann.'[43] In his 'Confessio', Faust comes to a positive understanding of the negativity of his life, so the essential conflict of the opera takes place within this single character. However, if the character of Faustus is to be considered 'typical', then the intellectual must not be shown as a traitor. Wilhelm Girnus takes this argument the furthest: 'Daß die Geschichte des deutschen Volkes die Geschichte der Reaktion ist, ist die Konzeption der Reaktion.' According to Girnus' conception, Eisler's work is unpatriotic because it sees German history as an exception to the norm:

> Es ist absolut unerfindlich, warum das deutsche Volk als einziges eine Ausnahme von den geschichtlichen Gesetzen machen sollte, die in anderen Nationen Geltung haben. Ich meine, hier kommt bei Hanns Eisler eine Fremdheit gegenüber dem deutschen Volk, gegenüber den nationalen Traditionen des deutschen Volkes, gegenüber seiner Geschichte zum Ausdruck. Er darf mir das nicht übelnehmen, das ist keinesfalls als Diffamierung gemeint, sondern als Hilfe.[44]

If German history is an exception, then the GDR forfeits its right a) to be an independent state, and b) to retain its place as a People's Democracy in the community of progressive nations. This is how the circle is squared, so that the GDR's national consciousness as a state separate from the FRG is reconciled with its integration into the Soviet Bloc.

The concerted tactics of the hostile SED faction are in stark contrast to Eisler's defenders, who put their faith in open discussion. Zweig in particular has obviously taken great care to prepare himself for the debate, but the ideas which he brings forward are the opinions of an individual, and have little effect on the other participants. Nevertheless, considering the humiliating pressure to

[43] Bunge, p. 62.

[44] Bunge, p. 71.

which he had been subjected over the Presidency of the Academy, he displays considerable courage in standing up for his friends. Zweig suggests that Eisler remove all references to the Faust legend by simply renaming the character, as the name Faustus brings with it 'eine Fülle von Assoziationen'.[45] His argument is quite ingenious, but it misses the point of the debate. Brecht, on the other hand, seems fully aware of the possible consequences, so his arguments are designed to relocate Eisler within the mainstream of Marxist thinking, rather than to criticise the orthodoxy itself. This is the kind of ideologized tactical compromise which was described in the *Lukullus* case study, and it results in a further shift towards the inflexible position of his opponents.

The outcome of the first meeting is still inconclusive, but the threats to Eisler are clear. An opposition has been set up between the position of Fischer, who is identified as a reactionary, an abstract point of reference sustainable because he is not present, and of the majority, who have the full authority of the Party and the Soviet Union behind them.[46] Eisler is given time to choose, and Becher ends the meeting on a conciliatory note ('Hier geht es nicht darum, Resolutionen zu fassen, sondern: das muß man wirklich nach allen Seiten hin durchdenken'), but it is very clear that there is no middle way.[47] It is important that the pretence of open discussion is maintained, as the SED still needs its intellectuals to support the regime at this delicate time, and so they must be convinced to come over of their own free will. However, free will is problematic here: if the SED is accepted as the legitimate government of Germany, then Marxist artists draw their legitimacy from that regime, and so objecting to Party orthodoxy is not simply a matter of exercising the conscious intellect, but rather involves calling into question the ideals for which the individual has fought and suffered for many years. What was not wholly clear to artists like Eisler was that the basis of this legitimacy was so fragile, and that the debate in the Academy was

[45] Bunge, p. 64.

[46] Deborah Viëtor-Engländer notes (p. 184): 'Fischers Aufsatz spielte in der ganzen Auseinandersetzung eine Schlüsselrolle, denn ohne seine Unterstüzung wären die Angriffe auf Eisler womöglich wesentlich milder ausgefallen.' I feel that the usefulness of Fischer's article for the opponents of Eisler consisted in Fischer's absence from the debate, enabling him to be demonised as one of the polar opposites between which Eisler had to choose. Given the political circumstances of the debate, and the fact that moves were also being made against Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble, it would be inaccurate to suppose that Fischer's article contributed to the harshness of the criticism; it was simply useful.

[47] Bunge, p. 82.

paralleled by conflicts within the leadership which were to come into the open in June 1953.

SECOND 'MITTWOCH-GESELLSCHAFT': 27 MAY 1953

While Eisler was preparing his reply to the criticisms which he had heard in the first meeting, the pressure was stepped up through a concerted press campaign, in order to further isolate Eisler from a supposedly unanimous public opinion. This campaign had the effect of making Eisler's opponents in the debate in the Academy seem conciliatory and ready to welcome the penitent and protect him from the hostility of his critics. A substantial article appeared in *Neues Deutschland* the day after the first 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft',[48] which restated the condemnations of Ernst Fischer's article in stronger terms. The 'Misere' theory is 'eine reaktionäre und antinationale Konzeption, die objektiv dazu dient, die nationale Würde und das Nationalbewußtsein des deutschen Volkes zu zerstören'.[49] Fischer is therefore accused of ignoring the struggle of the German people ('Hunderttausende', according to the author of the article[50]) who fought against National Socialism; this, of course, is tantamount to declaring that Fischer is a Nazi. Eisler himself is subjected to the dangerous accusation of 'cosmopolitanism', because he denies the importance of the nation:

> Unzweifelhaft liegt die tiefste Ursache darin, daß dem Verfasser und seinen Ratgebern die Erkenntnis von der Bedeutung des Patriotismus für die Nation und für die Entwicklung der Kunst fehlt. Eine Konzeption, der die deutsche Geschichte nichts als Misere ist und in der das Volk als schöpferische Potenz fehlt, ist nicht wahr. Mit dieser falschen Konzeption ist notgedrungen auch eine falsche Einstellung zum Realismus in den Fragen der künstlerischen Form und der Ästhetik verbunden.[51]

A form of nationalism which gains its ultimate authority from Stalin's words at the Nineteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1952, and from the

[48] 'Das "Faust"-Problem und die deutsche Geschichte', *Neues Deutschland*, 14.5.1953, in Bunge, pp. 89–101.
[49] Bunge, p. 91.
[50] Bunge, p. 97.
[51] Bunge, p. 101.

Soviet campaigns against 'cosmopolitanism', is here being used to entrench the division of Germany, rather than to promote unity; the 'creative' and 'reactionary' forces in the nation have crystallised into the two German states. Since the triumph of socialism is inevitable, the 'typical' intellectual (that is, the intellectual who represents the true historical role of the intelligentsia, who 'sich zum theoretischen Verständnis der großen geschichtlichen Bewegung hindurchgearbeitet hat'[52]) joins the cause of progress. The repercussions for the GDR of Stalin's decisive intervention in the 'Economists' Debate' are felt in the author's insistence on the precept that the collapse of capitalism is inevitable and will happen soon. The context-setting and analysis in the preceding chapters leads us to an important conclusion: although it is obvious that decisions and conflicts at the highest level in the Soviet regime had a determining influence on GDR cultural policy, the chains of causality are varied and diffuse. Therefore, it is better not to assume a direct relation between the aims of the 'integrationists' and the policies of the Soviet leadership, even when they seem to coincide, but instead to try to understand to what use the sources of authority emerging from the Soviet Union were put.

The authority of the Soviet Union as a factor in every political discussion is the most significant weakness in the line of argumentation brought forward by Eisler's defenders, handicapping them in their responses. For example, Brecht is clear enough in his criticism of some of the tenets of Socialist Realism: 'Aber der neue Mensch kann nicht durch die Dichtung produziert werden, das ist ein Aberglaube. Er muß sich selbst produzieren. Die Dichtung kann ihn anregen, nicht schaffen.'[53]

The problem with this view is that Brecht believes in the creation of 'the new man' at all. The idea of the perfectibility of humanity under a socialist system has authoritarian implications which lead Brecht to support the rule of the SED, however accurate many of his criticisms of the Party may be. His beliefs are bound up with the image of the Soviet Union, whatever private doubts he might have had about Stalin, and he mentions the Slánský trial with approval,

[52] Bunge, p. 99.

[53] Protocol of a discussion on Eisler's *Faustus*, cit. Bunge, p. 115.

comparing Slánský's confession with the 'Confessio' of Faust.[54] His support for the principle of purges of 'renegades' weakens his ability to defend his friends, despite the leeway which such compromises grant him, and ensures that the opportunity presented by the 17 June uprising is not fully exploited.

Although Brecht himself came under considerable personal attack in the context of the second 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft',[55] his actions showed considerable courage, particularly since the atmosphere was more openly hostile than in the first meeting (although still mild in comparison with the raging press campaign). Eisler opened the meeting with a response to his critics which is in marked contrast to the confused defensiveness of Dessau in the *Lukullus* controversy.[56] Eisler defends the complexity of the character of Faustus, pointing out that his negativity stems from his inability to put into practice his positive insights: '[...] aus ihm spricht die von ihm verratene, verkaufte Wahrheit.'[57] Eisler also stresses the ambiguity of the German intellectual tradition, and shows a more sensitive understanding of the legacy of Nazism in German thought: 'Können wir 1945 von einem *Sieg* des deutschen humanistischen Geistes sprechen?'[58] The ability of the intellectual to hover between good and evil is exposed powerfully in the text by Mephisto,[59] but this subtle conception is still seen as an affront by cultural functionaries who draw the only possible justification for their power from the idea that the German 'Geist' resisted Hitler.

Eisler's defence of his parodies of Luther in the figure of Hanswurst is similarly offensive.[60] Hanswurst sits down to eat with the words, 'Hier sitz ich, ich kann nicht anders';[61] Eisler explains this as a materialist twist on Luther's courage in defence of his theological views, and his inability to carry these views through consistently in defence of the starving peasants whom he has

[54] Bunge, p. 115.
[55] Cf. the attack on the Berliner Ensemble *Urfaust* in *Neues Deutschland*, 27.5.1953, in Bunge, pp. 117–26.
[56] see, Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 132–38.
[57] Bunge, p. 140, Dietzel and Geißler, p. 133.
[58] Bunge, p. 141.
[59] Faust: Wie schnell bist du?
Mephisto: Schnell wie der Übergang vom Guten zum Bösen.
Faustus, act 1, scene 4, p. 27.
[60] Cf. Bunge, p. 142.
[61] *Faustus*, act 2, scene 7, p. 58.

inspired. This kind of creative parody, as a form of discourse treating the past as a discontinuous textual resource rather than as a continually unfolding narrative, threatens those who rely on a legitimising continuity in history, and on unassailable representative figures, reduced to ciphers whose function is to refer forward in time (who, according to Socialist Realist orthodoxy, are 'typical').

Heinz Kamnitzer's statement: 'Die Vergangenheit ist nur sozusagen das Mittel, mit dem die Gegenwart exemplifiziert und ausgebreitet werden soll',[62] demonstrates just how close these two seemingly opposed conceptions actually are. In fact, the avantgardist approach to the past, as it emerges here, implies many possible points of connection with the present and many possible narratives; the conception defended by Abusch, Girnus and the others is simply one of these possible narratives. The reason it is called Socialist Realist is because it is what was politically expedient for the Communist Party at that moment, and for this reason, selecting any other narrative is a political act.

Under these circumstances, any attempt at self-defence by an artist who shares Marxist truth-criteria with his opponents is going to be difficult. Eisler's attempt to defend his text, and his unwillingness to make any alterations, draws criticism from his pupil Ernst-Hermann Meyer, who was not present on 13 May. The younger man's *Schadenfreude* at the discomfiture of his teacher is palpable, and the atmosphere is soured considerably: 'Du mußt entschuldigen, daß ich als dein Schüler dich kritisiere.'[63] Meyer's attitude, and the use to which it is put by Eisler's opponents, is a small-scale example of the conflict between the 'new' and 'old' intelligentsia, which was being played out in the GDR; anyone with experience of direct opposition to Nazism, let alone of exile in either the Soviet Union or the West, could still be unreliable, whether in their guilty weakness, as in the case of Becher, or in their independence of mind, as with Zweig. This is a process with certain parallels to the Soviet campaign to eliminate the old Bolsheviks in the 1930s.

Certain new arguments are brought forward, which illustrate further aspects of Socialist Realist dogma. For example, Meyer takes exception to Eisler's

[62] Bunge, p. 176.
[63] Bunge, p. 145, Dietzel and Geißler, p. 134.

assertion that artistic beauty has been used as a weapon of the ruling classes, in order to keep the masses in their place. A cultural conservative such as Ulbricht would find this attitude offensive, as it devalues working-class efforts to attain the cultural heritage which has been denied to them. Therefore, Meyer links the concept of beauty with 'progressive' art, with humanism, 'Volksverbundenheit' and 'Allgemeingültigkeit', and goes on to apply Zhdanov's decrees on music to the current debate:[64]

> Schön ist diejenige künstlerische Aussage, die die Menschen in ihrem Kampf um ihre materielle und geistige Weiterentwicklung vorwärts führt und bereichert und die sie bejahen [...] Wer die künstlerische Schönheit, ihre Funktion und ihre Bedeutung verkennt oder verneint oder gar verspottet, muß notwendigerweise die große Kunst der Klassik vermissen.[65]

Girnus takes up this theme in his comments on Classicism, although his argumentation is somewhat odd, confusing two entirely separate meanings of the word 'klassisch':

> Aber warum nennen wir [die klassische Epoche] klassisch? Weil sie eben Prinzipien des Klassischen realisiert! Das heißt, wir müssen den Begriff des Klassischen auch als eine Art normativen Begriff gebrauchen.[66]

In other words, Classical models must be followed because they present the identity of form and content: 'Das heißt, [...] daß also die künstlerische Form in der denkbar adäquatesten Weise einen bestimmten gesellschaftlichen und historischen Inhalt zum Ausdruck bringt.'[67]

This kind of statement defies analysis. What is important about such theories is that they were considered seriously by people who did not essentially agree with them, so that an argument which was simply an administrative weapon could be given the appearance of a serious contribution to debate. Intellectuals like Brecht or Becher, each in his own individual way, saw the GDR as

[64] Note that Brecht had warned Eisler in August 1951 that there might be problems when the SED began to apply Zhdanov's decrees in the GDR: cf. Lucchesi, p. 258. In fact, the decrees were published for the first time in Germany in 1951: Andrej Shdanow, *Über Kunst und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1951).

[65] Bunge, p. 148.

[66] Bunge, pp. 152–53.

[67] Bunge, p. 153.

representing this potential synthesis of 'Geist' and 'Macht' after the defeat of Nazism, and it was hard to disagree with statements by Stalin or Zhdanov on the matter. Where Brecht differs from the other participants in the discussion is in his understanding of the development of artistic form, which is more consistently dialectical than that expressed by Girnus. For example, Girnus claims that the 'Erbe' ('ein geschichtliches Faktum') must be developed further, that Goethe arrived at a conclusion, expressed in the line, 'Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen', which is developed further by dialectical materialism into the idea that the proletariat can liberate itself. Brecht, on the other hand, considers that 'die Entwicklung in Form von Widersprüchen vor sich [geht]', and that Eisler's Faustus is an antithesis, 'eine kritische Weiterentwicklung'.[68] Although these are seemingly minor disagreements, they delineate a field of conflict in which Brecht exercises his opposition to the imposition of Socialist Realism; as I have shown, individuals defined these areas of resistance and complicity on their own terms, as the ideological system provided the individual with a space in which to work out individual forms of compromise. This flexibility was one of the great strengths of Marxism-Leninism.

Abusch opposes Brecht's idea that Eisler's Faustus is 'ein dunkler Zwilling'[69] of Goethe's figure on the grounds that Eisler's conception is retrograde. A truly socialist development of the Faustus legend would show, 'daß eben diese Persönlichkeit in einem sozialistischen Sinne vollendet wird, d.h., daß das Dilemma Gesellschaft und Persönlichkeit gelöst wird'.[70] Since the GDR is the place where this synthesis occurs, a negation of Goethe is an attack on the GDR.

Opposition is particularly difficult when the argument proceeds by logical steps to the conclusion that avantgarde artists lack 'die Liebe zum deutschen Volk', and that 'der Patriotismus [...] ein unlösbarer Bestandteil des Kampfes für eine höhere Gesellschaftsordnung ist'.[71] Constant reference to Stalin's

[68] Bunge, pp. 167–68.

[69] Brecht, 'Gegenthesen', Bunge, p. 161, Dietzel and Geißler, p. 138.

[70] Bunge, p. 172.

[71] Bunge, p. 155.

speech at the 19th Congress shows how his change of direction on the German question brought his personal political power into line with his ideological authority, possibly for the first time since 1945, and the 'integrationists' were able to use the concept of patriotism to work against German reunification. However, now that political developments were accelerating in Moscow, the 'integrationists' could no longer take such authority for granted.

It seems to me that it is for this reason that the 'integrationist' line is being propagated so energetically, even though only a few people at the top of the leadership could have known about Beria's demands. Hans Rodenberg insists that, during the construction of socialism, 'die Entscheidung im Kunstwerk getroffen werden muß, und zwar nicht nur die negative Entscheidung, sondern die positive Entscheidung'.[72] There is a sense of urgency about the attacks on Eisler, which the regime has insisted on because of the precariousness of the situation, though Rodenberg's statement, which implies that this is only a temporary phenomenon, is not to be taken seriously.

Walter Felsenstein objects to this aggressive tone and to the vocabulary of Girnus and Meyer, which contains 'Anklagen [...] die einen Autor [...] nahezu zum kulturpolitischen Verbrecher und Vaterlandsverräter machen'.[73] Felsenstein is obviously intimidated by the proceedings, and his complaints about the tone of the discussion are met with hostility from Abusch, who implies that Fischer's article was a provocation which demanded a response. The session ends with a peroration from Walter Besenbruch which cannot help but provoke comparisons with the Inquisition:

> Und mit dem Kampf gegen die Zerstörung [des nationalen Erbes] kämpfen wir um denjenigen, der, zeitbedingt, unter bedingten Umständen, wie es auch immer sei, als Träger dieser Zerstörung auftritt. Wir kämpfen um ihn solange, bis er es eingesehen hat, bis er mit seiner ganzen Potenz die Wendung vollzieht.[74]

[72] Bunge, p. 164.

[73] Bunge, p. 157, Dietzel and Geißler, p. 135.

[74] Bunge, p. 177.

THIRD 'MITTWOCH-GESELLSCHAFT': 10 JUNE 1953

While Eisler's humiliation was continuing in the press, the dismissal of Peter Huchel was carried out through purely administrative channels. Huchel returned to Berlin on 2 June; although the manoeuvre, planned by Abusch and Becher, to trap him with a faked 'Selbstkritik', had failed, he was still obliged at the Presidium meeting of 10 June to express agreement with the action taken against him.[75] The Presidium declared that the commission which had been formed to report on alterations to the editorial policy of *Sinn und Form*, and which had never met, should have its proposals ready for 18 June. As the atmosphere in the 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaften' becomes more vituperative, we see the tensions which were unravelling in the Soviet and GDR leaderships played out on a smaller scale in the Academy: the declaration of the 'New Course' on 9 June increased the pressure on all parties, although the extent of the changes which Beria's policy could have brought was clear to few at the time.

Nevertheless, there are signs that Eisler's supporters were fighting back at the third meeting, thanks to interventions from Arnold Zweig, Hermann Duncker and Helene Weigel.[76] Abusch opens proceedings with a recapitulation of the questions which Eisler has supposedly not answered; the position of his accusers has not changed since the last session, and they have been backed up by an extensive press campaign.[77] Under the circumstances, Zweig's scholarly defence of Eisler is courageous, but it has no perceptible effect on the course of the discussion, as Zweig is working within a conceptual scheme, that of the old-fashioned liberal humanist literary critic, which leaves him isolated. In many ways, Becher is the closest to Zweig in his attitude to literature, but the contrast is instructive. Zweig's view of literature is of a piece with his 'Weltanschauung', and he is prepared to speak out when he feels that either is threatened; however, the ideological precepts which lead him to defend Eisler

[75] Beschluß-Protokoll der Präsidiumssitzung vom 10.Juni 1953: 'Herr Huchel erklärt sich mit unserem Schreiben vom 15.5.1953 einverstanden, daß sein Einzelvertrag mit dem 30.11.1953 abläuft und er als Chefredakteur mit diesem Zeitpunkt ausscheidet' (Dietzel and Geißler, p. 145).

[76] The protocol of the third 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft' is reproduced in Bunge, pp. 191–246. There is a brief extract in Dietzel and Geißler, p. 139, which does not do justice to the transformed atmosphere at the meeting.

[77] Cf. readers' letters to *Neues Deutschland*, in Bunge, pp. 181–86.

actually prevent him from intervening effectively in the debate. He is simply armed with the wrong weapons.

An indication of the distance between Zweig and the other participants is his discussion of Goethe's irony, and his criticism of the tendency of Marxist critics to see everything as 'Goethescher Ernst'.[78] The concept of irony, and of the often uncomfortably protean nature of Goethe's work, exposes the intellectual poverty of this literary purge, which reduces Goethe to a legitimising cliché. As in the case of *Sinn und Form*, Goethe's work demonstrates the impossibility of pinning down a final meaning, an ideological centredness, in language. Girnus demon-strates the problem at the core of Socialist Realism as a legitimising practice by protesting that Eisler's text is 'nicht eindeutig zu fassen'.[79] As we have seen, literary ambiguity exposes the artificiality of the semantic and political barriers of the Cold War, which were constructed to try to stem the ebb and flow of political forces described in the course of this study. Of course, the implications of this attitude to language also undermine the counter-model of 'dissidence', which is in itself a form of legitimising practice based on a very strict set of truth-claims. Attempts to claim figures such as Zweig or Huchel as 'dissidents' disguise the complexity of the issue, ignoring the way in which *Sinn und Form* in particular set out to explore and criticise many notions of reconstructed German identity after 1945.

Zweig himself shares many of the humanist literary values which had motivated Becher, insisting that there is a truth to be carried in literary language, which survived the attempts of the National Socialists to destroy it. As we saw in Chapter Three of this study, the Marxist-Leninist system was vulnerable to attack from this quarter because the ideology itself was based on many of these assumptions, but it is this common ground which leaves Zweig unable to understand the nature of the developments which he opposes. He is concerned with the contemporary relevance of the discussion, and of Eisler's work, and he invokes the Academy's 'all-German' basis without seemingly realising that the only purpose of the debate is to undermine that basis:

[78] Bunge, p. 195.
[79] Bunge, p. 209.

Ich bin nämlich der Meinung, daß unsere Diskussion ausgezeichnet war und sich gedruckt sehr anständig lesen wird, daß aber keiner merken wird, daß dies im Mai und Juni 1953 gesprochen worden ist, wo die Frage der Vereinigung Deutschlands uns auf den Nägeln brennt und wir wissen, was wir alles zu tun haben, um eine gesamtdeutsche Plattform zu erhalten.[80]

Later in the discussion, Gustav Just, who a few months before had expressed doubts about the appointment of Abusch as Permanent Secretary of the Sektion Dichtkunst, took up Zweig's comments about the effect in the West, but he put an explicitly 'integrationist' slant on the issue. He declared that the West German press will be 'mächtig geärgert', because, once public corrections are made to Eisler's text, they would no longer be able to shout about, 'wie die "Kommu-nisten" mit dem nationalen Erbe umspringen und [...] wie sie sich an der angehäuften Kultur versündigen'. Just linked this somewhat convoluted argument with the idea that the German nation is being formed 'auf unserer Seite der Barrikade', presumably before the astonished eyes of Western onlookers.[81] Of course, this is a view of German nationhood formed in opposition to the West, a political community defined by what it excludes, and as such is of a piece with the 'integrationist' project. However, Just's statements are interesting, because Eisler's critics had gone out of their way at all three meetings to deny that *Faustus* had the contemporary relevance which Brecht and Zweig see in it. We can perhaps detect a certain idealism in Just's words, a feeling, shared with Zweig, that the debate actually means something other than the administrative imposition of Party discipline. Just's fall in 1956, in the show trial with Walter Janka, seems to add credence to this suspicion.

Naturally, if the debate is assessed in its proper context, it is clear that the tone of the criticisms of Eisler is so harsh, pitched at a level designed to jeopardise any 'all-German' understanding, precisely because 'die Frage der Vereinigung Deutschlands uns auf den Nägeln brennt'. The question of German unity or division underlies every statement in the protocol; we need look no further for an explanation for the ineffectiveness of Zweig's interventions and his marginalisation in the Academy.

[80] Bunge, p. 195.
[81] Bunge, p. 225.

The bulk of the discussion concerned the questions raised by Brecht's twelve 'Thesen', which were presented by Abusch at the beginning of the session. Brecht's achievement here was to be able to bring the discussion onto ground where he and Eisler could put up a more spirited defence; Brecht had ensured that the debate revolved to a certain extent round his own personal standing, which was still high, despite the press campaign against the Berliner Ensemble. That the administrative structure of the Academy obliged such views to be heard is an expression of the tenacity of its 'all-German' foundation and the emphasis which it put on individual personalities rather than on the functions of a 'mass organisation' like the Kulturbund.

Brecht's 'Thesen' provoked a discussion which was less inquisitorial than the second 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaft', which was an attempt to put into practice the principles of 'Kritik und Selbstkritik'. Girnus asks whether the figure of Faustus as he appears in Eisler's text is able to encourage 'die Arbeiterklasse, die Bauern, und natürlich auch die Intelligenz, [...] umgestaltend auf die Wirklichkeit einzuwirken'.[82] This question is based on the criticism that the revolutionary peasantry appears only as a passive, defeated force. Girnus claims that a dramatic concept in which the protagonist is 'von den Erynnien seines eigenen Gewissens verfolgt', rather than being judged by the group with an objective grasp of historical truth, is an 'antike Konzeption'.[83]

This externalisation and reduction of conflict to the clash of sociological archetypes is a key issue in the legitimisation strategy of the SED, as it involves identifying what Heinz Kamnitzer calls the 'Träger der Nation'.[84] The concept of national unity is equated with the historical function of a particular class, and thus with the representative of that class, and so the only guarantee of national unity is for the GDR to be consolidated as the state in which this line achieves its highest expression. Brecht works within this paradigm, but he subverts it in an interesting piece of sophistry when he interprets *Faustus* as an important lesson in the development of a new generation of intellectuals:

[82] Bunge, p. 202.
[83] Bunge, p. 201.
[84] Bunge, p. 214.

[Das Proletariat] müsse aus sich heraus eine Intelligenz entwickeln, die nicht diese verräterische Haltung einnimmt, wie sie Faustus einnimmt, es habe also diesen Grundfehler zu korrigieren.[85]

Brecht pursues this line aggressively against a claim by Becher, who has been fulfilling the chairman's role with an air of neutrality, that his opinion represents a restatement of the 'Misere' theory. The theory has become a weapon to be used against opponents, in a brutally simplified form far removed from the analysis which Abusch put forward in *Irrweg einer Nation*; Becher caricatures Brecht's position thus: '[...] die ganze Intelligenz ist übergelaufen, die Arbeiterschaft muß sich eine neue Intelligenz schaffen.'[86] Brecht reacts sharply to this criticism, replying that what he means is that the proletariat should work to overcome the gap between itself and the intelligentsia. Most of his interventions in the debate are aimed at making sure that his words are not misunderstood or misused, exploiting his talent for turning questions back on an accuser in order to keep himself out of the firing line. However, a decision seems to have been made that Eisler's friends, particularly Brecht, will come out more strongly in his defence.

For example, when Walter Besenbruch tries to transform the session into a ritualised tribunal, as the second session had become, Brecht protests strongly about Besenbruch's use of the phrase 'Wühlen im Dreck' to describe Eisler's text: 'Das ist immer gesagt worden, wenn irgendwo etwas Schlechtes aufgedeckt wurde. Freude am Wühlen im Dreck.'[87] Although Besenbruch makes no gesture towards retracting his remark, the atmosphere is nevertheless changed, and Eisler's critics have to proceed less aggressively. Brecht's personal standing, the 'all-German' orientation of the Academy, and, perhaps, a certain defensiveness on the part of functionaries surprised by the 'New Course', have enabled Brecht to exploit his considerable room for manoeuvre.

[85] Bunge, p. 202. Dietzel and Geißler, p. 139.

[86] Bunge, p. 217. A rejection of the older generation of intellectuals would also threaten Becher's position; I have already discussed this question in relation to Becher's exchange of letters with Hans Lorbeer, and to Becher's influence on the programme of the *Kulturbund*. There is a painful continuity in Becher's self-justifications, even after he has betrayed everything which he imagined he stood for.

[87] Bunge, p. 208.

Becher tries to steer a middle course by supporting Brecht in his objection to Besenbruch's remarks, and he modifies considerably some of the more personal attacks on Eisler by taking into account Eisler's fears about the treachery of German intellectuals who have declared in favour of the Federal Republic. The fact that Eisler's text is 'mißlungen' should not be held against him personally; he is not a reactionary. Becher turns on Girnus and takes issue with the idea that progressive forces have been a constant presence in German history:

> [...] wie kommt es, lieber Genosse Girnus, daß diese herrliche, strahlende, 'einmalige' Kulturnation es nie zu einer Revolution gebracht hat und zweitens einen Hitler an die Macht kommen ließ und es nicht fertiggebracht hat, selbst mit Hitler Schluß zu machen?[88]

Becher stands here in opposition to the hard-line 'integrationist' position; his remarks on the failure of 'die deutsche Literatur' to become a genuine political force before 1933 would have been described as reactionary if they had been made by Eisler. Becher ends with his customary argument that 'literature' resisted Hitler, stating, '[...] die deutsche Literatur hat [...] alles das sozusagen wieder gutgemacht',[89] but he has contributed, like Brecht, to a softening of the tone of the debate, while demonstrating his ability to separate his cultural aspirations from his administrative activity. Of course, Becher's relatively conciliatory interventions also work in another direction, as it is largely through them that Eisler's supporters can be convinced that all participants in the debate are working for the same aim, that is, to prevent the division of Germany.

The end of the debate was inconclusive, largely because Brecht was able to take the fight to his opponents. However, the administrative processes were still under way, with critical articles appearing in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* and *Neues Deutschland*.[90] Although the real fightback against the 'integrationist' line, and against the dismissal of Huchel from the editorship of *Sinn und Form*, did not begin until the aftermath of the 17 June uprising, the contrast between the protocols of the second and third 'Mittwoch-Gesellschaften' seems to

[88] Bunge, p. 227.

[89] Bunge, p. 226.

[90] Gerhard Schulz, 'Zur Diskussion über Hanns Eislers Faustoper', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 3 (1953), no. 6; 'Das Faust-Problem in der sowjetischen Literatur', *Neues Deutschland*, 17.6.1953.

indicate that an attempt to reassert intellectual freedom was under way slightly earlier, perhaps encouraged by the 'New Course'. Whether this is the case or not, the aggressive disrespect with which Eisler was treated threw him into a state of depression, expressed in his letter to the Central Committee of the SED on 30 October 1953:

Nach der Faustus-Attacke merkte ich, daß mir jeder Impuls, Musik zu schreiben, abhanden gekommen war [...] Ich habe nun aber keine Hoffnung, den für mich lebenswichtigen Impuls, Musik zu schreiben, anderswo wieder zu finden, als in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik.[91]

[91] Cit. Bunge, pp. 263–64, Dietzel and Geißler, pp. 139–40.