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SOCIALIST LITERATURE, TWO VIEWS?

An examination of the works of
Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of two writers - Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf - who have been extremely influential in literary developments in the GDR since it was founded in 1949, but who have been very differently received by critics in the East and West, mainly because they are seen to possess different views of socialist literature and its role in a socialist society. This is in spite of the fact that Christa Wolf has often mentioned Anna Seghers as an important influence on her work, and frequently calls upon Anna Seghers' statements on literature to support her own poetological position.

The aim of the thesis is to establish the extent to which their contrasting reception is justified by examining the two writers' views of what constitutes socialist literature, and the similarities and differences between them.

The findings are that both Seghers and Wolf have a very similar view of the role that literature has to play in the establishment of a truly socialist society, a role which they see as being linked to literature's capacity to explore reality and the possibilities open to people, and thus assist them in their quest for personal fulfilment. However, there is an important difference. For whereas Wolf places her art in the service of the individual, Seghers frequently chose to place hers in the service of the socialist state.

The thesis concludes that whilst the two writers do share a very similar view of the role of literature in socialist society, they are not as similar as Wolf suggests. However, it points out that Seghers' influence was nevertheless crucial in enabling Wolf to break away from the prescriptions of socialist realism and that her significance for Wolf and indeed for a whole generation of younger writers should therefore not be underestimated.

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INTRODUCTION

*Die Frauen hier in diesem Augenblick
als die Vernunft der Geschichte,
nicht nur als Solidarisierte, sondern
als Liebende, die sich verstehen,
zeitlich und räumlich getrennt. Diese
überbrückende Kraft eines
einzigartigen Verständnisses macht
auch das Besondere der Beziehung Anna
Seghers - Christa Wolf aus.*

Peter Beicken: "Nachfolge, nicht
Nachahmung: Zur Beziehung Anna
Seghers - Christa Wolf"

*The sense of personal identification
and aesthetic sympathy which
permeates Wolf's essays on Seghers
has little basis. While they document
Wolf's progress, what they reveal
about Seghers is limited and even
distorted. Interesting in their
reflection of Wolf's literary
experience, they hardly serve the
cause of authenticity.*

Colin Smith: "Christa Wolf and Anna
Seghers"

Two women writers have greatly influenced literary
developments in the GDR since its foundation in 1949.
They belong to two different generations. The one, whose
origins go back to the years of communist opposition
during the Weimar Republic, became an establishment
figure in the GDR in the 1950s. The other, who made her
early reputation under that same new establishment, has
become the focus of critical thinking in its later years.

The first of the two writers is Anna Seghers, a
communist writer who was forced into exile when the
National Socialists came to power in 1933 and returned to
what was at that time the Soviet Occupied Zone fourteen
years later. From then until her death in 1983 she worked

hard to assist the establishment of a socialist German state. In 1952 she was elected president of the East German Writers' Union and in this role was particularly influential in determining the course of socialist literature in the GDR, which she furthered as a practising novelist and in numerous essays and speeches of the fifties, sixties and seventies.

Her ideas were not without their impact for a younger generation of writers in the GDR, amongst them Christa Wolf, who has since emerged as one of the country's leading writers. Christa Wolf was sixteen when the war ended and, after years of Nazi rule, welcomed the chance for a new beginning offered by the socialist order. In 1949 she became a member of the ruling party, the SED, and in the 1950s, whilst editor of the literary journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, published a number of articles in which, like Anna Seghers, she expressed her belief in socialist realism as the literary method best suited to meet the demands placed on literature by a socialist society. That belief is applied in her first published works, but since the late sixties she has become known rather for her break with the tenets of socialist realism and her introduction into her writing of techniques other than those prescribed and accepted by the cultural bureaucracy.

The reception of the works of the two writers in East and West Germany has been very different and to a large extent determined by critics' understanding of the

attitude of the two women towards the political and social conditions of their country. In the GDR, Anna Seghers is respected and revered. Her works are regarded as classics of socialist literature and earned her numerous honours during her lifetime. These included the *Nationalpreis* in 1951, 1959 and 1971, an honorary doctorate from the University of Jena in 1959, the *Vaterländische Verdienstorden* in silver in 1954 and in gold in 1960, and the *Karl-Marx-Orden* in 1965. In the West, however, such successes were regarded as an indication of the extent of her cooperation with a totalitarian government.¹ Her best known novel, *Das siebte Kreuz*, which first appeared in English in the USA in 1942, was published in Munich in 1947 and in the same year she was awarded the Büchner-Preis; but the establishment of two separate German states and the ensuing Cold War meant that it was some time before any of her other works were published. Indeed, the decision of Sammlung Luchterhand to publish a new edition of *Das siebte Kreuz* in 1962 met with a great deal of resistance.² And although the critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki defended the publisher's decision to make Anna Seghers' work available in the West,³ his own reviews of her post-war works, in particular *Die Entscheidung* (1959) and *Das*

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1. See Peter Jokostra's letter to the editor of *Die Welt* (1.8.1962). In: Peter Roos and Friderike J. Hassauer-Roos (Hrsg), *Anna Seghers. Materialienbuch*, (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1977), p.11-14.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Literarischer Schutzwall gegen die DDR - Anna Seghers Werke sollen in der Bundesrepublik erscheinen", *Die Zeit*. (10.8.1962). In: Roos/HassauerRoos, (1977), p.14-19.

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Vertrauen (1968), undoubtedly contributed to the accepted view of Anna Seghers as a once great writer who had sacrificed her talent for the sake of a corrupt and inhuman regime.⁴ As recently as 1970 the wish of an SPD MP in her native town, Mainz, to grant her the freedom of the city in honour of her seventieth birthday, unleashed a controversy which was not resolved until 1981.⁵

In recent years the situation has changed somewhat. In the late seventies Sammlung Luchterhand began to bring out individual editions of all of Anna Seghers' works and a number of articles have appeared offering a more differentiated appreciation of her writing. Nevertheless, only a selection of her essays are, as yet, available and it must be said that due to the many attacks on her work in the fifties and sixties the majority of Anna Seghers' works are hardly known in the Federal Republic.

Christa Wolf, on the other hand, ever since the publication of her novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in 1968, has been extremely well-received in the West, partly, perhaps, because the novel was seen to describe the impossibility of living under a socialist regime.⁶ The

4. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Bankrott einer Erzählerin. Anna Seghers *Das Vertrauen*", *Die Zeit*, (14.3.1969). In: Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Zur Literatur der DDR* (München: 1974).

5. Christa Degemann, "Sie ließ sich vom Osten nehmen mit Haut und Haar. Sexualmetaphorik als literaturkritische Kategorie. Anmerkungen zum Umgang mit Anna Seghers in der BRD", *Die Horen* (4/1983), p.62.

6. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Eine unruhige Elegie. Christa Wolf: *Nachdenken über Christa T.*" *Die Zeit*, (23.5.1969). In: Reich-Ranicki (1974), p.118.

Sagen wir klar: Christa T. stirbt an der Leukämie, aber sie leidet an der DDR. Was bleibt, ist Kapitulation: Rückzug in einen windstillen Winkel

works which followed, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, won her great acclaim and in 1980 she was awarded the Büchner-Preis. In 1982 she was invited to give the "Frankfurter-Poetik-Vorlesungen" and the fifth lecture, the fictional work *Kassandra*, gained her even greater recognition, Fritz J. Raddatz in *Die Zeit* referring to it as a masterpiece.⁷

In the GDR, however, it was her early work which established her reputation, in particular the novel *Der geteilte Himmel*, for which she was awarded the "Heinrich-Mann-Preis" in 1963 and the "Nationalpreis dritter Klasse" in 1964. But *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was surrounded by controversy and only a small number of copies were published until Erich Honecker's appointment as chairman of the SED resulted in a gradual relaxation of GDR cultural policy and made further publication possible. Nowadays, all of her works are eagerly awaited by the East German reading public which sees her as offering an alternative voice to that of the GDR establishment, but for this reason she is regarded with some suspicion by the GDR authorities, particularly since, along with a number of other prominent GDR writers and artists, she signed the petition protesting against the expatriation of the poet and singer Wolf Biermann in November 1976. In fact it was only after some hesitation

des Arbeiter- und Bauernstaates, Flucht in den Alltag der Ehefrau und Mutter.

7. Fritz J. Raddatz, "Das Gedächtnis - eine andere Form des Sehens", *Die Zeit*, (25.3.1983).

and censorship that her "Frankfurter Vorlesungen" were eventually published in the GDR in 1984.

Yet Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf are not such different writers as their contrasting reception in East and West Germany suggests. Detailed examination of their work reveals a number of thematic parallels which indicate similarities in their views of socialist literature and of its potential achievements. And where they differ, it is not in the simplistic terms of cultural policy. Christa Wolf is herself the author of twelve publications on Seghers, in which she reveals an interest in the older writer's work greater than that she shows for any other writer. That interest has in turn prompted the publication in recent years of three articles which examine the importance of the older writer for the younger. The first, "Nachfolge, nicht Nachahmung: Zur Beziehung zwischen Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf" (1981) by Peter Beicken, focusses on Wolf's fascination with Seghers. He presents her as Seghers' successor and points to what he sees as the essential similarity between the two, namely their common belief in the existence of an indestructible and unassailable inner core in man:

So sehr sich die Wolf mit den Leidenden identifiziert, so spricht sie doch mit einem Glauben an Irdisches, den sie bei der Seghers bewunderte. Dort strömte von dem Glauben an das Unangreifbare und Unverletzbare eine ungeheure Kraft aus.⁸

8. Peter Beicken, "Nachfolge, nicht Nachahmung: Zur Beziehung Anna Seghers - Christa Wolf". In: *Deutsche Exilliteratur - Literatur der Nachkriegszeit*, (Bern: 1981), p.129.

He also notes the use of the first person plural pronoun "wir" in the works of both writers which he sees as an indication of the desire by both to align themselves with the collective and thus signal their awareness of the responsibility of the writer to socialist society.⁹

Colin Smith, the author of the second article, "Christa Wolf and Anna Seghers" (1988) does not dispute either of these arguments. However, he points to what he feels is a lack of thematic similarities in their works and to the frequent occasions when Wolf deliberately misreads Seghers, in order to support his view that "Seghers' influence on Wolf has been minimal"¹⁰:

Instrumental in Wolf's development has been the changing use of one particular phrase of Seghers's. In 1968 she had tried to present Seghers's techniques and her own as though there were no contradiction in intention and approach. "Und wenn gilt: Was erzählbar geworden ist, ist überwunden, so gilt doch auch: Was überwunden werden muß, soll erzählt werden" This is blatantly misleading. Seghers's definition suggests it is distance to one's material temporally and psychologically which makes writing possible. For her style, Wolf relies on the opposite viewpoint: the closer narrative is to immediate experience, the more effective it will be.¹¹

Yet the premise of Smith's argument is wrong, for influence cannot be seen simply as the result of the incorporation of the motifs and themes of one writer's work in that of another, nor does it necessarily involve the wholehearted acceptance of the work of one writer by another. It can, as Beicken suggests, evolve from a fascination with another's work, leading to greater

9. Ibid, p.122.

10. Colin Smith, "Christa Wolf and Anna Seghers". In: *German Life and Letters*, vol XLI (1981), p.235.

11. Ibid, p.244.

involvement with that work. This might mean that the later writer misreads the earlier, that s/he reconstructs him/her as Smith suggests Wolf reconstructs Seghers, but that does not exclude the possibility of influence. For in the process of reconstruction the author is able to achieve greater clarity about his/her own position and thus find the basis from which to write. This is the view expressed by Joseph Fischel in the third article to have appeared on the relationship between the two writers, "Gewebe von Gesittung - Gewebe des Erzählens. Christa Wolfs Verhältnis zu Anna Seghers" (1989), in which he examines what he sees to be points of contact between their works and comes to the conclusion that "Dabei geht es nun immer weniger um Nachfolge, sondern immer selbstbewußter um die Profilierung des Eigenen."¹²

However, Fischel fails to explore the reasons behind the changing nature of the relationship between the two writers and it is the aim of this thesis to establish both the precise nature of that changing relationship between Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf and the reasons for it. In order to do so I shall first outline developments in socialist literature in Germany, highlighting, where appropriate, the place of Seghers and Wolf in those developments. I will then go on to look in detail at the careers of the two writers and will bring them together to establish where Anna Seghers' and Christa Wolf's views

12. Joseph Fischel, "Gewebe von Gesittung - Gewebe des Erzählens. Christa Wolfs Verhältnis zu Anna Seghers". In: Angela Drescher (ed.), *Christa Wolf, Ein Arbeitsbuch. Studien - Dokumente - Bibliographie*. (Berlin/Weimar: 1989), p.395.

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on literature - and their literary practices - converge and where they diverge. Having thus assessed the extent of Wolf's indebtedness to Seghers, I will then answer the question whether or not they do represent two different approaches to socialist literature, as their contrasting reception East and West suggests, or whether they have a similar approach.

1. SOCIALIST LITERATURE IN GERMANY

One of the first attempts in Germany to give socialist literature a theoretical basis came with the founding of the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, the Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller or BPRS, on October 19th 1928. The League's description as proletarian-revolutionary gives some indication of the nature of its membership, which was comprised of both proletarian writers such as Willi Bredel, Karl Grünberg and Hans Marchwitza, and bourgeois-revolutionary writers such as Ludwig Renn, Erich Weinert and Johannes R. Becher who, as chairman of the League, played a leading role throughout its four year history.¹ Anna Seghers herself became a member in 1929, and the words with which her membership was welcomed reveal the extent of her commitment to the organisation:

Zwei Schriftsteller, die in der Bourgeoisie einen guten Namen hatten, kamen zu uns: der Genosse Ludwig Renn und die Genossin Anna Seghers. Sie kamen nicht etwa als Sympathisierende zu uns, sie nahmen unsere Literaturlosungen völlig an und stellten sich auch organisatorisch ganz zur Verfügung.²

The League saw its main function to lie in the coordination and development of tendencies already present in German literature. Its main objectives, stated in the "Entwurf eines Aktionsprogramms", which was

1. For further information on the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers see Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie*, (Neuwied und Berlin:1971).
2. "Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Bundes proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller im Jahre 1929". In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1926-35* (Berlin und Weimar: 1979), p.183.

published in *Die Rote Fahne* on October 28th 1928, can be summarised as follows:

1. To promote proletarian writers and win over the middle classes and intellectuals to their cause.
2. To work for the development of new and radical proletarian literature, which was to be quite distinct from bourgeois literature, since the latter tended to regard itself as above politics and gave form priority over content. Proletarian literature, however, aimed to give priority to content over form since: "nicht durch die Revolutionierung der Form bekommt die Literatur einen revolutionären Wert, sondern die neue revolutionäre Form kann und muß ein organisches Produkt des revolutionären Inhalts sein."
3. to acknowledge literature as an agitational and propagandistic weapon in the class struggle, and therefore to regard political bias (Tendenz) as the necessary backbone of the literary work.³

These then were the League's objectives in the early months of its existence and they were developed in more detail in the essays published by members of the League in literary journals sympathetic to its cause, including the League's own journal *Die Linkskurve*. However, they contrast sharply with the League's policy in 1933 when Hitler's rise to power forced many of its members into exile or illegality and effectively put an end to its work. For by that time the most influential section of the League had put forward a number of arguments in favour of adopting the 19th century realist tradition as a model for socialist literature.

One of the main reasons for this development was the arrival from Moscow in 1931 of Georg Lukács, the distinguished literary critic and theoretician. The last

3. See "Entwurf eines Aktionsprogrammes" (1928). In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1926-35* (1979), p.138-140.

five issues of *Die Linkskurve* of 1932 contain a number of essays by Lukács in which he expresses his views on the direction which he feels proletarian literature should take. The most important of these essays are "Willi Bredels Romane", "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit" and "Reportage oder Gestaltung".

The essence of Lukács' criticism of proletarian literature - and in both "Willi Bredels Romane" and "Reportage oder Gestaltung" he insists that his criticism is not aimed specifically at Bredel or Ottwalt but at the methods of current proletarian literature in general - is that it is undialectical. For in Lukács' view the methods it employs, reportage, montage and documentary, since they are concerned only to portray surface reality, fail to expose the forces at work beneath the surface, the driving forces of capitalist society. Lukács therefore calls for a literature which exposes those driving forces, the nature of which has been proven by Marxist political science. To do this, he says, literature simply has to 'reflect' reality in its revolutionary development. The writer does not have to be tendentious but partisan, he does not have to impose his own idealised view of how society should be, but can simply align himself with the marxist interpretation of history.

Denn in seiner Darstellung, die eine Darstellung der objektiven Wirklichkeit mit ihren wirklichen treibenden Kräften, mit ihren wirklichen Entwicklungstendenzen ist, ist kein Raum für ein "Ideal", weder für ein moralisches noch für ein ästhetisches. Er bringt keine Forderungen "von außen" an seine Wirklichkeitsgestaltung heran, denn seine Wirklichkeitsgestaltung selbst muß das Schicksal jener Forderungen, die konkret und real

aus dem Klassenkampf herauswachsen, als integrierendes Moment der objektiven Wirklichkeit in ihrer Entstehung aus ihr, in ihrer Wirkung auf sie, mit enthalten, wenn er die Wirklichkeit richtig - dialektisch - abbilden will.⁴

And in his essay "Reportage oder Gestaltung" he states his view that traditional realist methods are much more suitable for this task than modernist methods such as reportage and montage. He compares Ernst Ottwalt's novel about the judicial system *Denn sie wissen was sie tun* with Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, which deals with a similar theme, and points out that whereas Ottwalt only reproduces surface reality, Tolstoy succeeds in presenting reality's essence. For Ottwalt, Lukács argues, simply juxtaposes the facts of a case and the various attitudes of the participants, whereas Tolstoy presents flesh and blood characters with whom the reader can empathise, but whose fates are at the same time typical of broader social developments. He is thus able to communicate the suffering which the judicial system causes and provide the reader with an insight into a whole series of decisive questions of the time.

Tolstoi will an der Hand des rein persönlichen (freilich typisch angelegten) Schicksals seiner Gestalten eine Reihe der entscheidenden Fragen seiner Zeit aufrollen. Indem er dabei die lebendige Wechselwirkung lebendiger Menschen untereinander und *dadurch vermittelt* mit der Gesellschaft, in der sie leben, mit der sie ihre Konflikte durchfechten, gestaltet, gestaltet er zugleich die lebendige, *dialektische Zusammengehörigkeit* und unlösbare Verflochtenheit von Zufall und Notwendigkeit.⁵

4. Georg Lukács. "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit". In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1926-35* (1979), p. 490.
5. Georg Lukács, "Reportage oder Gestaltung". In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1926-35*, p.517.

Yet in both "Tendenz und Parteilichkeit" and "Reportage oder Gestaltung" Lukács' arguments are flawed. Whilst arguing in favour of a literature which exposes the dialectical relationship between the individual and the forces at work in society, he fails to take account of their importance for the work of literature itself, both in the interaction between a literary work and its public and between society and the writer. For writers are themselves determined by social forces and cannot be expected simply to convey the marxist message in their work since their presentation of it will always be shaped by their experience of their time. Of course, as far as Lukács was concerned, the views he represented had been scientifically proven and had to be regarded as absolute truth. This kind of historically determined interplay was therefore not possible within his frame of reference. However, for many writers this was not the case, and it is not surprising that Lukács' views were the subject of a great deal of controversy in the League in the early thirties, when moves were made to draw up an alternative programme more in line with the League's original objectives.⁶ But the National Socialist's rise to power temporarily put an end to the discussion, and the conflict remained unresolved.

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In the years which followed, Lukács' views became dominant due to the formation of the Popular Front at the "Internationaler Schriftstellerkongreß zur Verteidigung

6. Gallas, (1971).

der Kultur" in Paris in June 1935. The main aim of the movement was to unite all supporters of anti-fascist parties and organisations against fascism.⁷ It became official Communist party policy when it was approved at the Brussels KPD conference in Moscow in October the same year, thereby signalling a major shift in the strategy of the KPD which had hitherto refused cooperation with the Social Democrats on the grounds that their support for moderate reforms prolonged the life of the capitalist system.

The Popular Front policy was seen to apply not only to political activists but also to writers, a number of whom quickly took up the Popular Front banner and wrote works supporting its cause. Anna Seghers, who left Germany for exile in Paris in 1933, was extremely active in the movement and, as we shall see, anticipated this development in a number of novels which take the importance of cooperation between all parties opposed to National Socialism as their theme. The best known of these, *Das siebte Kreuz* (1942), is dedicated to "die toten und lebenden Antifaschisten Deutschlands" and is often regarded as the novel of the Popular Front.

Lukács' concept of literature was extremely useful in bringing together writers of all political persuasions to work for this common cause, since its call for a traditional realist mode of writing found acceptance with

7. Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Frankfurt-am-Main: 1977), p.11-13.

both proletarian and bourgeois writers. It also bore a number of similarities to the Soviet concept of socialist realism.

Socialist realism was the name given to the literary doctrine which was developed in the Soviet Union at a time when Stalin was eager to establish a cultural policy in which literature could be employed as propaganda. Its main principles were outlined at the First All Union Congress of Soviet writers in 1934 by the Soviet cultural minister Zdanov (who is generally seen as being chiefly responsible for the development of the theory), the party theorists Karl Radek and Nikolai Bukharin, and the writer Maxim Gorky.⁸ All four speakers stressed the need for socialist realist works to reflect reality in its revolutionary development, to depict reality not "as it was" but "as it was to be".

Als die grundlegende Methode der sowjetischen schönen Literatur und der Kritik fordert der Sozialistische Realismus vom Künstler eine wahrheitsgetreue, historisch korrekte Darstellung der Wirklichkeit in ihrer revolutionären Entwicklung.⁹

From now on, in other words, literature was to have a didactic function, its role was to convince readers of and educate them in the benefits of socialism, and writers were to work in the service of the socialist state as "engineers of the human soul".¹⁰

8. For a more detailed analysis of the events of the congress see H. Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917-34* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: 1963)

9. Edward Mozejko, *Der sozialistische Realismus. Theorie, Entwicklung und Versagen einer Literaturmethode*, (Bonn: 1977), p.59.

10. Ibid, p.15-16.

In addition to the principle that the writer should objectively reflect reality in its revolutionary development, the theory of socialist realism also required the writer to be partisan, to acknowledge the inevitability of proletarian victory and thus identify himself with the aims and interests of the working class.

The third principle of socialist realism was that of "Volkstümlichkeit" or popularity: socialist realist literature was to be popular literature, popular both in the sense that it depicted the everyday lives of ordinary people, and in the sense that it presented reality in a way which was accessible and comprehensible for the reader. This automatically excluded the use of modernist techniques and demanded the application of the techniques of the nineteenth century realists.

The fourth principle of socialist realism was that of the typical, the importance of which can be traced back to Engels' letter to Miss Harkness in April 1888, in which he writes: "Realismus bedeutet, meines Erachtens, außer der Treue des Details die getreue Wiedergabe typischer Charaktere unter typischen Umständen."¹¹; and in another letter to Minna Kautsky he praises the novel Die Alten und die Neuen for the "scharfe Individualisierung der Charaktere" who at the same time represent much more: "jeder ist ein Typus, aber auch

11. Friedrich Engels, "Brief an Miss Harkness". In: Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Über Kultur, Ästhetik, Literatur*, (Leipzig: 1981), p.398-401.

gleichzeitig ein bestimmter Einzelmensch".¹² Thus it was accepted that socialist literature should present characters who were convincing both as individuals and as particular types of people, whose problems and conflicts could be seen as representative of broader social developments.

By far the most important "type" in socialist realist literature - and the fifth defining principle of the doctrine - was that of the positive hero, the idealised figure who actively strove for the establishment of a socialist society and whose exemplary thoughts and actions served to inspire similar behaviour both in his fellow characters and in the reader.

The similarities between the above doctrine and Lukács' theory of literature are quite clear, particularly where the categories of objective reflection of reality, popularity and the typical are concerned, and it is not surprising that Lukács' views should have gained greater acceptance at this point. Furthermore, since anti-fascist literature was to be aimed at a broad section of the German population in the hope that it might thus safeguard them from the effects of National Socialist ideology, it served the policy to exclude the modernist and experimental techniques so criticised by Lukács as too elitist and too incomprehensible for the vast majority of readers.

12. Friedrich Engels, "Brief an Minna Kautsky", Ibid, p.396-397.

Thus, the need to unite writers was given priority over any discussion of the socialist function of literature and the role it should play in society, and, to a certain extent, the form it should take, although the conflict between advocates of traditional and of experimental techniques continued to reverberate throughout the thirties, eventually culminating in the Expressionism debate which took place in the years 1937/38 in the literary journal *Das Wort*.

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The Expressionism, or Realism debate as it is also known, was triggered by the essay "Nun ist dies Erbe zuende" by Bernhard Ziegler, which appeared in *Das Wort* in September 1937. However, Ziegler's essay is generally regarded as having been prompted by Lukács' work "Größe und Verfall des Expressionismus" (1934) and it was therefore at Lukács that much of the ensuing criticism was aimed, particularly by Ernst Bloch in his contribution, "Diskussionen über Expressionismus", which appeared in *Das Wort* in June 1938.

Lukács response came in the influential essay "Es geht um den Realismus" in which he restates and develops many of the views he had expressed in *Die Linkskurve* in the early 1930s. Once again his starting point is that it is the duty of every realist not to be content with a superficial depiction of society but to expose the driving forces which lie beneath the surface, and once again he insists that the methods of the modernists are unsuitable for this task. On this occasion he calls upon

Thomas Mann to support his argument that the true models for socialist literature are to be found in the methods of the bourgeois realists rather than in those of the Expressionists or Surrealists. For, in Lukács' view, in spite of his bourgeois origins, Mann reveals in his work an understanding of the workings of society far superior to that displayed by many proletarian writers:

Warum bleibt doch Thomas Mann bei so modernen Themen künstlerisch "altmodisch", "herkömmlich", gibt sich nicht "avantgardistisch"? Eben weil er ein *wirklicher Realist* ist ... er weiß, wie Denken und Empfinden aus dem gesellschaftlichen Sein herauswachsen, wie Erlebnisse und Empfindungen Teile eines Gesamtkomplexes der Wirklichkeit sind. Dabei zeigt er als Realist *wohin* dieser Teil im Gesamtkomplex des Lebens gehört, *woher* er aus dem gesellschaftlichen Leben kommt, *wohin* er geht usw.¹³

and he goes on to give his analysis of the creative process which he says consists of two stages:

erstens das gedankliche Aufdecken und künstlerisch-gestalterische Zeigen dieser Zusammenhänge; zweitens aber, und unzertrennbar davon, das künstlerische Zudecken der abstrahiert erarbeiteten Zusammenhänge - das Aufheben des Abstrahierens. Es entsteht durch diese *doppelte* Arbeit eine neue gestaltet vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit, eine gestaltete Oberfläche des Lebens, die, obwohl sie in jedem Moment das Wesen klar *durchscheinen* läßt (was in der Unmittelbarkeit des Lebens selbst nicht der Fall ist), doch als Unmittelbarkeit, als Oberfläche des Lebens erscheint. Und zwar als die ganze Oberfläche des Lebens in allen ihren wesentlichen Bestimmungen - nicht nur ein subjektiv wahrgenommenes und ~~abstrahierend~~ übersteigertes und isoliertes Moment aus dem Komplex dieses Gesamtzusammenhangs.¹⁴

However, Lukács' choice of Mann as a model to be emulated is a questionable one and must be seen to be due to a desire to enlist Mann's support in the anti-Nazi cause. For whilst *Buddenbrooks* can perhaps be regarded as

13. Georg Lukács, "Es geht um den Realismus". In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1935-41*, (Berlin und Weimar: 1979), p.534-5.

14. Ibid. p.538-9.

a good example of the kind of literature Lukács is advocating, later works such as *Der Tod in Venedig* and *Doktor Faustus* certainly cannot. In fact, Lukács' description of the creative process and the notion that a work of literature can reflect reality like a mirror reveal a mechanical understanding of the way in which a writer works and shows no sense of the intuitive grasp which is part and parcel of a writer's trade. This was precisely the point made by Anna Seghers in her correspondence with Lukács in 1938/39 which takes up some of the points of the Expressionist debate. The exchange of letters, and some of its key ideas and phrases, was to become an important point of reference for later writers wrestling with the realist orthodoxy - and in particular for Christa Wolf.

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In the correspondence Seghers counters Lukács' reflection theory with Tolstoy's theory of the creative process which incorporates precisely that element which Lukács excludes, namely the experience of the writer.

Auf der ersten Stufe nimmt der Künstler die Realität scheinbar unbewußt und unmittelbar auf, er nimmt sie ganz neu auf, als ob niemand vor ihm dasselbe gesehen hätte, das längst Bewußte wird wieder unbewußt; auf der zweiten Stufe aber handelt es sich darum, dieses Unbewußte wieder bewußt zu machen usw.¹⁵

In Seghers' opinion Lukács was in any case misguided in his belief that the inadequacies of many works being written at the time were due to the application of the wrong literary method. She felt that errors were to be

15. Anna Seghers, "Briefe an Georg Lukács" (1938/39), AAE I, p.74.

found at a much earlier stage of the creative process, namely in the inability of many writers to transform their basic experience of reality, their "Grunderlebnis", into a work of art. She thus shifted the main focus of the discussion away from method to the artist's experience and pointed out that at times of crisis such as these, the impact of that crisis on the artist can be so powerful that it is extremely difficult for him to come to terms with it and portray it satisfactorily in a literary work.¹⁶ This, she admitted, gave rise to imperfect art works, but whereas Lukács rejected those works completely and insisted that writers adopt the methods of the nineteenth century realists, Anna Seghers pointed out that even though such works might be inadequate in certain ways they were nevertheless significant since they contained within them the seeds of something new, which was far more appropriate to both the writers' and the readers' experience than the outmoded classical models Lukács was advocating. She argued that it was unrealistic of Lukács to demand that the writer present an objective reflection of reality in its revolutionary development, since he failed to take account of the fact that writers themselves are determined by their time and communicate this in the art work. Indeed, in Seghers' view, artists can play a unique role in society, since they are both the object and subject of social developments which shape them and, through their art are simultaneously shaped by them -

16. Ibid, p.85.

"... der Künstler ... einzigartige, eigentümliche gesellschaftliche Verknüpfung von subjektivem und objektivem Faktor, Umschlagestelle vom Objekt zum Subjekt und wieder zum Objekt".¹⁷ She therefore insisted on the importance of immediacy - "Unmittelbarkeit", on the right of authors to write according to their experience of reality, since only by so doing could they hope to be realistic, and only by presenting a picture of reality with which the reader could identify could they hope to communicate with the reader and thus play a part in the fight against National Socialism.

Anna Seghers was not a literary theorist, she never participated in the discussions which took place in the BPRS in the early thirties and was generally concerned to produce the kind of works that were asked of her rather than herself determine the role literature should play. That she should have been moved to enter the debate at this point, albeit by means of letters rather than by a direct contribution to the journal, is an indication of how strongly she felt in this matter. Whilst others tended to concentrate on a defence of the Expressionists, she pinpointed that area of the debate which affected her directly, namely the creative functioning of the writer, and in so doing exposed the vital flaw in Lukács' argument which was to be so significant for the development of GDR literature in years to come.

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17. Ibid, p.80.

After the war, the question of what kind of role socialist literature should play in society arose once again. Initially in the Soviet Occupied Zone the answer was left open and the cultural climate was fairly liberal. In February 1946, in fact, at the first central cultural conference of the Communist party, artists and scientists alike were promised complete freedom of expression.¹⁸

However, according to Elimar Schubbe, this was a purely tactical manoeuvre on the part of the KPD in order to win the support of the Social Democrats and should not be taken at face value,¹⁹ particularly since the key political and cultural positions were held by Moscow emigrés. Indeed, close examination of speeches made at the time reveals increasing acknowledgement of cultural achievements in the Soviet Union and a readiness to adopt Soviet models in the development of cultural policy in the GDR - a development which was particularly marked after the founding of the socialist state in 1949. They also contain an increasing amount of criticism for developments in the West, criticism which finds its most vehement expression in a resolution passed by the ZK of the SED in 1951 entitled "Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur für eine fortschrittliche deutsche

18. Anton Ackermann, "Freiheit der Wissenschaft und Kunst. Vortrag auf der ersten zentralen Kulturtagung der KPD, 3. Februar 1946". In: Elimar Schubbe (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED* (Stuttgart:1972), p.55.

19. Elimar Schubbe, "Einführung in die Dokumentation". In: Schubbe, (1972), p.43,

Kultur". The resolution openly rejected what it referred to as the formalist and decadent tendencies of capitalist culture in the West and stated its support for socialist realism. Significantly, this was because it was regarded as most suitable for the task of reeducating the German people from their allegiance to fascism to the new Communism:

Um die Herrschaft des Formalismus in der Kunst zu beseitigen, ist es notwendig, eine realistische Kunst zu entwickeln. ... Dabei muß die wahrheitsgetreue und historisch konkrete künstlerische Darstellung mit der Aufgabe verbunden werden, die werktätigen Menschen im Geiste des Sozialismus *ideologisch umzuformen und zu erziehen* (my italics). Das ist die Methode, die wir in der Literatur und in der Literaturkritik als sozialistischen Realismus bezeichnen.²⁰

At this stage, therefore, there is no doubt about the nature of the role literature was to play, it was to function as a propagandistic tool. For this, the Soviet doctrine of socialist realism, which had been developed for that very purpose, was eminently suitable. And in 1954, with the establishment of a GDR cultural ministry, socialist realism was officially adopted as the creative method of GDR literature.

This position was accepted by many of the writers who had returned to the GDR from exile and who shared the conviction that the method of socialist realism was the method best suited for the task which lay before them, namely the political reeducation of the German people. This was the view expressed by Anna Seghers, by this time

20. "Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur". In: Schubbe, (1972), p.182.

President of the Writers' Union, who, although critical of Lukács' theories in the 1930s, now embraced the doctrine of socialist realism which she described as "niemals Einengung unseres Schaffens, er ist die denkbar größte Erweiterung".²¹

Nevertheless, she continued to be critical of the schematic nature of much of the literature being produced in the GDR. Indeed, this was a major weakness of GDR literature in the 1950s, as the essays and speeches of a number of writers and critics reveal. Some of the sharpest criticism came from Hans Mayer, Professor of Literary History at Leipzig University, who, in 1956, warned that lack of contact with the most important developments in modern literature could have far reaching effects for GDR literature and eventually lead to sterility and stagnation:

Will man ... das literarische Klima bei uns ändern, so muß man die Auseinandersetzung beginnen. Es muß aufhören, daß Kafka bei uns ein Geheimtip bleibt und daß das Interesse für Faulkner oder Thornton Wilder mit illegalem Treiben gleichgesetzt wird. ... Die Beschäftigung mit Form- und Inhaltsproblemen der modernen Literatur kann nicht als Diplom betrachtet werden, das den Inhaber berechtigt, hochwertige neue Literatur zu schaffen. Die fehlende Beschäftigung aber mit den Tendenzen und wichtigsten Erscheinungen der modernen Künstler und Schriftsteller wird sich in jedem Falle als Stagnation und Sterilität auswirken. So scheinen mir die Dinge zu liegen.²²

However, Mayer's words had little effect (he was in fact to leave the GDR in frustration seven years later in 1963) and cultural politicians such as Alexander Abusch

21. Anna Seghers, "Zu einigen Fragen unserer Literaturarbeit" (1953), AAE I. p.428.

22. Hans Mayer, "Vortrag. 28. November 1956". In: Schubbe, (1972), p.449.

and Alfred Kurella refused to admit that the obvious deficiencies in GDR literature might be due to the isolation of the GDR from mainstream modernism. Instead they preferred to put them down to the fact that writers in the new socialist state had still not succeeded in bridging the gap between workers and intellectuals - a view expressed by the party chairman Walter Ulbricht at the fifth party conference of the SED in 1958:

... die Trennung von Kunst und Leben, die Entfremdung zwischen Künstler und Volk, die in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft so katastrophale Ausmasse erreicht haben, sind noch lange nicht überwunden. Hier sind noch beharrliche Anstrengungen notwendig, wenn die wachsenden kulturellen Bedürfnisse des Volkes auf einem möglichst hohen Niveau Befriedigung finden sollen, so daß Unterhaltung und Kultur wieder zusammenfalllen und dabei in den Dienst der sozialistischen Bewußtseinsbildung gestellt werden.^{2 3}

This view seemed to be supported by the "Nachterstedtener Brief", the name given to a letter written in 1955 to the writers' union by workers at a coal mine in Nachterstedt. In the letter, the workers had called for more books dealing with the life of workers and the world of work, and between 1957 and 1959 a number of conferences were held in the GDR to discuss ways of answering the Nachterstedtener demands and closing the gap between intellectuals and workers.

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The most significant of the conferences was organised by the Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle on April

23. Walter Ulbricht, "'Der Kampf um den Frieden für den Sieg des Sozialismus, für die nationale Wiedergeburt Deutschlands als friedliebender demokratischer Staat' Rede auf dem V. Parteitag der SED vom 10. bis 16. Juli 1958." In: Schubbe, (1972), p.535.

24th and 25th 1959 at the Bitterfeld chemical works. Although at first sight an unlikely location for a conference of writers and critics on the role of literature in society, its choice was by no means a coincidence. In January of the same year, the Bitterfeld brigade Nikolai Mamai had called for a competition between brigades under the motto "sozialistisch arbeiten, lernen und leben", an act which was seen by many to signal a new level of awareness on the part of GDR workers and to demand new developments and initiatives in cultural policy. It thus seemed fitting that a conference to discuss those initiatives should take place in the factory where the call had originated.²⁴

During the conference many papers were given which referred to these new developments and to the need for writers to depict them in a way which would contribute to and encourage further advancements. The main emphasis was on the need for writers to be able to base their writing on direct experience of the world of work - "das Neue erkennen, begreifen, aufspüren und schöpferisch darstellen, das kann der Schriftsteller am besten, der selbst an den Brennpunkten der Entwicklung des neuen Lebens wirkt und tätig ist".²⁵ By far the most important initiative to emerge from the conference was the decision

24. See Ingeborg Gerlach, *Bitterfeld. Arbeiterliteratur und Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR*, (Taunus: 1974)

25. Walter Ulbricht, "Rede vor Schriftstellern, Brigaden der sozialistischen Arbeit und Kulturschaffenden, in Bitterfeld, 24. April 1957." In: Schubbe, (1972), p.553.

to encourage writers to acquaint themselves more closely with the workforce and the means of production, whilst workers were encouraged to "storm the heights of culture", to seek closer contact with writers and, where possible, to write about *their* experiences in the factories. As a result a number of groups were formed in factories where, with the help of writers and theorists, workers were encouraged to record their day to day experiences at work. Crucial to this development was the brigade diary - a journal of the brigade's daily activities which, since it both recorded and illuminated problems faced by the workers, could be used to aid their solution. For many this represented the ideal model for a national, socialist literature.

However, the brigade diary failed to establish itself as a genuine alternative to the model of the nineteenth century novel advocated by cultural theorists. Gradually, therefore, the workers' groups became neglected and the emphasis shifted back to the works of by now established writers, among them Franz Fühmann, Christa Wolf, Erik Neutsch and Brigitte Reimann, all of whom had taken up the call of the conference for writers to go into industry and had spent several months (or, in Brigitte Reimann's case, several years) in factories in an attempt to gain direct experience of factory life in the GDR and to collect material for their novels. In the years which followed a number of novels appeared which related those experiences, novels such as Franz Fühmann's *Kabelkran und blauer Peter*, Erik Neutsch's *Spur der*

Steine and Brigitte Reimann's *Ankunft im Alltag* and *Franziska Linkerhand*. Christa Wolf's novel *Der geteilte Himmel* was particularly well-received and brought its author a number of honours, thus establishing her reputation as a leading socialist writer.

The Bitterfeld movement was initiated in an attempt to strengthen and confirm socialist realism as the creative principle of GDR literature, and there can be no doubt that the novels listed above meet socialist realist demands in that they present typical aspects of everyday life in the GDR and focus on the actions of positive heroes and heroines whose exemplary actions and commitment to socialism serve as a source of guidance and encouragement to all. At the same time, however, a number of works introduce new themes which were to play a crucial role in the development of GDR literature in the following years. For the tone of the novels is frequently extremely personal and moves away from an objective depiction of reality to a consciously subjective presentation of experience.

This increased concern with individual experience has since been put down to the fact that it was generally the work of a younger generation of writers who aimed, through their writing, to come to terms with their experiences in the new socialist state. Lacking the experience of the older generation, they could not claim to be in a position to reeducate their fellow men and therefore could not hope to play the role of omniscient

narrator demanded by the prescribed classical models. Instead they focussed on their own experience as individuals who, having identified with the new society, now begin to make claims of it, to measure their own expectations of themselves against the possibility of their realisation in the socialist state. This also found expression in the narrative structures they employed in their works, such as the partial viewpoint of the narrator, for example, in Brigitte Reimann's *Franziska Linkerhand*, Irmtraud Morgner's use of montage and fragment in *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura*, and Christa Wolf's employment of sporadic time schemes in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*

These developments were not immediately welcomed, however. At the Eleventh Plenum of the SED in 1965 a number of films and novels were attacked for their subjectivity by party functionaries. These demanded that literature be partisan, that it support the decisions of the party and refrain from what they referred to as dangerous ideological positions such as scepticism and alienation, and a number of works, amongst them Werner Bräunig's novel *Rummelplatz* were subjected to fierce criticism for their anti-socialist tendencies.²⁶

Christa Wolf spoke out in Bräunig's defence but her remarks were also met with hostility and less than four

26. Walter Ulbricht, "Probleme des Perspektivplans bis 1970! Referat Walter Ulbrichts auf dem 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 16-18 Dezember 1965". In: Schubbe, (1972), p.1081-1088.

years later with the publication of her own novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* she found herself the subject of similar controversy.

This was perhaps not surprising since, in its presentation of a young woman's search for identity, the novel employs a first person narrator who casts doubt on her own reliability and suggests that dreams, inventions and subjective perceptions are just as valid for our understanding of reality as so called facts, the choice of which is inevitably the product of subjective judgements. In other words the novel represents a direct challenge to socialist realism's demand for an objective reflection of reality.

The novel appeared in a very small edition in 1968 and was the subject of a strong attack at the sixth writers congress the same year.²⁷ However, five years later the work was republished following Erich Honecker's replacement of Walter Ulbricht as party chairman in 1971, which brought about a major change in GDR cultural policy and led to the publication of a number of interesting experimental works which had failed to gain approval in previous years.

By 1973 in fact, in an interview with Hans Kaufmann, Christa Wolf felt confident enough to outline her own approach to writing, an approach she now referred to as "subjektive Authentizität". By this she meant the

27. Wolfram und Helmtrud Mauser, *Christa Wolf: Nachdenken über Christa T.*, (München: 1987), p.116.

conscious inclusion of the author's experience in the fictional work. She felt that this was necessary, firstly because it is impossible for writers to be completely objective since they are shaped by their time and that experience inevitably colours their judgement of it, and secondly because it is precisely in the area of subjective experience that the appeal of art, of literature lies. For art not only appeals to the intellect but to the emotions and indeed acts as a mediator between the two, illuminating areas of experience to which we would otherwise not have access. And after many years of insistence on the objective depiction of everyday reality, Wolf emphasises the role of the imagination, both as a dimension of reality and as a means of exploring possibilities which might, in everyday life, be closed to readers, but which can nevertheless help them to understand what is happening around them. In other words, Wolf broached precisely those points in Lukács' theory of socialist literature which Anna Seghers had focussed on in her correspondence with Lukács in the thirties, namely that the artist is shaped by his time and communicates this in his work, and it is therefore foolish to expect him to exclude it from his writing. Like Seghers she defended writers' freedom to adopt other models more appropriate to their experience than the outmoded genre of nineteenth century realism and in the interview frequently refers to Seghers, quoting the latter's arguments on

"Unmittelbarkeit" to support her own approach of "subjektive Authentizität".²⁸

The term "subjektive Authentizität" has since come to be employed to characterise the nature of developments in GDR literature in the 1970s in general. The GDR critic Dieter Schlenstedt uses it in his book, *Wirkungsästhetische Analysen*, in which he sees this development in GDR literature as arising from the changing historical situation and a maturing readership which now seeks partnership and cooperation with rather than advice and instruction from the writer. Thus literature is no longer seen to have a didactic function (although this is not entirely excluded), but is instead shown to be one of the many possibilities open to people in a socialist state as they explore reality in search of fulfilment.²⁹ Schlenstedt welcomes this development and points to the many more open forms - such as the diary, and the short story - to which it has given rise.

However, by concentrating on the role of the reader in this development, Schlenstedt neglects to acknowledge the fact that it was initiated not by readers but by writers dissatisfied with the doctrine of socialist realism as a model for the communication of their experience of reality. He therefore fails to point out the true significance of the development, namely the

28. Christa Wolf, "Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann", DA, p.773-805.

29. Dieter Schlenstedt, *Wirkungsästhetische Analysen*, (Berlin: 1979), p.127.

beginning of a break with socialist realist doctrine and of a search for alternative socialist literary models.

It was probably impossible for Schlenstedt to do otherwise, and the fact that he was unable to explore this question even as late as 1979 is an indication of the sensitivity of the issue. Indeed, in spite of the thaw which Honecker's replacement of Ulbricht brought with it in the early seventies, the cultural climate was still far from liberal, as the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in November 1976 served to illustrate.³⁰

The government's reaction to the letter of protest which followed Biermann's expatriation led many prominent writers, among them Günter Kunert, Sarah Kirsch and Jurek Becker, to leave the GDR, greatly impoverishing the literary scene there. Christa and Gerhard Wolf also signed the letter and as a result Gerhard Wolf was expelled from the Writers Union, an event which led Christa Wolf to request her own expulsion, although she was eventually persuaded to remain a member. Recent years have also seen the departure of a large number of writers who were dissatisfied with the limited possibilities open to them and their writing in the GDR.

Nevertheless, or perhaps because so many writers so clearly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with GDR cultural policy, new developments in literature began to find far greater acceptance than they had done in the past, as did the works of a number of Western writers

30. *Der Spiegel*, 24.11.1981, p.86-108.

such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf who, for many years were regarded as decadent and formalistic but who have recently been published in the GDR. Furthermore, the "Erbe-Debatte", which took place in the literary journal *Sinn und Form* in the early 1970s, gave rise to a great deal of discussion about the socialist state's cultural heritage and led to a far more differentiated reception of writers such as the Romantics who, due largely to Lukács' influence, had been neglected in the GDR for many years.

The "Erbe-Debatte", essentially a reassessment^s of the Expressionism/Realism debate of the 1930s, signalled a further attempt to extend the GDR literary heritage beyond the nineteenth-century realist tradition, which was seen to be the basis of socialist realism, and to open it up to other influences more suited for the role literature was now seen to play. Not surprisingly, the Seghers-Lukács' correspondence of the thirties - which Christa Wolf had herself employed as the basis of her break with the prescriptions of socialist realism - assumed crucial importance. As on so many previous occasions, however, Seghers herself did not enter the debate directly, but in a number of speeches and interviews of the time she reiterated her arguments to Lukács on method and stressed the need for a broader literary tradition and a broader understanding of what constituted realism, albeit with with certain qualifications, the significance of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The debate was preceded and accompanied by the publication of a number of fictional works directly concerned with the role of art and the artist in society. These included *Scardanelli* (1970) by Stephan Hermlin, *Sonderbare Begegnungen* (1973) by Anna Seghers, *Das Leben des Jean Paul Friedrich Richter* (1975) by Günter de Bruyn, *Pamphlet für K.* (1975) by Günter Kunert and *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979) by Christa Wolf, all of which emphasise the validity of subjective perceptions, of dreams, fantasy and the imagination. These had been seen as having no part to play in the objective depiction of reality prescribed by socialist realism, but it was now argued that they were equally important as a means of illuminating our understanding of society. Furthermore, since they dealt with the alternative canon of non-classical writers, many of whom had been so fiercely criticised by Lukács in the 1930s, they all challenged the validity of the nineteenth-century realist novel as the model for socialist literature.

In recent years GDR cultural policy has been characterised by a more open interpretation both of its cultural heritage and of realism. Literature is now regarded less as a propagandistic tool than as a means of stimulating the readers' imagination, of making them think critically and encouraging them to take their lives into their own hands, to become the subjects rather than the objects of the historical process. It has thus broken with the Soviet doctrine of socialist realism and instead

looked to the humanist tradition which was itself so important for Karl Marx, and indeed the words of the *Communist Manifesto*, "die freie Entwicklung eines jeden ist die Bedingung für die freie Entwicklung aller"³¹ have frequently been used by writers to support their increased concern for the individual in socialist society. In many ways, therefore, the opening up of literary policy preceded the political opening up of the GDR which has been taking place since the autumn of 1989.

As this chapter has shown, Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf have been extremely important in literary developments in the GDR, and Wolf has frequently referred to Seghers to support her own concept of socialist literature, thereby suggesting an affinity between her views and those of the older writer. In the next two chapters I therefore look at the careers of first Anna Seghers and then Christa Wolf in detail in order to highlight the similarities and the differences between them.

31. Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*, (Berlin: 1977), p.51. This is quoted by Stefan Hermlin in his autobiographical work *Abendlicht* (Leipzig: 1982), p.23.

2. ANNA SEGHERS

Anna Seghers was born Netty Reiling in Mainz in 1900, the only child of the Jewish art dealer Isidor Reiling. She enjoyed a prosperous but sheltered childhood and although she was moved by the events of the Russian Revolution, which made her conscious of poverty and of class distinctions,¹ it was some time before she became politically aware. In 1919 she began her studies in Art-History and Sinology at Heidelberg University where, in 1924, following a period at the Museum for East Asian Art in Cologne, she obtained her doctorate with a dissertation entitled *Jude und Judentum im Werke Rembrandts*.

1924 also saw the appearance of her first publication as a novelist, namely the short story "Die Toten von der Insel Djal", followed three years later by "Grubetsch" and, in 1928, by the extremely succesful novella, *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara*. As the title of the latter suggests, her works became increasingly political in content as she herself became increasingly involved in politics. For whilst at Heidelberg University Anna Seghers met a number of political emigrés who had escaped from the counter-revolutionary forces then in power in their countries. Contact with these men and women, and in particular her marriage in 1925 to the Hungarian communist, Laszlo Radvanyi, gave what had initially been an intuitive

1. Anna Seghers, "Gespräch mit Wilhelm Girnus", AAE II, p.433.

understanding of the need for social change an intellectual basis and sharpened her political awareness. In 1928 she herself became a member of the Communist party and, a year later, of the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, thereby committing herself to work for social change through her writing.

Her view that literature had a role to play in bringing about social change was founded not only on her political beliefs but also on her firm conviction that literature could open up a world otherwise closed to people and thus play a part in shaping people's consciousness. This belief can be seen to be founded on her own childhood experiences. As a small girl Anna Seghers was often ill and the world of fiction, of the imagination, which both reading and writing opened up to her, provided her with a means of escape from the boredom and loneliness which long periods at home entailed.² Her belief in the power of literature was therefore itself the result of her own personal experience rather than intellectual argument, and in this respect it is important to note once again that Anna Seghers never regarded herself as a literary theorist. Significantly, she did not participate in the debates which took place in the League in the late twenties and early thirties on the nature of socialist literature. In fact, "Kleiner Bericht aus meiner Werkstatt" (1932), her only published contribution to the League's journal, *Die Linkskurve*, is

2. Christa Wolf, "Ein Gespräch mit Anna Seghers" (1965), DA, p.280.

concerned less with the theoretical than with the practical implications of writing and reveals her desire to conform to the literary programme of the League and to fulfil its aims to the best of her ability.³

On the whole, Anna Seghers' early essays are concerned with the young and the need to convince them of the benefits of socialism, since she felt that they would otherwise lack direction and be a prey to fascism:

Jugend ist nachdenklich und aufgeschlossen. Wir müssen viel mehr in sie hineindringen. Wir müssen viel mehr Wege ausfindig machen, mit scharfer Arbeit einsetzen. Wir müssen diesen Halbwüchsigen, der Jugend des kommenden Krieges, den Boden unter den Füßen wegziehen, auf den ihre Väter seit Generationen gestanden haben.⁴

Many of her early stories have at their centre a young man or woman searching for a way out of their dull, routine existence. These include Anna in "Grubetsch" (1926), Marie and her brother in "Die Ziegler" (1927/28), and Andreas in *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara* (1928). Whereas in "Grubetsch", however, the only way out for Anna is shown to be in misfortune, and for Marie in "Die Ziegler" in death, both Marie's brother and Andreas find release through political activity and solidarity with others of their class.

People's capacity to long for change, to dream, to visualize a world different from the one they inhabit was to become a central theme in Anna Seghers' later works,

3. Anna Seghers, "Kleiner Bericht aus meiner Werkstatt" (1932), AAE I, p.26-32.

4. Anna Seghers, "Eroberung der Jugend" (1931), AAE I, p.8.

and even at this early stage is shown to be the basis for political action. In other words it is shown to have a role to play in socialism. For it is Andreas' ability to dream of a more colourful and exciting life than the one he leads which prompts him to long for an escape from poverty.

...hungrig war er immer gewesen, aber seit kurzem hatte er einen andren, neuen Hunger. Der machte einen so leicht, machte alles so dünn und bunt, splitterte jetzt zum Beispiel kleine Fünkchen ab von der gelben Türklinke...⁵

And it is his longing for escape which attracts him to Hull, the sailor who arrives in St. Barbara and incites the fishermen to protest against the low wages being offered to them by their employers.

Andreas stand noch immer auf der Treppe. Er betrachtete noch immer eingehend Hulls Rücken ... "Der hat es gut", dachte Andreas, als ob er es von Hulls Rücken ablesen könnte, "der wird nie mehr so einen langen Landwinter erleben. Nie mehr wird er in so eine Stube zurückkehren müssen wie ich jetzt."⁶

The uprising fails, however. The fishermen's emotional, subjective understanding of the need for revolution, without an intellectual understanding of how to organise it, is shown to be insufficient in the face of the brutal measures taken by the shipping company owners, who have both the police and the armed forces on their side. Nevertheless, as the opening lines indicate, the fishermen have tasted victory and it is now only a matter of time before they obtain the political awareness necessary to bring them social justice:

5. Anna Seghers, *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara* (Leipzig/Weimar: 1981), p.27.

6. Ibid, p.31.

Der Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara endete mit der verspäteten Ausfahrt zu den Bedingungen der vergangenen vier Jahre ... Aber längst, nachdem die Soldaten zurückgezogen, die Fischer auf der See waren, saß der Aufstand noch auf dem leeren, weißen, sommerlich kahlen Marktplatz und dachte ruhig an die Seinigen, die er geboren, aufgezogen, gepflegt und behütet hatte für das was für sie am besten war.⁷

Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara was in fact the most succesful of Anna Seghers' works at this point. In 1928 it was awarded the Kleist prize, the judge, Hans Henny Jahnn, justifying his decision with the words:

Ein gutes Buch mit knapper und sehr deutlicher Sprache, in dem auch die geringste Figur Leben gewinnt. In dem die Tendenz schwächer ist als die Kraft des Menschlichen. Es ist ein Daseinsvorgang in fast metaphysischer Verklärung. Das nenne ich Kunst. Darüber hinaus: die Darstellungsart wirbt sogar bei fast Herzlosen für die Tendenz.⁸

His decision was controversial, however, particularly amongst bourgeois critics, who found the work too tendentious.⁹ Communist critics, on the other hand, felt that Seghers had not gone far enough, and Otto Biha, writing in *Literatur der Weltrevolution*, although prepared to admit that the novel had "...durch seine, wenn auch noch unmarxistische, so doch mit dem Proletariat sympathisierende Problemstellung, die noch mehr vom Gefühl ausgeht als von der kritischen Vernunft, eine immerhin revolutionisierende Wirkung ausgeübt", nevertheless insisted that "Wir dürfen keinesweges sagen, daß dieses Buch ein Bestandteil der proletarisch-

7. Ibid, p.5.

8. Hans Henny Jahnn, *Literatur* (Berlin, 2/1929). Here quoted from: H. Sembdner, ed., *Der Kleist Preis. Eine Dokumentation*, (Berlin: 1968), p.108.

9. Arno Schirokauer, *Die literarische Welt*, (Berlin, 11.1.1929). Ibid, p.106-107.

revolutionären Literatur in ihrem eigentlichen Sinn ist."¹⁰

Here again, therefore, we find expression of the two views which dominated discussions on socialist literature in the late 20s and early 30s. For whereas Jahnn seems to judge the "Kraft des Menschlichen" as a more important feature of the work than its "Tendenz", Biha is critical of the work's emotional appeal and lack of "kritische Vernunft", which he feels makes it unsuitable for the main task facing socialist writers, namely the conversion of the proletariat to Marxism.¹¹

Biha's argument can be seen to have its roots in Lenin's view that revolution is created by the conscious activist working upon the exploited poor who experience society's injustices at first hand. His criticism thus suggests that the writer should adopt the position of the conscious activist and use his work to enlighten the poor as to the true causes of their plight.

Anna Seghers' own acceptance of this position is clear from her article "Selbstanzeige" (1931), in which she is extremely critical of a number of her early short stories since they do not show people a way out of their misery:

In diesen Geschichten gibt es viele verzweifelte und untergehende Menschen. Wenn man schreibt, muß man so schreiben, daß man hinter der Verzweiflung die

10. Otto Biha, "Die proletarische Literatur in Deutschland". In: *Zur Tradition der deutschen sozialistischen Literatur 1926-35* (Berlin/Weimar: 1979), p.265.

11. Ibid, p.266.

Möglichkeit und hinter dem Untergang den Ausweg spürt. Ich hoffe, daß es mir gelingen wird, in dem Roman an dem ich jetzt arbeite, diesen Ausweg klar aufzuzeigen.¹²

However, she makes no mention of the stories' emotional appeal and years later, when her reputation as a leading socialist writer was firmly established, she was to state her belief that the depiction of the revolution from an emotional basis was the main source of its charm. As she said in an interview with Wilhelm Girnus in 1967:

Sonderbarerweise habe ich aber zuerst das kleine Buch der *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara* geschrieben, in dem es viel Unmittelbares und vielleicht auch dadurch Reizvolles, wenn ich das sagen darf, gibt, weil ich es eben noch sehr unkritisch, unverstandesmäßig hingeschrieben habe, aus einer vollen Liebe zu dem, was mir damals am besten gefiel.¹³

In fact, evidence that this was also her position in her early years can be found in the work to which she refers in "Selbstanzeige", *Die Gefährten* (1932), in which the importance of both an intellectual and an intuitive understanding of the need for revolution is again a major theme. Indeed here the emphasis is reversed. For in the face of the problems they suffer in exile it is the intellectual understanding of the revolution of the Hungarian students Bato and Steiner that is shown to be an inadequate basis for political activity without first-hand experience of poverty and thus of the need for radical change. In Bato's words:

12. Anna Seghers, "Selbstanzeige" (1931), AAE I, p.7.

13. Anna Seghers, "Gespräch mit Wilhelm Girnus", AAE II, p.434.

Es gibt eine Kluft zwischen Wissen und Leben, die man erst überbrücken muß, bevor man arbeitet, ohne das geht es nicht, verstehn Sie, Steiner, es genügt nicht, das, worüber man schreibt, im Bewußtsein zu haben. Man muß sich in der Wirklichkeit wirklich zurechtfinden wie ein Blinder in der Nacht ohne Stock -

Wenn ich in der Partei drinstecke, wie ich in meinem früheren Vorkriegsleben gesteckt habe, nicht bloß mit meinem Kopf, sondern ganz und gar, von oben bis unten, mit meinem ganzen Sinn -

Ja, dann werde ich arbeiten, etwas Gutes arbeiten.¹⁴

Steiner in fact capitulates. Tormented by fear and uncertainty and unaware of the suffering caused by starvation, he convinces himself of the hopelessness of the revolutionary cause, and, having sought temporary refuge in a provincial university town, he eventually chooses to settle there and break off all contact with the party.

Bato, however, reacts differently. Isolated from party activities in his own country, he does his best to find his way back to the party whilst in exile. It is a slow and difficult process, but he never resigns himself to defeat and gradually comes to terms with the problems of the new situation, realising that, however great the problems may be, the need to alleviate the suffering of the poor is both necessary and worthwhile and must be worked for at all costs.

Die Gefährten was inspired by the stories of the political emigrés with whom Anna Seghers came into contact at Heidelberg University. It tells of the reactions of communist party workers all over the world

14. Anna Seghers, *Die Gefährten*, (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1981), p.131-132.

to defeat at the hands of the counter-revolutionary forces in power in their countries and was clearly intended as a source of support and encouragement for all those engaged in party activities in the early thirties. That literature could play such a role is one of the main themes of the novel in which the myths and legends of past heroes are shown to play an important part in inspiring hope and courage in the workers. This is made particularly clear in the Bulgarian episodes. By day the peasants are bludgeoned into submission by the ruling counter-revolutionary forces, but at night, when they seek refuge in the inn from the misery and suffering of daily life, they find new strength in the songs and legends about the successes of those who have helped bring the alleviation of that suffering a little closer.

Auf einmal, als ihre Flüche so hart waren, daß man sie packen und schleudern konnte, gerade an dieser Stelle, als sei das Ganze nutzlos und eine Schande in seiner Nutzlosigkeit, brachen sie ab im Fluchen und, abgebrochen, aus wemnschon, denn schon, zupfte eine Hand ein paar Saiten an. Sie seufzten beschämt, erleichtert, als sei eine unerträgliche Last weggenommen, duckten sich zusammen und wiegten sich.¹⁵

Nor are the tales limited to past heroes. Stories of the exemplary behaviour of contemporary party workers, whose courageous actions expose the fallibility of the ruling forces, serve as a constant source of inspiration for the peasants since they fire their imagination and make them aware of possibilities outside the realm of their everyday experience.

15. Ibid, p.75.

The stories and songs which provide the farmers with respite from the misery of their everyday lives underline Anna Seghers' belief in the power of art, of literature, to fire people's imagination, to stimulate their dreams and longings. This was the basis of her conviction that literature could shape people's consciousness, for these are the qualities which make the perception of change possible and cause people to act to alter their lives. As Biha's criticism has shown, these qualities were seen to have no place in socialist literature at the time, since the power of socialism was seen to lie in the force of its intellectual argument rather than its emotional appeal. Anna Seghers, however, convinced by her own experiences as a child when literature had provided her with a means of escape from the loneliness of her life at home, emphasises the importance not only of intellectual argument but also of the realm of the imagination for the realisation of socialist ideals, even at a time when her work is otherwise characterised by party loyalty and a desire to fulfil the aims of the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers to the best of her ability.

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Die Gefährten was Anna Seghers' last work to be published in Germany for many years. In 1933 the rise to power of the National Socialists forced the League into a position of illegality and many of its members into exile, and Anna Seghers, after spending several hours in police custody, fled to Paris.

In Paris Anna Seghers was extremely active in a number of organisations founded to assist exiled German writers and to promote the publication of anti-fascist literature. She was a member of the Association of German Writers in Exile,¹⁶ spoke at a number of congresses and, together with Wieland Herzfelde, Oskar Maria Graf and Jan Petersen, co-edited the literary journal *Neue deutsche Blätter*. The first edition appeared in Prague in September 1933, carrying an editorial which stated quite firmly that:

Es gibt keine Neutralität. Für niemanden. Am wenigsten für den Schriftsteller. Auch wer schweigt, nimmt teil am Kampf. Wer erschreckt und betäubt von den Ereignissen in ein nur privates Dasein flieht, wer die Waffe des Wortes als Spielzeug oder Schmuck verwendet, wer abgeklärt resigniert, der verdammt sich selbst zu sozialer und künstlerischer Unfruchtbarkeit und räumt dem Gegner das Feld.¹⁷

The message is clear. If, before Hitler's rise to power, there had been any doubt that the writer had a role to play in society, that doubt was no longer valid. Indeed, the isolation of the writer can only be harmful for both society in general, since his silence ultimately benefits the enemy, and for the artist himself, who is confronted with a feeling of uselessness and begins to question the purpose of his existence. Seghers therefore urges her fellow writers to join with her in the fight against National Socialism, since it is only through "gemeinsame

17. David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers* (London: 1973), p.150.

17. Anna Seghers, ed., *Neue Deutsche Blätter*, (1/1933), p.3. Here quoted from *Neue Deutsche Blätter Band I*, (Berlin: 1974), p.1.

Arbeit" and "kameradschaftliche Auseinandersetzung";¹⁸ that victory can be achieved.

Her works of the time, particularly those concerned with the events of the Austrian uprising of 1934, "Der letzte Weg des Koloman Wallisch" and *Der Weg durch den Februar*, support this view. They focus on the destructive nature of division and are critical of Social Democrats and Communists alike for failing to recognize the common ground which united them and might have made National Socialist victory impossible. Sooner than many of her colleagues, therefore, and some time before the concept of a popular front became enshrined as party policy at the Brussels conference in 1935,¹⁹ Anna Seghers realized that the aim to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat now had to take second place to the fight against National Socialism, a fight which demanded resistance from all sides if it was to end in victory.

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Seghers believed that one of the main reasons for the victory of the National Socialists was their ability to capture the imagination of a large section of the German population:

Der Hitlerfaschismus hat uns gelehrt, daß der Feind eine jede Lücke, die wir in der Vorstellungswelt der Massen gelassen haben, jeden Punkt im Gehirn, den wir brachliegen gelassen haben, mit seinen eigenen Ideen besetzt.²⁰

19. Anna Seghers, Ibid.

20. See Chapter One, p.18.

20. Anna Seghers, "Zum Schriftstellerkongreß in Madrid" (1937), AAE I, p.46.

In her opinion it was therefore the task of socialists to reclaim that imagination by offering an alternative vision:

Einer Jugend, die der Faschismus daran gewöhnt hat, vom "gefährlichen Leben" zu träumen, müssen wir eine von Grund auf andere Konzeption des Lebens bieten: eine Wahrheit die weit verführerischer ist als die Lüge, das Aufsichnehmen von Gefahren für die Wahrheit.²¹

This was a task in which literature could, in her view, play an essential part. We have already seen that in her early works she takes into account people's dreams and longings and sees the role of literature to lie in feeding those longings, thereby prompting people to act to bring about social change. In her exile works she developed this element of her writing in an attempt to produce a literature which appealed to socialists and non-socialists alike and convinced them of the need to do all in their power to fight the evils of National Socialism.

Particularly important in this respect are a number of short stories which, whilst they employ elements of the fairy tale, the myth and the legend, nevertheless deal with subjects very close to Anna Seghers own experience. "Sagen von Artemis" (1937), for example, tells of the fascination, particularly for the young, of the exotic, the unknown; whilst the three tales which make up the trilogy "Die drei Bäume" (1940), centre on the themes of flight, exile and homecoming. They thus provide an excellent illustration of one of Anna Seghers'

21. Anna Seghers, "Und jetzt muß man arbeiten" (1938), AAE I, p.66.

main aims in her writing, namely to combine fairy-tale and realistic elements,²² and it is significant that she gives full expression to this aspect of her work at a time when her concern for the establishment of a socialist Germany has given way to her concern to produce a literature with a broad mass appeal.

The stories also suggest a dimension of experience which is not to be explained in material terms, a dimension which includes the longings for adventure, for companionship, for home, and it is at precisely those longings that the stories themselves are aimed. This is stated quite clearly in the motto at the head of the earliest of the stories, "Die schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok" (1936) which proclaims the author's belief that art and literature not only provide people with a refuge from the harshness of reality but also move them in a way that political agitation - symbolised by the bloody fist - cannot:

Und habt ihr denn etwa keine Träume, wilde und zarte, im Schlaf zwischen zwei harten Tagen? und wißt ihr vielleicht, warum zuweilen ein altes Märchen, ein kleines Lied, ja nur der Takt eines Liedes, gar mühelos in die Herzen eindringt, an denen wir unsere Fäuste blutig klopfen? Ja, mühelos rührt der Pfiff eines Vogels an den Grund des Herzens und dadurch auch an die Wurzeln der Handlungen.²³

22. Christa Wolf, "Glauben an Irdisches" (1968), DA. p.294.

Es gab dabei zwei Linien: erzählen, was mich heute erregt, und die Farbigkeit von Märchen. Das hätte ich am liebsten vereint und wußte nicht, wie.

23. Anna Seghers, "Die schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok" (1936). In: *Erzählungen 1926-44* (Berlin/Weimar: 1981), p.210.

And on a number of occasions throughout the story we see Woynok, the solitary bandit who is torn between a life of independence and one of companionship with a robber band, moved by the robbers' songs into an awareness of a different life from the one he himself leads:

Jetzt kamen die Räuber erst richtig in Zug. Klar und rein waren ihre Lieder... Nie hatte Woynok etwas begehrt, was man nicht hatte rauben können - durch Gewalt oder durch List, als Pilger verkleidet oder den Fuß in den Türspalt geklemmt und zugleich den Flintenlauf. Nie hatte er Leiden gekannt, die man nicht aus dem Fleisch herausschneiden oder ausbrennen konnte oder einfach von sich abschütteln wie Läuse. Jetzt aber, minutenlang über dem Feuer, gab es unraubbare Freuden und unausbrennbare Leiden, denn sie waren gar nicht da.²⁴

The capacity of literature to address people's innermost longings and to stimulate their imagination to the extent that they are encouraged to act to change their lives is also thematicized in a number of Anna Seghers' major novels of the time. In *Die Rettung* (1937) the Jack London books which Lorenz borrows from the public library are shown to provide him with a means of escape from the miseries of unemployment and make him aware of a world where his abilities might be needed:

Dieser Seewolf ist ein Riese. Er ist auf allen Meeren gefahren. Die ganze Mannschaft zittert vor ihm, die abgebrühtesten. Er streckt den Beschwerdeführer mit einem Faustschlag zu Boden. Mich würde er nicht zu Boden strecken. Ich würde ihn mit einem Blick zähmen. Sein bereits erhobener Arm würde vor meinem Blick langsam heruntergleiten. Auf dieses Schiff käme mit meiner Ankunft ein anderes Leben. Der Bann wäre gebrochen.²⁵

In *Das siebte Kreuz* (1942) it is not a work of literature as such but the stories of Georg's escape from

24. Ibid, p.216-217.

25. Anna Seghers, *Die Rettung* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1965), p.216-217.

the concentration camp which, since they expose the fallibility of the Nazis, unleash the imaginative powers of all who hear them and give them the strength to perform actions they would otherwise not have dreamed possible. This is true of the gardener's apprentice and Hitler Youth member Fritz Helwig who, in an attempt to win time for Georg, denies all recognition of his jacket, which had been stolen by Georg in the early hours of his escape; it is true of Paul Roder, Georg's childhood friend who has never been involved in politics but who offers Georg shelter; and it is true of the Kreß couple, who have been Communists all their lives but inactive during the early years of National Socialist rule. In the words of the prisoners left inside the camp Georg's escape is:

Ein kleiner Triumph, gewiß, gemessen an unserer Ohnmacht, an unseren Sträflingskleidern. Und doch ein Triumph, der einen die eigene Kraft plötzlich fühlen ließ nach wer weiß wie langer Zeit, jene Kraft, die lang genug taxierte worden war, sogar von uns selbst, als sei sie bloß eine der vielen gewöhnlichen Kräfte der Erde, die man nach Maßen und Zahlen abtaxiert, wo sie doch die einzige Kraft ist, die plötzlich ins Maßlose wachsen kann, ins Unberechenbare.²⁶

In *Transit*, too, the narrator's discovery of the unfinished manuscript of the writer Weidel, who has recently committed suicide, wakes him from his indifference and changes the course of his whole life. Here, the power of literature to affect even an uninterested mind, its ability to illuminate the otherwise complex processes of everyday life is revealed

26. Anna Seghers, *Das siebte Kreuz* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1978), p.7.

in the effect which reading the work has on the narrator, normally by no means an avid reader:

So hatte ich nur als Kind gelesen, nein, zugehört. Ich fühlte dieselbe Freude, dasselbe Grauen. Der Wald war ebenso undurchdringlich. Doch war es ein Wald für Erwachsene. Der Wolf war ebenso böse, doch es war ein Wolf, der ausgewachsene Kinder betört. Auch mich traf der alte Bann, der in den Märchen die Knaben in Bären verwandelt hat und die Mädchen in Lilien, und drohte von neuem in dieser Geschichte mit grimmigen Verwandlungen. All diese Menschen ärgerten mich nicht durch ihre Vertracktheit, wie sie's im Leben getan hätten, durch ihr blödes Auf-den-Leim-Gehen, durch ihr Hineinschlittern in ein Schicksal. Ich begriff ihre Handlungen, weil ich sie endlich einmal verfolgen konnte von dem ersten Gedanken ab bis zu dem Punkt, wo alles kam, wie es kommen mußte.²⁷

In all three works the emphasis is on people's inner qualities, their inner strengths. As Anna Seghers herself explained in connection with *Die Rettung*:

Nachdem diese Menschen das Letzte an Heldenhaftigkeit hergegeben hatten, unter Tag, wurde das Bergwerk geschlossen, und sie hatten keine Arbeit mehr. Ich fragte mich, wie sie dann lebten mit ihren großen inneren Fähigkeiten.²⁸

By "innere Fähigkeiten" Anna Seghers means the imaginative and creative powers of ordinary men and women, and this statement could also be applied to both *Das siebte Kreuz* and *Transit* in which she is less concerned with the characters' actions than with the reflective processes which precede them. In *Die Rettung* this is particularly true of Katharina and Marie, both of whom possess a vivid imagination which provides them with some respite, however brief, from the monotony of their work in the home. The reader is allowed access to their thoughts by the narrator's use of the interior monologue,

27. Anna Seghers, *Transit* (Leipzig: 1980), p.22-23.

28. Anna Seghers, "Gespräch mit Christa Wolf", AAE II, p.419.

a technique which is particularly effective in one of the most moving passages in the novel when Katharina, after her abortion, sits dying on the stairs outside her room and has a vision of her sister Marie:

Katharina hob schützend die Hände gegen ein ganzes Gestöber von Gesichtern, die sie gar nicht haben wollte, Fetzen von Bildern, die niemand mehr zusammensetzen konnte. Sie vergingen auch, wie sie gekommen waren. Bis auf ein einziges unter tausend, klarer als die andern. Jetzt war es schon so deutlich, daß sie den kleinen Riß in der Unterlippe sehen konnte und die braunen Tüpflein in den grauen, weitaufgerissenen Augen. Ihre Stiefschwester Marie, blaß vor Anstrengung, denn sie hielt mit dünnen Armen die Katze hoch, damit das Kind stillhielt, das Katharina auf ihren Knien fütterte.²⁹

Later, Marie herself is shown to share the same capacity when, on her way to enquire about Lorenz's arrest at the police station, she imagines how their life together might have been under different circumstances:

Sie stellte sich Lorenz vor, wie er auf der Karlssteige neben sie getreten war und ihre Finger auseinandergebogen und ihren Glasklicker in die Tasche gesteckt hatte. Das hätte auch anders weitergehen können. Man hätte sich dann später auch treffen können, man hätte auch miteinander in den Wald gehen können und in die Torfahnten, das wäre dann die Liebe geworden. Sie bog in die Riemannstraße ein, in die die Ludwigstraße münden mußte. Ihre Furcht legte sich etwas... Das wäre dann die Liebe geworden. Man hätte sich dann vor nichts mehr gefürchtet. Man wäre in die Hölle hineingegangen, um einen Zipfel von ihm zu erwischen. Ihre frechen Blicke, ihre Mäuler, ihre Pistolen, ihre hohen Stiefel hätten einem nichts anhaben können. Sie stand jetzt schon an der Ludwigstraße. Zum Glück war die Straße lang.³⁰

The use of the word 'man' identifies Marie with the collective, and it is important to note that Marie's reflections, in spite of their intensely personal nature, are not subjective, they are not concerned with her fate

29. Anna Seghers, *Die Rettung* (see note 22), p.159.

30. Ibid, p.317.

alone but are shown to have a general relevance for others of her class. It is significant too, that Katharina, when faced with death, should think not of herself but of her sister. The reflections of the two characters are therefore not presented in order to highlight the importance of subjectivity, but rather as a means of exploring the significance of people's imaginative capabilities for the class struggle. In fact, in both *Das siebte Kreuz* and *Transit* similar occasions can be found where the reader is taken from a detailed portrayal of the characters' actions into the characters' thoughts which are shown to be not only the basis of people's behaviour but also an important means of illuminating that behaviour.

This emphasis on the reflective processes which precede and accompany the characters' actions rather than on the actions themselves met with some opposition from communist critics at the time of the novels' publication. Klara Blum, for example, writing on *Die Rettung* in 1938, expressed the opinion:

Es ist die überzeugendste Stärke Anna Seghers', daß sie solche Gestalten zu schaffen vermag. Es ist ihre Schwäche, daß sie diese ihre herrlichen von Wahrheit und Eigenart strotzenden Schöpfungen dem Leser so zerfasert, in unzählige psychologische Einzelheiten zergliedert vorführt, daß er vor lauter Bäumen den Wald nicht mehr sieht und durch all die Mosaiksteinchen, Fasern, Haare - oft gespaltenen Haare - hindurch nur mühselig und mit schmerzenden Augen die Umrisse großer und plastischer Persönlichkeiten erkennt.³¹

31. Julius Steinfeld/Klara Blum, "Zwei Stimmen zu einem Werk". In: *Das Wort*, (3/1938), p.134-140.

And Georg Lukács, although he accepts that *Das siebte Kreuz* is Germany's best novel about the Third Reich, is critical of the fact that Anna Seghers does not explain fully the social and historical reasons for the anti-fascist fight:

Selbst der weitaus beste Roman über das faschistische Deutschland, das "Siebente Kreuz" von Anna Seghers, leidet unter solchen Schwächen. An Bildhaftigkeit der einzelnen Situationen, an innerer Wahrheit der dargestellten Menschen beider Lager hat Anna Seghers Außerordentliches geleistet. Und doch kommt auch sie oft nicht über die Schilderung sinnlicher oder psychologischer Zuständlichkeiten hinaus, in denen sie freilich ihre ungewöhnliche Energie der Vergegenwärtigung plastisch zeigt. Das tiefe Warum des Kampfes, das Herauswachsen seines gesellschaftsgeschichtlichen Sinnes aus individuellen Erlebnissen, Zusammenhängen, Konflikten lebendiger Einzelmenschen bleibt auch hier von einem - dichterisch allerdings hochwertigen - Schleier verhüllt.³²

Their comments are reminiscent of those of Otto Biha in connection with *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara*,³³ and provide further evidence of the difficulties experienced by communist critics in accommodating subjective perceptions in their theory of literature, since it was felt that an excessive concern with the characters' inner life hindered the presentation of true causes of National Socialism which, according to Marxist analysis, are socio-economic.

It is true that, with their insistence on the importance of man's subjective perceptions, and on the existence of an indestructible inner core, Anna Seghers' exile works could be regarded as humanist rather than

32. Georg Lukács, *Die deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (Berlin: 1946), p.65.

33. See p.46.

marxist in approach. This perhaps accounts for the popularity of *Das siebte Kreuz* in the United States, where it was made into a film in 1943/44, but it is significant that the film excludes the role of the communist party, whereas in the novel, although the communist party is shown to be dependent on help from all sections of German society, it is nevertheless instrumental in the organisation of Georg's escape. Moreover, even though both *Der Weg durch den Februar* and *Die Rettung* contain a great deal of criticism of dogmatic party officials, the underlying theme of both works leaves no doubt about the author's commitment to the party's objectives. Nor does Anna Seghers dispute the economic attractions of National Socialism - her works contain a number of characters who join the Nazi party because of the economic benefits it brings them - but she realized that part of its appeal also lay in its ability to offer people a vision, a means of escape from the monotony of everyday life. In *Das siebte Kreuz* this is best illustrated by the figures of Fahrenberg and Zillich who join the Nazi party not only for the material benefits it offers, but also because it allows them to believe that they are in some way better than their fellow men.

Seghers felt that it was the task of socialist writers to reclaim that vision, and her concern in her works with the characters' dreams and longings, far from hindering the advancement of socialism, is instead intended to reveal the immense inner strength within men

and women which can be harnessed for the socialist cause, thereby bringing its realisation closer.

This is why Seghers is so critical of Lukács' demands for an "objective" reflection of reality in accordance with the methods of the nineteenth century realists in her letters to him in 1938/39. For not only was Seghers worried that Lukács' insistence on the superiority of one method above all others could alienate writers otherwise sympathetic to the anti-Nazi cause, she was also afraid that Lukács' socialist literary model, since it excluded the validity of subjective perceptions, failed to exploit what she perceived to be the true power of literature, namely to stimulate people's dreams and longings. What's more, Lukács' insistence that writers conform to an inappropriate literary model which did not relate to their experience of their time, could, she felt, lead to the production of unrealistic and schematic works which failed to win people over to the anti-Nazi cause:

Du gehst davon aus, und mit Recht, daß der Kampf gegen den Faschismus in der Literatur nur mit ganz entgifteten, ganz ausgeräucherten Köpfen wirksam geführt wird. Auf unserem Gebiet verknüpfst Du diesen Kampf eng mit bestimmten methodischen Fragen. Da fürchte ich, daß eine Verengung eintritt, wo von Dir selbst eben Raum gewonnen wurde, nach der andern Seite: an Fülle und Farbigkeit in unsrer Literatur. Ich fürchte, daß man vor eine Alternative gestellt wird, wo es gar nicht um Entweder-Oder geht, sondern in diesem Fall um die Zusammenfassung, um eine starke, vielfältige antifaschistische Kunst, an der alle teilhaben, die als Antifaschisten und Schriftsteller dazu qualifiziert sind.³⁴

34. Ibid, p.87-88.

Her own works of the time represent an attempt to do precisely this, to produce a literature of colour and variety which will aid the fight against National Socialism. As such they are fully in accordance with the aims of the Popular Front in that they emphasise the need for people of all political persuasions to work together against National Socialism, and she employs a variety of styles and genres in an attempt to produce a literature with a broad mass appeal. At this point, therefore, Anna Seghers was able to use the demands of the Popular Front to justify her own view of literature against the objections of theoreticians such as Lukács, and it is perhaps not surprising that her exile works, written at a time when she no longer felt it necessary to toe the party line, are generally regarded as being amongst her most successful.

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In 1947 Anna Seghers left exile in Mexico and travelled via Sweden to Germany. She did not immediately enter the Soviet Occupied Zone but instead settled in the Allied sector of Berlin, hoping, according to Brecht, to retain her Mexican passport and to work for the publication of her novels in the West:

um ihren mexikanischen paß zu behalten, wohnt sie nicht im russischen sektor, hat so auch nicht die vergünstigungen, ohne die arbeit unmöglich ist. sie möchte ihre bücher auch in den nichtrussischen zonen gelesen haben. sie scheint verängstigt durch die intrigen, verdächte, bespitzelungen.³⁵

35. Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal 1938-55*, (Berlin/Weimar: 1977), p.431.

Eventually she did move to the Russian sector, however, Brecht's closing comment possibly indicating her reasons for doing so, and was given a warm welcome by the East German authorities.³⁶

For many years Anna Seghers had been working for the realisation of socialist ideals in Germany. In 1947, after the horrors of National Socialist rule, the Soviet backed regime in the East seemed to offer a far more adequate basis for the foundation of a progressive egalitarian society than the resurgent capitalism of the West. Furthermore, the East German government showed an awareness of the importance of the written word unparalleled in any Western nation and totally in accordance with Anna Seghers' own view of the writer as an active participant in the socialist struggle. As she herself later explained:

Man fragt mich oft, warum ich nach dem Krieg in diesen Teil Deutschlands fuhr, der damals die Sowjetzone war, und nicht in meine Heimat an den Rhein. Darauf antworte ich: Weil ich hier die Resonanz haben kann, die sich ein Schriftsteller wünscht. Weil hier ein enger Zusammenhang besteht zwischen dem geschriebenen Wort und dem Leben. Weil ich hier ausdrücken kann, wozu ich gelebt habe.³⁷

And although shocked by the level of destruction she saw around her, both in the towns and in the people themselves, she quickly settled down to what she regarded as the writer's main task at that time, the clearing away of the ruins of fascist ideology from people's minds:

Wir wissen ja alle, daß in uns allen und bestimmt in Menschen, die bis vor fünf oder sechs Jahren noch

36. Anna Seghers, "Der Besuch", AAE II, p.78.

37. Anna Seghers, "Ansprache in Weimar" (1965), AAE II, p.308.

beinahe alle aktiv Faschisten gewesen sind, in dem Bewußtsein und den Gehirnen noch recht viel Trümmer enthalten sind. Dies Aufräumen und gleichzeitig die grandiose, einzig mögliche Zukunft zeigen - das gehört alles zu der Arbeit des Schriftstellers.³⁸

This is the main concern of Anna Seghers' works of the immediate post-war years as she attempts to explain the events leading up to the defeat of Germany and to point the way to the future. Thus the short stories "Das Ende" (1945) and "Die Saboteure" (1946) deal with the collapse of National Socialism, and the novel *Die Toten bleiben jung* (1949) traces the events which brought about Hitler's rise to and eventual fall from power at the end of the Second World War; whilst in the fifties stories such as "Friedensgeschichten" (1950) and "Der erste Schritt" (1953) focus on the years of reconstruction in the GDR. These last works are extremely didactic. They proclaim Anna Seghers' faith in the new socialist state and are clearly intended as a source of support and guidance to readers in the GDR.

The same is true of Anna Seghers' major novels of the post-war period, *Die Entscheidung* (1959) and *Das Vertrauen* (1968), both of which deal with the early years of the new socialist republic. *Die Entscheidung* covers the years 1947-51 and *Das Vertrauen*, takes up the story in 1952, finishing with the events of the June uprising of 1953. Both fulfil the criteria of socialist realism, as outlined in Chapter One, in that they are concerned with the everyday lives of ordinary people in the GDR and

38. Anna Seghers, "Rede auf dem II. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongreß 1950", AAE I, p.337.

present reality in its revolutionary development. For in spite of a number of problems which the characters encounter, there is no doubt that they are progressing towards the realisation of socialist ideals. The novels are partisan, the negative depiction of the West, where human qualities such as kindness, generosity and companionship are shown to be totally lacking, underlines the positive nature of socialist society, where such qualities are actively encouraged. They focus on typical situations and characters, and there is no shortage of positive heroes such as Richard Hagen and Robert Lohse who, through their unfailing commitment to socialism and tireless efforts to work for its advancement, function as perfect role models for their fellow workers.

The novels were very positively received in the East where they were hailed as masterpieces of socialist realism. Hans Jürgen Geerdts, writing for *Neue Deutsche Literatur* is full of praise for Anna Seghers' achievements in investing the nineteenth century realist tradition with a socialist perspective:

Anna Seghers und andere haben bereits das Fundament einer neuen sozialistischen Klassizität dadurch errungen, daß sie unter der Einwirkung des neuen Helden unserer Literatur, nämlich des bewußt sozialistisch denkenden und handelnden Arbeiters das Bild der Gesellschaft in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik als ein in steter vorwärtsweisender Veränderung begriffenes Bild abzeichneten. Dadurch unterscheiden sich ihre Werke bei aller Traditionsverflochtenheit deutlich von den Romanen des Bürgertums, auch von den klassischen.³⁹

39. Hans Jürgen Geerdts, "Die Arbeiterklasse in unserer neuesten epischen Literatur - Anna Seghers *Die Entscheidung*", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (5/1960), p.137.

However, the novels came in for a great deal of criticism in the West. Marcel Reich Ranicki in fact describes *Das Vertrauen* as obscene because it presents what he regards as Seghers' love for Stalin,⁴⁰ and accuses Seghers of capitulating to the demands of the new socialist regime.⁴¹

Reich-Ranicki's accusations are based in part on Seghers' presentation in the novel both of Stalin's death and of the revelations which followed it concerning the unjust sentencing of a number of his doctors. Yet Seghers' incorporation of these events in the novel must be seen to have arisen not out of a desire to praise Stalin, but rather to reveal people's true attitude towards the socialist state, which is not as positive as they are generally able to lead others to believe.⁴² Moreover, she presents a teenager's idolisation of Stalin in a very critical light and points to the dangers of the personality cult which, since it is based on an irrational acceptance of a person's infallibility, makes critical thought impossible and therefore hinders socialist progress.⁴³

Nor is Reich-Ranicki's charge of capitulation justified, implying as it does that Seghers abandoned all that she believed in and produced socialist realist works

40. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Bankrott einer Erzählerin" (Review of *Das Vertrauen*), *Die Zeit*, 14.3.1969.

41. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Von Erniedrigten und Beleidigten, Anna Seghers *Die Kraft der Schwachen*", *Die Zeit*, 28.1.1966.

42. Anna Seghers, *Das Vertrauen*, p.136-137.

43. Ibid, p.153-154.

simply because this was expected of her by the party. It is true that, in spite of her reservations about Lukács' insistence on the superiority of one literary model above all others, she now accepted the nineteenth century model as the one best suited to the task confronting her, and acknowledged Lukács' influence in enabling her to achieve clarity on a number of points connected with socialist literary theory.

Obwohl ich schon lange selbst schrieb, begann ich erst damals ... gründlich darüber nachzudenken, was den alten und neuen Büchern, die meine Freunde und Helfer waren, solche Wirkungskraft gab. Ich begann über ihren Aufbau und ihre Struktur nachzudenken. Ich verglich die Feststellung Lukács' mit den Romanen von Scholochow oder von Balzac. Ich machte mir die Methode klar mit der sie geschrieben waren.⁴⁴

However, this was less a result of capitulation on Anna Seghers' part than of her perception that a changed historical situation demanded a different literary approach. In the essay "Der Lehrer" (1951) she wrote: "Ihr Lehrer, wir Schriftsteller, wir helfen hier im Osten von Deutschland mit bei der Erziehung der Jugend"⁴⁵, and throughout the late forties and early fifties her essays contained a number of references to the writer as "Lehrer", "Erzieher" and "Umerzieher". If, during her exile years, therefore, one of her aims had been to explain the evils of National Socialism and how it came about, her chief desire after returning to Germany was to reeducate the German people in the ideals of socialism, and for this purpose the doctrine of socialist realism, with its strong didactic element, was eminently suited.

44. Anna Seghers, "Georg Lukács", AAE II, p.75.

45. Anna Seghers, "Der Lehrer", AAE II, p.337.

Nevertheless, she continued to be critical of Lukács' insistence on the superiority of one form above all others,⁴⁶ and frequently pleaded for greater tolerance towards writers on the part of critics. Indeed, on a number of occasions she championed the works of younger writers such as Brigitte Reimann and Peter Hacks who had been accused by critics of failing to invest their works with a socialist perspective.⁴⁷

In her post-war essays and speeches Anna Seghers points out that whilst ideological clarity is important, it is not all that a writer needs - "Ideologische Klarheit genügt nicht, um einen Schriftsteller, selbst wenn er talentiert ist, zum 'Meister' zu machen."⁴⁸ She argues that a writer's role is different from that of a scientist or a historian, since he is concerned with the inner processes at work in people and only in this way can he hope to penetrate readers minds and thus shape their consciousness and convince them of the benefits of socialism.

Hilft er (der Schriftsteller) durch seinen Beruf an der großen Veränderung unserer Gesellschaft, dann muß er vor allem die Vorgänge im Innern der Menschen kennen und darstellen. Nur dann kann er wieder zurück auf das Innere wirken... Von dem Schriftsteller wird etwas anderes verlangt als nur die Schilderung unserer Aufbauwerke und der damit verbundenen Arbeitsprozesse. Von ihm wird verlangt,

46. Anna Seghers, "Literaturkritik als Gesellschaftsauftrag", AAE II, p.360.

47. See: Anna Seghers, "Über eine Rezension", AAE II, p.184-185, and "Der empfindlichste aller Stoffe", AAE II, p.190-195.

48. Anna Seghers, "Die große Veränderung und unsere Literatur. Rede auf dem IV. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongreß 1956", AAE II, p.88.

daß er darstellt, was sich dabei im Innern der Menschen zuträgt. Wie und was sie lieben und hassen, was sie anspornt und was sie hemmt.⁴⁹

And she insists that for him to be able to do this successfully, the socialist perspective must be second nature to the writer, it must be part of the way he sees the world, and not imposed on the art work:

es ist nicht so, wie man manchmal denkt, daß die Leistung des Schriftstellers sich in dem Maße steigert, in dem sich seine ideologische Klarheit steigert. Erst wenn ihm das, was er weiß, zur zweiten Natur geworden ist, kann er auch durch das, was er schreibt, voll auf die Leser wirken. Dann kann er sie dazu bringen "Altgewohntes mit neuen Augen zu sehen."⁵⁰

The contrast between on the one hand Seghers criticism of schematicism in GDR literature, and on the other hand her whole-hearted affirmation of the doctrine of socialist realism (which in her letters to Lukács she had identified as a possible cause of schematicism) is characteristic of Anna Seghers' post-war essays, and must be seen as an indication of her desire to reconcile her own personal convictions with the demands now placed on her by the socialist state. She herself broaches this point in her essays on Tolstoy, written in the early fifties after a visit to the Tolstoy archive in Moscow.

In the essays, Seghers repeats Tolstoy's theory of the three stage creative process which she had quoted in her letters to Lukács in the thirties in order to illustrate the importance of the artist's experience of reality in the creation of the art work. She complains, as she had done fifteen years earlier, that many writers

49. Ibid, p.103.

50. Ibid, p.106.

are still beginning on the second level, they are still writing according to an idea rather than according to their experience of reality:

Es gibt hier bei uns überall viele Künstler, die auf der zweiten Stufe beginnen - und enden. Sie sind nicht von der Wirklichkeit ausgegangen, die frisch und unmittelbar auf sie wirkte. Sie gehen sogleich von ihrem Bewußtsein aus, von ihren als richtig erkannten Gedanken, für die sie dann in der Wirklichkeit gleichsam Belege suchen. Obwohl sie die Prinzipien der realistischen Kunst in der Theorie akzeptieren, gehen sie in der Praxis nicht von der Wirklichkeit aus, vom Menschen und seinen Lebensbedingungen, sondern von ihrem eigenen Bewußtsein.⁵¹

And although Seghers does not deny that an "Auftrag", that guidance from outside is necessary, indeed she feels that it is often essential if the writer is to find his way towards the subjects most suited to his ability, she insists that it must also be in tune with the writer's experience of reality if a work of art is to result.

Wird der Künstler hier von unserem Staat einen Auftrag erteilt ... dann wird ihm kein Kunstwerk gelingen, wenn er sich nur aus anderen Gründen bemüht, einen Auftrag auszuführen, der seiner Eigenart nicht entspricht. Er wird zwar Tatsachen lernen und sie montieren gemäß den Begriffen des sozialistischen Realismus. Er wird aber kalt dabei bleiben, und auch der Leser bleibt kalt.⁵²

In Anna Seghers' view, Tolstoy is an excellent example of a writer who has succeeded in achieving that synthesis between "Auftrag" and "Intuition". For when he wrote *War and Peace* Tolstoy was writing both according to his experience of the world around him and, at the same time, according to what he perceived to be his task, namely the "Befreiungskampf des russischen Volkes zu gestalten,

51. Anna Seghers, "Tolstoi", AAE I, p.438-439.

52. Anna Seghers, "Über die Entstehung von *Krieg und Frieden*", AAE II, p.12.

nacherlebbar für alle Menschen und Zeiten"⁵³ and she concludes: "Es war also weder Nur-Intuition, noch war es Nur-Auftrag. Und es war beides zusammen".⁵⁴

Precisely what Anna Seghers means by the word "Auftrag" in this last quotation, however, is uncertain, for whereas at the beginning of the letter it quite clearly refers to a commission from the state, in the case of Tolstoy no such commission existed, it was a task he set himself. Seghers is therefore quite right to say that in Tolstoy's case it was neither a question of "Intuition" or "Auftrag" but a combination of both, but only because Tolstoy never received such a commission - he enjoyed the freedom to write according to his own inclinations and according to his own sense of responsibility as a writer.

In fact, the situation Seghers presents is less an accurate description of Tolstoy's position as a writer than it is of her own, for she herself chose to write according to her own experience, part of which was her commitment to socialism. She therefore felt that it was her task to portray the route to socialist victory in her works and never required the demand of the state to do so. This is also the basis from which Seghers believed others had to write if convincing works of socialist literature were to be produced which would move people sufficiently to bring about social change. Some years

53. Ibid, p.20.

54. Ibid.

later, in the essay "Die Aufgaben des Schriftstellers heute" she clarifies the point further when she writes:

Wir schreiben von innen heraus auf Grund unserer Natur und unseres Charakters und unserer spezifischen Fähigkeiten, und wir werden auch von außen dazu gebracht, manchmal durch ein dauerndes Klopfen an der Tür. Kannst du nicht für mich eintreten? Manchmal hören wir dieses Klopfen, ohne daß man geklopft hat. Schreibe ich, was ich auch schreibe, einzig und allein aus innerem Bedürfnis, das sich entschieden selbst sein Thema wählt, oder im Auftrag, um, zu helfen bei der Veränderung. Ich glaube, zwischen diesen beiden Möglichkeiten gibt es, so verschieden sie aussehen, keinen großen Unterschied. Wenn ich kein Einsiedler bin, sogar wenn ich Einsiedler wäre, würde ich ehrlich über meine eigenen Probleme schreiben, aber dadurch schreibe ich auch über Probleme der Welt, in der ich lebe.⁵⁵

The point that Anna Seghers is making here is that, in her case at least, there is little distinction between the demands of the state and the demands she places on herself, since her commitment to socialism is such that she fully accepts the demands of the socialist state.

Whether or not this really was the case is debatable. In his article "'Ich bin in die Eiszeit geraten ...' Zur Rückkehr von Anna Seghers aus dem Exil", Alexander Stephan argues that Anna Seghers' return to the GDR was far more problematic than critics are generally prepared to admit.⁵⁶ He finds evidence for this in the delays accompanying the publication of many of her exile works, the negative reception of certain of these by communist critics, and in Seghers' letters to Bruno Frei

55. Anna Seghers, "Die Aufgaben des Schriftstellers heute" (1966), AAE II, p.314.

56. Alexander Stephan, "'Ich habe das Gefühl, ich bin in die Eiszeit geraten...' Zur Rückkehr von Anna Seghers aus dem Exil". In: Ingrid K. J. Williams (ed.), *GDR: Individual and Society*, (Ealing: 1987), p.91-101.

and Georg Lukács in 1947 and 1948. The title of the article in fact comes from the Lukács letter, whilst in his discussion of Seghers' letter to Frei, Stephan points to her mention of the fact that things are not going to progress very quickly and of the darkness she finds around her as proof of the despair Seghers felt in the immediate post-war years.⁵⁷ Yet in her letter to Frei, Seghers actually writes the following:

Ich glaube nicht, daß es bei uns rasend rasch vorwärts geht. Individuell genommen, auf die eignen begrenzten Eindrücke hin, befindet man sich oft in einer großen Dunkelheit, in der die einzelnen Punkte von Charakter und intellektuellem Wert verhältnismäßig selten auftauchen, und dann durch die Dunkelheit einem besonders hell vorkommen. Wie ich aber jetzt im Westen war (an der Schweizer Grenze) und zurück kam, da habe ich sehr gespürt, wieviel es ausmacht, wer die Menschen beherrscht und wer ihrem Leben und ihren Handlungen die Richtung gibt. Ich habe mich zum ersten mal in meinem Leben geradezu gefreut, wieder in Berlin anzukommen.⁵⁸

Seen in context, therefore, Seghers words are not quite as negative as Stephan suggests and reveal the extent of her commitment to the new socialist state. Similarly, in her letter to Lukács, the feeling that she has "been transported to the ice age" can be said to be due not only to the political situation, but also to the general atmosphere of destruction and despair in the Soviet Zone, as well as to her own loneliness and isolation in Berlin without both her husband, who had still not returned from exile, and her children, who were studying in Paris.

57. Ibid, p.94.

58. Anna Seghers, "Brief an Bruno Frei. 9. Oktober 1947". In: Anna Seghers, *Über Kunstwerk und Wirklichkeit* Bd. IV, (Berlin: 1979), p.151.

Although Stephan's arguments are not entirely convincing, however, it is possible to find other evidence that Anna Seghers' situation in the GDR was not as harmonious as she would have had people believe in Walter Janka's recent essay *Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit*. In the essay, Janka, the former head of the Aufbau Verlag, describes the circumstances surrounding his arrest and imprisonment in 1957 for allegedly plotting to overthrow Ulbricht's government. One of the main charges brought against him concerned his planned trip to Hungary at the time of the uprising in 1956 to bring Georg Lukács to safety. The trip, which was forbidden by Ulbricht and never actually took place, was initially the idea of Anna Seghers who, greatly concerned for her friend Lukács' life, asked the cultural minister, Johannes R. Becher, to make the necessary arrangements. Yet although she was present at Janka's trial, Seghers failed to speak up on his behalf (as did Johannes R. Becher) and remained silent in the years which followed.

Anna Seghers, die Janka aufgefordert hatte, "Den bedeutendsten Autor des Verlages zu suchen, ihm wenn möglich zu helfen, damit der siebzigjährige Freund nicht ein Opfer der Aufständischen in Ungarn würde", blieb stumm. Als hätten sich die Worte des Herrn Melsheimer gegen Lukács nicht auch gegen sie gerichtet.⁵⁹

This is an example of a conflict between private and public interests which Anna Seghers failed to acknowledge, and we can only speculate as to the reasons for her silence. Undoubtedly fear played a great part, for even though Janka believes that Seghers had nothing

59. Walter Janka, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: 1989), p.91.

to be afraid of,⁶⁰ the fact that he himself was convicted and sentenced in spite of his excellent communist credentials, was proof enough that no one was safe from the accusations of the secret police.

Seghers' silence can also be seen to have resulted from her commitment to the socialist state which prevented her from making any kind of protest that could be interpreted as anti-socialist - and in this respect it is interesting to note that in her short story "Brot und Salz", written in 1958, she presents a very orthodox view of the Hungarian uprising as a counter-revolutionary movement.

Here too, then, we have contradictory evidence of Anna Seghers' position in her post-war years. For on the one hand she was eager to help Lukács out of Hungary and on the other she condemned the movement of which he had been a part as counter-revolutionary. Yet even in cases such as this when there was a clear conflict between Anna Seghers' private interests and those of the socialist state, she chose not to acknowledge it. Instead she limited her criticism to literature and even here to the false application of the literary doctrine the GDR had adopted rather than of the doctrine itself. As president

60. Ibid. Janka writes:

Gerade sie hätte sich die Mitverantwortung nicht entziehen dürfen. Schon deshalb nicht, weil sie die namhafteste Frau war, die es sich leisten konnte, ihre Stimme der Wahrheit zu leihen. Ein wenig Mut hätte ihrem Ruf nicht geschadet und ihre Position nicht gefährdet. Selbst Ulbricht hätte es nicht gewagt, sie verhaften oder auch nur belästigen zu lassen. All das wußte sie. Trotzdem blieb sie stumm.

of the Writer's Union she used the power she had to plead for the acceptance of those developments which she felt did not challenge the doctrine but aimed to extend its boundaries. This can of course be regarded as capitulation. It certainly did not lead to the production of great literary works on her part, a tragic development when one considers both the fineness of her exile achievements and the fact that she must have been aware of the weaknesses her post-war novels contained. But given the political climate in the GDR, particularly in the fifties, and given the strength of Anna Seghers' commitment to socialism, it is difficult to see what other position she could have adopted. For any criticism of the literary doctrine of socialist realism would have placed her in a position of opposition to the new socialist state and her sense of responsibility to the state she had worked so hard to bring about made the contemplation of such a position impossible. The only possibility open to her, therefore, was to accept the framework the state imposed and do her best to work from the inside to broaden the limits of that framework, hence the apparently contradictory nature of the arguments contained in many of her essays and speeches, as she attempted to walk the tightrope between acceptance and rejection.

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Evidence of the same duality is also to be found in her later fictional works in which she returns to the theme of the imagination and reaffirms arguments from

letters to Lukács whilst at the same time emphasising the responsibility of the artist to his/her people. This is true of stories such as "Das wirkliche Blau" (1967) and "Sonderbare Begegnungen" (1973), both of which deal with the role of art and the imagination in our lives, and in some ways mark a return to the themes of works like "Die schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok".

"Das wirkliche Blau" tells the story of the Mexican potter Benito Guerrero, whose livelihood is threatened when the outbreak of the Second World War leads to a breakdown in the supply of a blue pigment with which he has dyed his pottery since he began his trade. Although he could easily use another pigment to colour his pots and tries to do so, Benito's pride in his work is such that he leaves his native village and undertakes a long journey to find the "true blue", for only by doing so can he remain true to himself and to his craft:

Im Grunde genommen war alles nur meine Schuld. Ich habe mir etwas aufdrängen lassen von dem verdammt Don Victor. Warum? Aus Angst vor Not. Anstatt immer weiter zu suchen, zu suchen nach dem Blau, an dem mein Herz hängt, das Blau, das mir allein und wahrhaftig zusteht.⁶¹

As the title suggests, Benito's quest for "das wirkliche Blau", in Anna Seghers words not simply the search for a colour but "das heftige Suchen nach etwas Fernem, mit Mühe Erreichbarem",⁶² is in many ways reminiscent of Heinrich von Ofterdingen's quest for the "blaue Blume". Anna Seghers in fact denies any

61. Anna Seghers "Das wirkliche Blau". In: *Erzählungen 1963-77*, (Berlin/Weimar: 1981), p.199.

62. Anna Seghers, "Gespräch mit Günter Caspar", AAE II, p.456.

intentional reference,⁶³ perhaps because she was unwilling to lay herself open to the charge of decadence which any association with Romanticism could bring for it is possible to draw a number of parallels between the two works. Benito's journey to his cousin Ruben, who, he has been told, manufactures the blue pigment, is similar to Heinrich's journey in search of the blue flower in that it brings him into contact with areas of experience of which he would otherwise have remained unaware, and thus broadens his understanding of his country and countrymen. Dreams too, which figured so prominently in the works of the Romantics as a means of broadening our perception of reality, are shown to play an important part in enabling Benito to come to terms with his experience, and provide the reader with an additional insight into the hopes and fears accompanying Benito on his journey.

In many ways, therefore, the story can be seen as a reaffirmation of Anna Seghers' belief in the power of literature which, since its appeal is principally to the imagination and to the emotions, penetrates the reader's consciousness in a way not open to the political pamphleteer, and is thus able to play an active role in the reader's development.

However, throughout the story, Anna Segher's main concern is the suffering caused by poverty, the poverty

63. Achim Roscher, "Wirkung des Geschriebenen. Gespräche mit Anna Seghers", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (10/1983), p.65. In an interview with Roscher in 1973 she said: "Mit blauer Blume und ähnlichem hat das nichts zu tun."

Benito himself experiences and the poverty of his fellow countrymen with which he is frequently confronted on his journey. Whilst revealing the value of art and beauty, therefore, of the role of the imagination in our lives, Anna Seghers does not advocate the principle of art for art's sake, and she insists that art should have a practical purpose. Part of the value of Benito's art lies in the fact that it is useful, it provides people with vessels from which they can eat and drink, whilst bringing into their lives the knowledge and beauty of the creative imagination, which also forms part of man's consciousness, of his perception of reality. The implication is, therefore, that literature too, whilst exploiting its ability to release man's creative powers, should not do so without a definite purpose, but should instead aim to channel the energies it releases into work for man's improvement, work for socialist society. And the fact that the story concentrates on Benito's quest for the colour with which his work has come to be identified underlines Seghers' belief that in order to be successful the writer should not adopt methods inappropriate to his own experience, but should be true to himself. Seghers thus reasserts the importance of "Unmittelbarkeit" whilst at the same time stressing the need for the artist to recognize his responsibility to work to improve the lot of his fellow men.

The importance of the imagination is also the theme of the trilogy *Sonderbare Begegnungen* but receives slightly different emphasis since all three stories are

concerned to show the dangers as well as the benefits of the imaginative dimension of human consciousness.

The significance of this theme for the creative process is discussed in the third story, "Die Reisebegegnung", which presents an imaginary meeting between E.T.A. Hoffmann, Gogol and Kafka in a Prague café and tells of their subsequent conversations about writing and reality. That a realistic work should be concerned with more than surface reality is clear to all three writers, and Hoffmann voices a view they share when he says: "Was die Leute für pure Phantasie halten, kann manchmal auch ein Stück handfester Wirklichkeit enthalten."⁶⁴ Later in the conversation he continues:

Symbolische oder phantastische Darstellungen, Märchen und Sagen wurzeln doch irgendwie in der Wirklichkeit. Genausogut wie greifbare Dinge. Ein richtiger Wald gehört zur Wirklichkeit, doch auch ein Traum von einem Wald.⁶⁵

Art, says Hoffmann, can contribute to man's development by enabling him to experience situations he might otherwise not encounter: "Manchmal gelingt es sogar einem Dichter etwas zu erfinden, was das Leben selbst noch nicht verwirklicht hat."⁶⁶ However, both Hoffmann and Gogol are extremely critical of Kafka's use of fantastic elements in his writing to create a nightmare world which, since no escape seems possible, plunges the reader into despair, and Hoffmann insists that the writer acknowledge his responsibility towards his readers, that

64. Anna Seghers, *Sonderbare Begegnungen*. In: *Erzählungen* 1963-77, p.505.

65. Ibid, p.525.

66. Ibid, p.524.

he employ dreams, fantasy, in such a way that they provide him with a vision of how society could be changed, and thus give them hope for the future:

weil Sie für sich selbst keinen Ausweg sehen, sehen Sie auch keinen für andere. Man muß aber nach einem Ausweg suchen, nach einer Bresche in der Mauer. Wie ein Gefangener eine sucht, um eine Botschaft durchzustecken von einem Menschen zum anderen. Ein Lichtpünktchen muß man aufglänzen sehen.⁶⁷

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The belief that art and the basis of art, the imagination, were an extremely important part of reality, was a constant theme of Anna Seghers' speeches and interviews of the 1970s. In them she talks of the ability of art to penetrate the reader's innermost thoughts and feelings and thus inspire him to action:

Echte, wirkliche Kunst erhöht direkt oder indirekt auf verschiedenste Art und Weise das Lebensgefühl und damit den Arbeitsschwung. Durch die ihr innewohnende Kraft ... wirkt sie als eine Art Triebfeder, die die in den Menschen schlummernden Fähigkeiten erweckt und erhöht.⁶⁸

And in this respect she stresses the importance of the artist, who is both shaped by and shapes society:

Sehr wichtig würde es mir erscheinen, das Wechselverhältnis darzustellen zwischen dem Schriftsteller und dem Volk, in dem er lebt, zu dem seine Leser gehören. Seine Arbeitskraft kommt aus der Wirklichkeit und strömt wieder zurück in die Wirklichkeit, lebensfördernd, arbeitsfördernd.⁶⁹

These statements are of course reminiscent of her arguments to Lukács in their correspondence of the 1930s when she spoke of the writer as "einzigartige, eigentümliche gesellschaftliche Verknüpfung von

67. Ibid.

68. Anna Seghers, "Von der Kraft unserer Kunst" (1976), AAE II, p.390.

69. Ibid, p.391.

subjektivem und objektivem Faktor, Umschlagestelle vom Objekt zum Subjekt und wieder zum Objekt".⁷⁰ In fact, although "Das wirkliche Blau" and Sonderbare Begegnungen are frequently seen by GDR critics as having introduced new themes to GDR literature, it must be said that in Anna Seghers' case the stories mark less an introduction of new themes than a return to her main concerns of the exile years. Whereas in the 1930s, however, Seghers had felt that this was necessary in order to reach as broad a cross-section of the German people as possible in order to make them immune to the attractions of National Socialism, in the 1970s Seghers is also concerned to win the reader's commitment to the new socialist state. She therefore emphasises that the writer's imagination should not be given free rein, but should be correctly employed to further the socialist cause. As she stated in an interview with Neues Deutschland in 1973:

Nicht nur, was man greifen und schmecken kann, auch Phantasie und Träume gehören zur Wirklichkeit. Unser heutiges, wirkliches, greifbares Leben wurde einmal erahnt. Das war damals für trockene, ja feindselige Menschen eine Traumwelt. Ich meine, daß Träume ein Bestandteil der Wirklichkeit sein können. *Richtig gebraucht*, (my italics) erweitern sie die Literatur, die sozialistische Literatur.⁷¹

This quotation is crucial for our understanding of Seghers' work, since Seghers both openly states the belief she has held since her early years as a writer that one of the sources of literature's power lies in its ability to fire people's imagination - a belief which

70. See Chapter One, p.25.

71. Anna Seghers, "Helfen, tiefer ins Leben einzudringen", *Neues Deutschland*, 22.9.1973, AAE II, p.464.

goes against socialist realism's demands for an objective depiction of reality in its revolutionary development - and suggests that it has a part to play in socialist literature. However, she insists that it must be properly used - richtig gebraucht - if it is going to do so successfully, again revealing her sense of caution, her sense of responsibility to a power which she regards as more authoritative than herself.

In other words, what we have here is further evidence of the balancing act which Anna Seghers performed repeatedly in her post-war years as she sought to extend the boundaries of what was considered to be socialist literature without appearing to challenge the authority of the socialist state, to which she felt herself to be subject. As we have seen, she herself was convinced that there was no contradiction between socialism and man's imaginative capacity, and indeed in the opening lines of the above quotation firmly states her belief that the latter was in fact one of the chief sources of inspiration for the former; but she was also extremely aware that communist critics did not share her views, hence her sense of caution and her desire to qualify her statements with the words "richtig gebraucht".

In her exile years, Anna Seghers was able to reconcile her own position with that of the party due to the fact that it was in the interest of the popular front that writers employ all means at their disposal in the

fight against National Socialism. After the war, however, this was no longer the case. It was now necessary to decide precisely where one stood and, having made that decision, to adopt the policies of one's side wholesale, since to do otherwise was seen to be tantamount to playing into the hands of the enemy.

Of course Anna Seghers' decision can be seen as reprehensible, and was indeed immediately interpreted as such by a number of critics in the West, hence the hostility towards Sammlung Luchterhand's decision to publish her novels in the Federal Republic. The recent revelations of Walter Janka certainly do not present a very favourable picture of her behaviour, and with the opening up of the GDR far more material may come to light which could lead to a reassessment of Anna Seghers in both East and West Germany.

At the same time, however, we should not forget that, from her position of authority, Anna Seghers continued to argue for greater flexibility in the interpretation of what constituted socialist literature, and, as we shall see in the following chapter, the very fact that she did so was to be extremely important for a number of younger writers, amongst them, Christa Wolf.

3. CHRISTA WOLF

Christa Wolf belongs to the second generation of GDR writers whose experience of fascism and war, and consequently also of socialism, was very different from that of the exiled older generation. Born in Landsberg/Warthe in 1929 she was four years old when Hitler came to power. She spent the greater part of her childhood under National Socialist rule and grew up believing in the superiority of Hitler's Germany and the German people. Her reaction to Germany's defeat was therefore characterised not by relief and jubilation, as in the case of Anna Seghers, but by guilt and suspicion and it was some time before she was able to overcome her prejudices against socialism, prejudices born of years of indoctrination. In fact, in the essay "Zu einem Datum" which gives a personal view of the day on which the Social Democrat and Communist parties in the Soviet Occupied Zone merged to form the SED, the Socialist Unity Party, she writes: "Die Wahrheit ist, daß ich erst zweieinhalb Jahre nach jenem 21. April 1946 meine erste marxistische Schrift las".¹

When she did begin reading Marxist-Leninist theory, however, the effect, as she explains in her *Frankfurter Vorlesungen*, was liberating.² It brought to an end the uncertainty which had dominated her life in previous months and seemed to offer her the chance to start anew,

1. Christa Wolf, "Zu einem Datum", *Sinn und Form* (1/1971), p.239-243.

2. Christa Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung. Cassandra*, (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1983), p.131.

and in 1949, at the age of 20, Christa Wolf became a member of the SED.

In the same year she began her studies at the universities of Jena and Leipzig, where she deepened her understanding of Marxism-Leninism and socialist literary theory. In 1952, whilst still at university, she wrote a review of E.R. Greulich's novel, *Das geheime Tagebuch*, which was published in *Neues Deutschland*, and in 1953, after completing her studies with a dissertation on "Probleme des Realismus im Werke Falladas", she was offered employment with the Writers' Union. She worked there for a year before taking up the post of editor with the publishers' "Neues Leben", and then moved on to the literary journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur*. Her talent was thus spotted very quickly and she enjoyed success early in her career.

Christa Wolf's reviews and articles published in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* in the years which followed provide an interesting insight into her views on socialism and literature at that time. In them she proclaims her belief in the new society in the East and her total rejection of Adenauer's Germany in the West, where the restoration of capitalist values could only lead to resignation and despair. She sees this confirmed in the works of many West German authors, as her review of the novels *Spätestens im November* and *Spirale* by Hans Erich Nossack reveals:

Nossack hat in diesem Buch die ihn umgebende
bürgerliche Welt nach der etwa in ihr schlummernden

echten Lebensmöglichkeit für den Menschen abgeklopft und gefunden, daß in diesem System weder für sinnvolle Arbeit noch für Liebe, noch für ein ehrliches, vernünftiges Miteinanderleben der Menschen Raum bleibt.³

The socialist system in the East, however, is, in her view, humane. Its aim is to enable people to find fulfilment,⁴ and literature can play an important part in helping it to do so:

Die Literatur mußte klarmachen, wie bei uns endlich das gesellschaftlich Notwendige sich in Übereinstimmung befindet mit der tiefen Sehnsucht des Menschen nach Vervollkommenung, nach allseitiger Ausbildung ihrer Persönlichkeit.⁵

This is a significant statement since it reveals that even in her early years Wolf saw the aim of socialist literature to lie in helping people to find fulfilment rather than in convincing them of the socialist message. This belief has its roots in the humanist tradition and was to find more developed treatment in her later works where it was to become central to her concept of literature. The reference to human longing is also reminiscent of a number of Anna Seghers' works, in which the characters' capacity to act for change is shown to be based on their longing for a better life. In fact it is possible to trace a number of points of contact between Wolf and the older writer, whom Wolf interviewed in 1959.⁶ This was to be the first of several encounters

3. Christa Wolf, "'Freiheit' oder Auflösung der Persönlichkeit? Hans Erich Nossacks Romane >Spätestens im November< und >Spirale, Roman einer schlaflosen Nacht<", *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, (4/1957), p.137.

4. See Karl Marx, *Das kommunistische Manifest* (Berlin: 1967), p.51.

5. Christa Wolf, "Popularität oder Volkstümlichkeit", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (1/1956), p121-122.

6. Anna Seghers, "Gespräch mit Christa Wolf" (1959), AAE II, p.399-406.

with her work, encounters which were to lead to the writing of no less than ten reviews of or articles on Seghers' writing.

Like Anna Seghers, Wolf fiercely criticises the schematic nature of so much contemporary GDR literature. She insists that writers should not shrink from the presentation of conflict in their work for fear that it is not typical, since such an attitude will only hinder progress and development:

Jeder Mensch weiß, daß in der Wirklichkeit sehr viel "passiert". Unter anderem passieren auch menschliche Tragödien; unsere Literatur ignoriert sie, weil sie "nicht typisch" seien, denn typisch sei nur das Positive! Auf diese Weise lassen unsere Schriftsteller ihre Leser allein, die ja von ihnen auch wissen wollen, wieso denn heute noch Menschen durch eigene oder fremde Schuld zugrunde gehen oder schwere Fehler einzelner Funktionäre großen Schaden anrichten können.⁷

Like Anna Seghers, she acknowledges that for literature to be able to do this, the writer himself must be firmly committed to socialism, and Wolf insists that an understanding of Marxism-Leninism is a basic precondition for the writing of socialist literature:

Ehe ein Autor zum Beispiel Belehrung über "rein" ästhetische Fragen braucht, benötigt er Klarheit über die grundlegenden Probleme der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit, die er als die grundlegenden Probleme der Ästhetik begreifen muß.⁸

Like Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf also accepts that the writer's ideological standpoint has to have become second nature, has to be part of his 'Grund-Erlebnis', if

7. Christa Wolf, "Komplikationen aber keine Konflikte", *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, (6/1954), p.142.

8. Christa Wolf, "Eine Lektion über Wahrheit und Objektivität", *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, (7/1958), p.123.

he is going to communicate it successfully in a work of literature:

Ein Autor kann sich einen progressiveren als seinen gegenwärtigen Standpunkt wohl wünschen, aber nicht einfach aussuchen, er muß ihn erarbeiten, erfahren, erleben.⁹

and she sees the main task of socialist literature at this stage to lie in helping its readers to come to terms with their past and thus with themselves:

Unsere Bücher müssen die Leser zwingen, ehrlich gegen sich zu sein, mit sich ins Gericht zu gehen und die eigene, die unheilvolle Rolle unseres Volkes im letzten Krieg zu begreifen und zuzugeben.¹⁰

There would thus seem to be a number of similarities between the views of Christa Wolf and Anna Seghers at this early stage in her career, although it must be said that Wolf returns from the interview amazed by the extent to which Seghers departs from accepted literary doctrine:

Später in der Redaktion, als wir ihre Antworten durchlasen, sagten wir tadelnd und gelinde bekümmert: Die Anna hat wieder mal ihren Kopf für sich. Wir nämlich waren mächtig sattelfest in dem, was wir für marxistische Literaturtheorie hielten.¹¹

In spite of her admiration for Seghers, therefore, and in spite of a certain closeness, Wolf is unable to accept those aspects of the older writer's views which throw her own opinions into doubt. Where the older writer is secure enough in her communism to have expressed reservations about the rigid literary prescriptions, the young convert, with her career ahead of her, is far more orthodox. So, although Christa Wolf shares the same

9. Christa Wolf, "Vom Standpunkt des Schriftstellers und von der Form der Kunst", *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, (12/1957), p.120.

10. Ibid.

11. Christa Wolf, "Fortgesetzter Versuch". In: Christa Wolf, DA, p.340.

fundamental literary and social aims as Seghers does (the need for ideological commitment on the part of the writer; the contribution of literature to the development of the whole person) she is at these early stages of her career at her most ambivalent where Seghers can be critical. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that she perceived Seghers as an alternative to the prescribed doctrine, for in later years when she herself was in search of an alternative literary method it was for precisely this reason that Wolf looked to Seghers for support.

On the whole, however, the chief influence at this point would seem to be Georg Lukács.¹² Many of her statements echo his theories on socialist realism, and her judgement of new novels tends to be based on the extent to which they fulfil the requirements of socialist literary theories.

Strittmatter wollte nicht nur die äußere Erscheinungsform des Neuen auf unseren Dörfern aufzeichnen, er wollte zugleich und vor allem das Wesen dieses Neuen deutlich machen. Er mußte seinen Stoff mit einer Idee durchdringen, die geeignet erschien, im künstlerischen Bild wie in einem Brennpunkt die innere Gesetzmäßigkeit unserer gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung einzufangen und auf diese Weise selbst in einem begrenzten Stoff die Totalität eines Weltbildes zu vermitteln.¹³

What emerges from the articles and reviews, therefore, is an extremely mechanical understanding of the way in which literature works, based on an uncritical

12. Therese Hörnigk, "Gespräch mit Christa Wolf". In: Therese Hörnigk, *Christa Wolf* (Göttingen: 1989), p.15.

13. Christa Wolf, "Menschliche Konflikte in unserer Zeit. Erwin Strittmatter: >Tinko<", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (7/1955), p.140.

acceptance of socialist literary theories. As Christa Wolf herself was to admit several years later:

Ich habe Kritiken geschrieben - im falschen Sinne. Ein Kritiker, der Bücher nach einem bestimmten Maßstab beurteilt. Das habe ich dann mit Entsetzen sein gelassen.¹⁴

That such an understanding could be extremely damaging for a work of literature is revealed in Christa Wolf's first published work, *Moskauer Novelle* (1961), which displays many of the weaknesses she had frequently criticised in the works of others in the preceding years. The story of Vera Braun, an East German pediatrician, and Pawel Koschkin, a Russian interpreter, who meet in Moscow in 1959, fourteen years after their first meeting in Germany, where Pawel was stationed as a Russian lieutenant, is clearly intended to symbolise the changing relationship, from enmity to brotherhood, between the GDR and the Soviet Union in the post-war years. The characters are thus hardly more than vehicles for the author's thoughts and ideas, and function as stereotyped representatives of the German and Soviet people. Moreover, the conflict at the centre of the story, which arises when Vera considers leaving her husband for Pawel to atone for her past guilt (she has discovered that the injuries Pawel sustained in a fire started in her village by some former Hitler Youth members have prevented him from realising his aim of becoming a surgeon) is ultimately exposed as no conflict at all, but rather a product of Vera's uncertainty and Pawel's fear. It is, to use Christa Wolf's own words in an earlier article,

14. "Gespräch mit Christa und Gerhard Wolf". DA, p.897.

"durch subjektive Fehler verschuldet".¹⁵ Thus, far from encouraging the reader to reflect on and question the nature of socialist society, and so to assist in its development, it simply reinforces the notion that any problems arising in a socialist state are caused by the individual rather than the system itself.

Christa Wolf is fully aware of the weaknesses the work contains and now prefers to distance herself from it. In the essay "Über Sinn und Unsinn von Naivität" which she wrote in 1973 in answer to a request for a description of the circumstances surrounding the writing of her first work, she described her embarrassment at re-reading the novella fourteen years after having written it. That embarrassment was largely caused by the predictable structure, the well-trained adoption of standard patterns, the closed form and the given solution. ("ein Zug zu Geschlossenheit und Perfektion in der formalen Grundstruktur, in der Verquickung der Charaktere mit einem Handlungsablauf, der an das Abschnurren eines aufgezogenen Uhrwerks erinnert"¹⁶) She feels that the work is proof of how well "ich meine Lektion aus dem germanistischen Seminar und aus vielen meist ganzseitigen Artikeln über Nutzen und Schaden, Realismus und Formalismus, Fortschritt und Dekadenz in Literatur und Kunst gelernt hatte",¹⁷ and she speaks with regret of her noticeable naivety at the time:

15. Christa Wolf, "Kann man eigentlich über alles schreiben?", *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, (6/1958), p.14.

16. Christa Wolf, "Über Sinn und Unsinn von Naivität". DA p.46.

17. Ibid.

Das alte hypertrophe Selbstbewußtsein (dem ja ein tiefes Minderwertigkeitsgefühl zugrunde lag), verdienstermaßen zerstört, war nicht einfach durch ein fertiges neues zu ersetzen. Um aber doch weiterleben zu können, griff man begierig auch nach nicht vollwertigen Ersatz-Teilen, einem neuen blinden Glaubenseifer zum Beispiel (in einer Zeit, die, das brauche ich Ihnen nicht zu belegen, gerade von Sozialisten ein dialektisches Denken gefordert hätte) und der anmaßenden Behauptung, ein für allemal im Mitbesitz der einzig richtigen, einzig funktionierenden Wahrheit zu sein.¹⁸

These remarks are significant for they reveal that Christa Wolf's initial enthusiasm for Socialism was due in part to a need for something to believe in, something to hold onto after the foundations of her belief in National Socialism had been destroyed by her experience of war and defeat. It is something she has in common with many Germans of her generation and in the essay she describes how the replacement of one ideology by another enabled them to avoid being forced to come to terms with their past. This resulted in an unnatural relationship to socialism, founded not on critical reflection but on patterns of thought and behaviour determined by National Socialism. Hence her uncritical acceptance of socialist literary theories, which in many ways blinded her to certain consequences of their application. For whilst arguing for greater openness and flexibility in GDR literature, whilst criticising the hesitancy of many writers to present conflict in their novels, she herself imposed criteria which limited and inhibited writers attempting to write realistic novels dealing with such conflict, criteria which led to the very schematicism she

18. Ibid, p.51.

was so anxious to avoid. However, Christa Wolf's next novel explored more vulnerable ideological positions and matched them with a more experimental narrative structure.

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Der geteilte Himmel (1963) examines the failure of many Germans to face up to the past and the consequences of their failure for GDR society. Here the exchange by Manfred's father of National Socialism for Communism, the opportunism of his fellow students and the dogmatism of figures such as Mangold, are, to a certain extent, shown to be the source of Manfred's cynicism and to contribute to his decision to leave the GDR. The story focusses on the consequences of Manfred's decision for his fiancée, Rita Seidel. Several years younger than Manfred, she is shown to experience a far more natural relationship to socialism, and her faith in the new society is strong enough to enable her to withstand the disappointments Manfred experiences. After Manfred leaves the GDR she visits him in West Berlin, but chooses to return to the East and shortly afterwards suffers a nervous breakdown caused by her grief at their separation. However, in the long process of recovery when she reflects on the events which led to Manfred's departure, she is able to come to terms with her own personal tragedy, and realises that her initial, emotional decision to return to the GDR was the right one, since only in this society can people hope to find possibilities for personal fulfilment.

In spite of this clear affirmation of socialist society, however, both the novel and the film, for which Christa and Gerhard Wolf wrote the screenplay in 1964, were the subject of some controversy in the GDR. Christa Wolf was reproached for having presented too bleak a picture of factory life in the GDR,¹⁹ and was accused by two of the fiercest critics, Dieter Allert and Hubert Wenzelt, writing in the magazine *Freiheit*, of possessing a "dekadente Lebensauffassung".²⁰

In many ways the uncertainty at the root of these criticisms can be seen to have its source in the novel's narrative structure. Events are presented primarily from Rita's perspective as she reflects on the events which led to her breakdown. This allows for close identification with the main character on the part of the reader, who is drawn into the reflective process and is able to trace Rita's development from naive village girl to mature young woman. The underlying tone is therefore questioning as Rita searches for answers to the problems confronting her in a socialist society. The narrator is able to provide the reader with information of which Rita herself is unaware, but she frequently behaves like Rita, reflecting on and questioning events, and the close identification between the two is particularly apparent on those occasions when they come together and share one voice:

19. "Brigade Lotti in der Waggonfabrik Ammendorf". In: Martin Reso (ed), *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker*, (Halle: 1965), p.154.

20. Dietrich Allert/Hubert Wetzelt, *Freiheit* 31.8.63. In: Reso (1965), p.83.

Neun Monate später war das Boot untergegangen. Sie standen an verschiedenen Ufern. Hatte niemand ihre Zeichen erwidert und ihre Not bemerkt? Rita, die in den gleichförmigen blassen Krankenhauswochen eine schwere innere Arbeit leistet, kehrt immer wieder grübelnd zu diesem Punkt zurück: Hatte sie selbst nicht rechtzeitig die Gefahr gesehen?²¹

The implications of this development for Christa Wolf's work will be dealt with in more detail later, but it is important to note that in *Der geteilte Himmel* she began to move away from the objective depiction of reality demanded by socialist realist doctrine, and that it was precisely this aspect of her work which caused most problems.

Nevertheless the novel found acceptance with the literary establishment which, whilst acknowledging the problems caused by the work's narrative structure,²² at the same time recognised that it generally conformed to the demands of socialist realism. The work was after all based on Christa Wolf's experiences in the VEB Waggonbau Ammersdorf when she followed the call of the Bitterfeld Conference of 1959 for writers to enter production and gain direct experience of working in industry.²³ As such it was concerned with the everyday life of East German workers, it presented typical characters and situations, and both Rita and her mentor, Schwarzenbach, could be regarded as positive heroes in that they were exemplary

21. Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, (München: 1978), p.50.

22. "Aus der Begründung zur Verleihung des Heinrich-Mann-Preises 1963 an Frau Christa Wolf" *Mitteilungen* (4/1963), p.6-7.

23. See Chapter One, p.30-33.

models whose behaviour (their commitment to socialism, their tolerance and openness) the reader was encouraged to imitate. Most of all, of course, the novel was partisan. It affirmed the socialist order in the East, where, even though there were a number of problems which still needed to be dealt with, life was shown to be infinitely preferable to that in the West. The work was thus hailed as a masterpiece of the Bitterfeld movement and in 1963 Christa Wolf was awarded the Heinrich Mann prize. In the same year she was accepted as a candidate member of the central committee of the SED and a year later won the Nationalpreis dritter Klasse, and her reputation as one of the GDR's leading writers was firmly established.

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The early to mid-sixties was a time of rapid change in the GDR when a great deal seemed possible to young writers like Christa Wolf who were working for the realisation of socialist ideals through their writing. As Christa Wolf herself said in an interview with Theresa Hörnigk in 1988:

Eine Zeitlang hatten wir geglaubt, uns einen Freiraum erarbeitet zu haben; wir, das waren Autoren unserer Generation, aber vor allem auch schon Jüngere - acht, neun, zehn Jahre Jüngere, sehr Begabte darunter, Volker Braun, Sarah und Rainer Kirsch, Karl Mickel und andere, die das Gefühl hatten, auf dasselbe hinzuarbeiten, und zwar salopp gesprochen, nach innen und nach außen.²⁴

and she goes on to explain that following the 20th party conference in Moscow in 1956 and the subsequent

24. "Gespräch mit Christa Wolf". In: Hörnigk, (1989), p.30.

revelations about Stalin, she felt very strongly that the role of literature was to expose the conflicts and contradictions present in GDR society, for only in this way could it be realistic and assist in the resolution of those conflicts:

Es ging um den Realismus. Mindestens seit dem XX. Parteitag war ich auf der Seite derer, die es für sehr gefährlich hielten, wenn vorhandene Widersprüche nicht aufgedeckt werden.²⁵

However, it is not possible to find evidence of this change in her thinking in her writing of the time, and in the interview with Hörnigk she also mentions the difficulties she encountered when writing about controversial subjects due to the fact that she depended on socialist ideology.²⁶

The strength of Wolf's commitment can be felt in the interview itself in which, although speaking in 1988, she nevertheless uses Lukácsian phrases such as "Es ging um den Realismus" in order to align herself with the socialist tradition. The pressure of those commitments in the 1960s perhaps explains why it was not until eight years after the 20th party conference, at a meeting at the "Akademie der Künste", that she was capable of expressing her misgivings about the course which literature was taking :

Man muß sich zwingen, sich damit zu konfrontieren, daß es eben verschiedene Auffassungen darüber gibt, was Kunst ist, was Kunst heute bedeutet und welche Funktion sie in unserer Gesellschaft hat. Das muß man dann auch in der Diskussion sagen, und man darf keinen Schritt zurückweichen, auch wenn man selbst - das ist die große Schwierigkeit dabei - im Laufe der

25. Ibid, p.29.

26. Ibid, p.31.

Zeit sieht, was alles wirklich zu kritisieren wäre. Aber diese Kritik kommt nicht, sondern es kommt die Kritik gegen die man sich nicht nur um seiner selbst willen bis zuletzt verteidigen muß, und zwar, indem man den Kampf aufnimmt: nicht, indem man sagt: Freunde beruhigt euch; es ist alles da, es ist alles parteilich, es ist alles positiv. Man muß im Gegenteil sagen: Nein, es ist etwas anderes da, als ihr wollt, weil wir über Parteilichkeit und das Positive und über das Glück und andere Dinge verschiedener Meinung sind.²⁷

Similar misgivings also prompted her to speak out at the Eleventh Plenum in December of the following year when the doctrine of socialist realism was reaffirmed as the creative principle of GDR literature.²⁸ For Christa Wolf, however, this was the wrong course. She spoke up in support of one of the works under attack, Werner Bräunig's novel *Rummelplatz*, and expressed her belief that literature should be allowed to ask questions to which it did not know the answer: "Die Kunst muß auch Fragen aufwerfen, die neu sind, die der Künstler zu sehen glaubt, auch solche, für die er noch nicht die Lösung sieht".²⁹

The Eleventh Plenum marked a time of disillusionment for Christa Wolf. Only shortly before she had felt herself to be fully in tune with literary developments in the GDR, now she felt rejected and to a certain extent alienated from what was happening there.

27. Ibid, note 21, p.95.

28. See Chapter One, p.33.

29. "Diskussionsbeitrag Christa Wolfs, Kandidat des ZK, auf dem 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 16-18 Dezember 1965." In: Elimar Schubbe (ed), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, (Stuttgart: 1972), p.1098-9.

Her response was to look elsewhere for literary models and in the years which followed she wrote a number of essays on contemporary writers in an attempt to clarify her views on the precise role of literature in socialist society. Amongst the most important of these was the essay "Die zumutbare Wahrheit", which deals with the work of Ingeborg Bachmann.

In the essay Wolf expresses her admiration for the Austrian writer which is founded on the latter's ability to write in such a way that she is true to herself and to her experience of reality. In other words, Wolf admires Bachmann because she searches for the form best suited to her own experience of the world around her:

Man soll, im Begriff, diese Prosa zu lesen, nicht mit Geschichten rechnen, mit der Beschreibung von Handlungen. Information über Ereignisse sind nicht zu erwarten, Gestalten im landläufigen Sinn so wenig wie harthörige Behauptungen. Eine Stimme wird man hören: kühn und klagend. Eine Stimme, wahrheitsgemäß, das heißt: nach eigener Erfahrung sich äussernd....³⁰

As a result, says Wolf, Bachmann is able, through her writing, to come to terms with her past experiences and find the courage for new experiences in the present and the future. She is able to offer both herself and the reader hope in the form of a vision which takes account of the interdependency of past, present and future and exposes the connections between seemingly unrelated forces and events:

Die Haltung dieses Menschen, des Autors, macht diese Prosa aus, macht sie konkret und sehnsuchtsvoll, hält sie im schwierigen Gleichgewicht zwischen

30. Christa Wolf, "Die zumutbare Wahrheit". DA, p.86.

Anspruch und Erfüllung, zwischen Realität und Vision...

Man sieht plötzlich, was nicht zu sehen ist, was aber da sein muß, weil es Wirkungen zeitigt. Die Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart zum Beispiel. Oder die immer unterdrückten maßlosen Wünsche, die jeden Augenblick, keiner weiß, woher, in jedermann aufschießen können ... Vor allem aber Zusammenhang und Bedeutung hinter scheinbar zusammenhanglosen und unbedeutenden Vorfällen. Die Entdeckung, wovon sie alle leben und woran sie, was immer sie vorzuspiegeln suchen, in Wirklichkeit zugrunde gehn.³¹

It is thus the subjective element which Wolf most admires in Bachmann's work, subjective both in the sense that Bachmann is able to be true to herself, and in the sense that she is concerned about the subject, about human perceptions and personal development:

Sie verteidigt keine Außenbezirke, sondern "Herzländer". Den Anspruch des Menschen auf Selbstverwirklichung. Sein Recht auf Individualität und Entfaltung seiner Persönlichkeit. Seine Sehnsucht nach Freiheit.³²

However, Wolf sees Bachmann as being greatly handicapped by bourgeois society which, since it leaves no room for humanist values, hampers personal development:

Sie markiert damit eine äußerste Position in der heutigen bürgerlichen Literatur, den Versuch, humanistische Werte gegenüber dem totalen Zerstörungstrieb der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft zu verteidigen.³³

Her words echo her critique of Nossack's novels in the 1950s and the implication then as now is that socialist society provides a far more adequate basis for writing of this kind, since the aim of socialism is to assist personal development and individual fulfilment.

31. Ibid, p.91.

32. Ibid, p.95.

33. Ibid, p.99.

Wolf's essay on Bachmann is interesting since it reveals that the main source of her misgivings at the Eleventh Plenum was not socialist society as such, but rather the party's insistence on a literary model which she had come to feel was no longer suited to the demands of the time. Her encounter with Bachmann thus results in a reaffirmation of her belief in socialism, but at the same time gives rise to an important new development in her writing as she breaks away from socialist realist principles and writes, like Bachmann, "wahrheitsgemäß, das heißt; nach eigener Erfahrung sich Äußernd."

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This development is most strongly marked in the short story "Juninachmittag" (1965), in which a first person narrator offers a very personal view of the events of a June afternoon and combines personal reflections, dreams and her own experience of life to offer insights of far greater depth and complexity than a simple depiction of surface reality could possibly provide. Thus, sitting in her deckchair in the garden on a Saturday afternoon she is able to explain the fear she feels by pointing out the tensions which lie beneath the surface of the idyllic setting and on occasion threaten to destroy it: the disagreements with the neighbours, the tensions between her husband and their teenage daughter, the conformism of the engineer next door, the bitterness of the widow Horn, the problems Frau B. faces with her deaf-mute children, and of course the political situation. For the narrator lives near to the border

between West Berlin and the GDR, and her thoughts are constantly interrupted by the sound of aeroplanes - passenger and fighter planes - which remind her of the threat of war which the division of Germany involves.

The greatest of her fears is death. The news of the death in a train crash of a woman from the neighbourhood puts the other tensions of the afternoon into perspective and confronts the narrator with the greatest of all threats to her existence, namely that she too could be snatched from life and thus prevented from participating in the tranquillity and beauty of such an afternoon forever:

Der ganze federleichte Nachmittag hing an dem Gewicht dieser Minute. Hundert Jahre sind wie ein Tag. Ein Tag ist wie hundert Jahre. Der sinkende Tag sagt man ja... Aber man kriegt Angst, wenn immer noch kein Boden kommt, man wirft Ballast ab, dieses und jenes, um nur wieder aufzusteigen. Wer sagt denn, daß der Arm schon unaufhaltsam ausgeholt hat zu dem Schlag, der einem die Hände aus allem herausreißt? Wer sagt denn, daß diesmal wir gemeint sind? Daß das Spiel ohne uns weiterginge?³⁴

This is the vision. All other fears are transcended in this moment and seem petty by comparison.

The vision is extremely subjective, quite out of line with the objective depiction of reality demanded by socialist realism, and the words which open the work also signal Wolf's break with accepted socialist realist models and warn the reader to prepare himself for something different from what s/he normally expects from a "story":

34. Christa Wolf, "Juninachmittag". In: *Gesammelte Erzählungen*, (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1980), p.64.

Eine Geschichte? Etwas Festes, Greifbares, wie ein Topf mit zwei Henkeln, zum Anfassen und zum Draustrinken?
 Eine Vision vielleicht, falls Sie verstehen, was ich meine.³⁵

These words echo Wolf's description of Bachmann's work in her essay on the Austrian writer,³⁶ and indeed, what follows is not something the reader can take hold of and, having grasped its message, consume passively (as was the case with *Moskauer Novelle*). Instead the narrator requests the readers' complicity, their active participation, and the suggestion is that people should stop looking elsewhere for models of behaviour and should instead attempt to be true to themselves. This was precisely Christa Wolf's aim in writing the story, for "Juninachmittag" signals her break with prescribed models and the beginning of a search for a form more appropriate to her experience as a writer in the GDR.

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The same is true of Wolf's next work *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, which consists of the reflections of a first person narrator, this time on the life of a close friend who has recently died. The subject of those reflections, Christa T., is an unlikely heroine, quite untypical of the positive heroes who, in accordance with the tenets of socialist realism, offer exemplary models of behaviour for the reader to imitate. The narrator in fact admits that "sie ist als Beispiel nicht beispielhaft, als Gestalt kein Vor-bild",³⁷ but suggests both that such

35. Ibid, p.41.

36. See note 30.

37. Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Darmstadt

exemplary figures do not exist and that even if they did they would not tell us as much about ourselves or the society we inhabit as the figure of Christa T. does.

The narrative tone is searching and questioning. The narrator bases her reflections on personal memories, on interviews with mutual friends, on documents left by Christa T. and, on more than one occasion, on her own imaginative projections in an attempt to get closer to the truth about Christa T.. She uses her narrative freedom to move between time levels and presents events from a variety of perspectives, thereby suggesting that there is more than one way of looking at them and that it is difficult to say which is the right way.

In her essay "Loyalism in Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*" Linda Hill argues that the work is still basically socialist realist in character. She points out that apart from Christa T. herself, almost all of the characters can be regarded as typical representatives of GDR society and in certain cases serve as models for the reader to imitate, whilst Christa T. too, though perhaps not exemplary, is in her view a figure from whom we can learn a great deal.³⁸

This last statement is undoubtedly true. Christa T. is by no means perfect. She is unreliable, impulsive and regarded by many who know her as impractical and

und Neuwied: 1979), p.46.

38. Linda Hill, "Loyalism in Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*" *Michigan Germanic Studies* (2/1981), p.249-61.

unrealistic. She spends her last money on a piece of cake or a book on birds. She spends an evening watching an orchid bloom, oversleeps because of it and misses an important exam. Worst of all in the narrator's eyes, in the early years of her marriage she has an affair, with no apparent compulsion about the suffering she is causing her husband and possibly her children. However, the narrator also insists that these aspects of Christa T.'s character are related to other qualities which we cannot do without. Christa T. is spontaneous, sensitive, imaginative. She has a vision of how her life could be and she refuses to accept any constraints which might prevent that vision's realisation - a trait signalled by the trumpet call she makes at the beginning of the story. Yet the very fact that the narrator's reflections are concerned with Christa T. rather than Gertrud Born³⁹ or Günther, both of whom have, by the standards of socialist society achieved far more than Christa T., implies a rejection of the socialist realist principle of the positive hero, as does the value attached to subjective perceptions since this challenges the possibility of the objective depiction of reality which socialist realism demands.

Nevertheless it is true that the novel is supportive of the GDR. For all her disappointments, Christa T. never considers an alternative: - "Unter den Tauschangeboten ist Keines, nach dem auch nur den Kopf zu drehen sich

39. Note Gertrud Born's name - its allusion to the word 'borniert' suggests her limitations.

lohnem würde"⁴⁰ - and there can no doubt that Wolf was writing within the humanist tradition. The motto with which the work opens "Was ist das, dieses Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen" is taken from an entry in the diary of Johannes R. Becher - the marxist writer who, as Minister of Culture, was one of the chief influences in literary developments in the GDR after the war.

Wolf's use of the motto here takes us back to her statement of 1958 when, as we have seen she also suggested that literature should play a part in helping people to find fulfilment. Whereas on that occasion, however, she was concerned that literature should highlight the humanist nature of socialist society which enables people to realise their full potential, she now suggests that literature should itself play a part in that process.

Die tiefe Wurzel der Übereinstimmung zwischen echter Literatur und der sozialistischen Gesellschaft sehe ich eben darin: Beide haben das Ziel dem Menschen zu seiner Selbstverwirklichung zu verhelfen.⁴¹

In order to do so, however, literature should not attempt to educate and instruct but should exploit its ability to fire people's imagination. This is in itself a humanist ideal which has more in common with Schiller's views as expressed in *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*⁴² than with socialist realist literary theory. However, as we have seen, Wolf was concerned to break

40. Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (see note 32), p.52.

41. Christa Wolf, "Selbstinterview", DA, p.33.

42. Friedrich Schiller *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Stuttgart: 1965), p.101.

away from that doctrine since she felt that it was both inhibiting and inappropriate. She therefore highlights the humanist aspects of socialism and of literature in an attempt to defend her own concept of what literature should be trying to do.

Wolf outlines her views in detail in the essay "Lesen und Schreiben" which was written shortly after "Nachdenken über Christa T." and represents a crystallisation of the insights she has gained over the preceding years. In it she examines the role literature can play in our lives and the implications of that role for writing itself. Following an examination of technological developments, particularly in the media, which are increasingly encroaching on literature's territory, Wolf comes to the conclusion that literature can only survive if it concentrates on its ability to do what newspapers, television, film cannot do, that is, to address people's innermost feelings:

Die epische Prosa sollte eine Gattung sein, auf noch ungebahnten Wegen in das Innere dieses Menschen da, des Prosalesers, einzudringen.⁴³

Literature should exploit its ability to move between the three time levels, past, present and future and to expose the connections between them. By so doing it can prompt the reader to reflect and explore possibilities otherwise closed to him thereby helping him to find out more about himself and thus to work towards his personal fulfilment.

43. Ibid, p.490.

Wolf's belief that literature can penetrate people's innermost feelings and thus stimulate them to act is reminiscent of Anna Seghers' views on literature examined in the previous chapter, and in particular of the motto at the beginning of the story "Die schönsten Sagen des Räubers Woynek".⁴⁴ We have already seen how, in Wolf's early essays it is possible to trace a degree of closeness between the two writers, and as we shall see in the following chapter it is also possible to trace a number of similarities in their works. Anna Seghers in fact indirectly defended Wolf at the 9th Writer's Congress in 1969, where *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was the object of strong criticism from the writer Max Walter Schulz. Schulz held the main speech because Anna Seghers, at that time still President of the Writer's Union, had been ill and was unable to do so. Whether or not this really was the case is uncertain. However, Seghers did open the congress with some introductory remarks in which she repeated one of her arguments to Lukács in the thirties when she asked that writers should be allowed to write as the times demanded:

Seitdem der letzte Kongreß stattfand, sind in unserem Staat viele Umstellungen und Veränderungen vor sich gegangen. Solche Veränderungen bedeuten auch für den einzelnen Umstellungen im Innern, selbst wenn er sie gar nicht wahrnehmen, gar nicht wahrhaben will. Der Schriftsteller wird über andere Stoffe als bisher schreiben, auch wenn es ihm nicht bewußt ist. An die Leser und an die Kritiker geht dann die neue Forderung, zu erfassen, daß ein Schriftsteller - denn sie lesen ihn ja nicht zum ersten Male - das andere anders schreiben will.⁴⁵

44. See Chapter Two, p.54.

45. Anna Seghers, "Von der Zukunft unseres Schreibens", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (9/1969), p.19.

"Lesen und Schrieben" begins with words which recall Seghers' argument:

"Das Bedürfnis auf eine neue Art zu schreiben, folgt, wenn auch mit Abstand, einer neuen Art in der Welt zu sein."⁴⁶

In fact the entire essay can be seen to echo and develop Seghers' statements in her correspondence with Lukács as Wolf employs the arguments of the older writer to support her search for a narrative form more appropriate to her time.

Like Seghers, Wolf rejects the reflection theory. It is impossible, she says, for literature to reflect reality, since reality is transformed in the consciousness of the author who is himself determined by reality:

Lassen wir Spiegel das Ihre tun: spiegeln. Sie können nichts anderes. Literatur und Wirklichkeit stehen sich nicht gegenüber wie Spiegel und das, was gespiegelt wird. Sie sind ineinander verschmolzen im Bewußtsein des Autors. Der Autor nämlich ist ein wichtiger Mensch.⁴⁷

Like Seghers she insists on the need for the writer to be allowed to write according to his experience, in fact she goes one step further and suggests that the writer consciously incorporate his experience in the art work. Her model in this respect is Büchner's *Lenz* (again there is a connection with Seghers who described this as "ein Vorspiel der deutschen Literatur"⁴⁸). For in *Lenz*, so Christa Wolf argues, Büchner incorporated his own

46. Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben" (1968), DA, p.463.

47. Ibid, p.496.

48. Anna Seghers, "Ansprache in Weimar" (1965), AAE II, p.302.

experience in his description of Lenz's breakdown and produced an art work which, whilst clearly fictional could enlighten and enhance people's understanding of their time:

Nur soll man nicht weiterhin, wie Büchners Mit- und Nachwelt, seine Entdeckung übersehen, daß der erzählerische Raum vier Dimensionen hat; die drei fiktiven Koordinaten der erfundenen Figuren und die vierte, "wirkliche" des Erzählers. Das ist die Koordinate der Tiefe, der Zeitgenossenschaft, des unvermeidlichen Engagements, die nicht nur die Wahl des Stoffes, sondern auch seine Färbung bestimmt. Sich ihrer bewußt zu bedienen ist eine Grundmethode moderner Prosa.⁴⁹

Wolf's use of the term the fourth dimension to describe the incorporation of the author's experience can be read as a reference to Einstein's theory of relativity which established that absolute time does not exist and that only when two events occur in the same place at the same time can they be regarded as simultaneous by the observers. If they occur in different places they are not simultaneous and therefore different aspects will be perceived by the observers. In literary terms, of course, this can be seen to be connected with the modernist idea of perspective which as we have seen had been condemned as decadent in the GDR in the 1950s.⁵⁰ Wolf's reintroduction of the idea at this point can thus be seen as an attempt to introduce to marxist literary theory that aspect which caused Lukács so many problems but which Seghers, in her correspondence with Lukács in the 1930s, reminded him of, namely the impossibility of

49. Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben", DA, p.487.

50. See Chapter One, p.27.

objectivity since the artist is determined by his time and communicates this in the art work.⁵¹

In a later interview with Hans Kaufmann in 1974, Wolf explains the advantages of her approach, which she now refers to as "subjektive Authentizität",⁵² in more detail. They lie, she says, in the tendency to see writing not from the point of view of the end product, but rather as a process accompanying, explaining and intensifying the experience of life. The incorporation of the author's contemporary experience enables the writer to reveal the connections between actions and events and thus to produce a picture of reality far more appropriate to our understanding of our time than the methods of the nineteenth century realists advocated by Georg Lukács.

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Neither *Nachdenken über Christa T.* nor *Lesen und Schreiben* were particularly well-received when they first appeared in the GDR. As has been said in Chapter One, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was only published in a limited edition in 1968 and was the subject of great controversy in the GDR. It was not until the thaw in cultural policy brought about by Honecker's replacement of Ulbricht as the general secretary of the SED that it was made more widely available. "Lesen und Schreiben" did not appear until 1972 when it was published in a collection of Wolf's essays by the same name. Nowadays, however, both works are highly regarded in the GDR and

51. See Chapter One, p.25.

52. Christa Wolf, "Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann", DA, p.781.

are generally seen as representing a turning point in literary developments in the country, and the term "subjektive Authentizität" is frequently used to characterise much of the literature that has been produced there since the 1970s.⁵³

The works definitely marked a turning point in Christa Wolf's career, completing as they did her break with socialist realist doctrine which, as we have seen, had begun with "Juninachmittag". However, contrary to the opinion of many Western critics at the time, the works did not mark Wolf's break with socialism. The references to Becher and to Seghers, Wolf's insistence that the aims of literature and socialism are the same, reveal that Wolf was eager to place herself in a socialist tradition and not against socialist society. She does so by highlighting the humanist elements common to both socialism and her own view of what literature could achieve and was thus able to win new ground for herself as a writer which was crucial for her next work *Kindheitsmuster*, in which she returns to the topic which had been troubling her for some time, namely her own and Germany's National Socialist past.

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The theme of *Kindheitsmuster*, the need to confront and come to terms with the past, can be traced back to Christa Wolf's early essays,⁵⁴ and plays an important part in *Der geteilte Himmel*. In *Nachdenken über Christa*

53. See Dieter Schlenstedt, *Wirkungsästhetische Analysen* (Berlin: 1979)

54. See note 10.

T. the subject of the Third Reich, which both Christa T. and the narrator experienced when they were still children, is touched upon, and the difficulties involved in talking about that time are briefly referred to when the two meet again at university. Then, the sight of a friend from the past brings back memories of their time together, of the National Socialist schoolteacher who all but Christa T. worshipped, of their membership of the "Bund deutscher Mädel" and of their contemporary, Horst Binder, who reported his father to the Gestapo and later, with the Red Army advancing, shot both himself and his mother. With the image of the "Reiter über den Bodensee" the narrator suggests that neither she nor Christa T. knew what they were going through until it was all over. They are simply grateful that they are too young to have been directly involved in many of the atrocities and are ashamed of the enthusiasm they felt, but are unable to talk about their memories openly. Even now, years after the war, the narrator says, it is too soon to probe the past, to talk about it in anything other than half-sentences.

Der Reiter, hinter dem nichts lag als ein zufällig festgefrorener See, fiel tot vom Pferd, als er erfuhr, was er hinter sich hatte. Sie schrie nur, das ist nicht zuviel. Sie verbrannte ihre alten Tagebücher, da gingen die Schwüre in Rauch auf und die Begeisterungen, deren man sich nun schämte, die Sprüche und Lieder. Die Lebenszeit wird nicht ausreichen wieder davon sprechen zu können, ihre Lebenszeit nicht. Für diese Sache bis zum Schluß die halben Sätze....⁵⁵

The stress on the word *ihre* indicates that although Christa T.'s life will be too short for her to be able to

55. Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* p.31-32.

confront the past openly, that of the narrator will not be, for the time will come when the taboos surrounding the Third Reich can be broken.

In fact the image of the rider, the figures of the teacher, of Horst Binder and indeed Christa T. herself were all to recur, albeit with slightly different treatment in *Kindheitsmuster* which focusses on these years and it would seem that, for Christa Wolf at least, now that she had found the basis from which to write, the time had come to try and turn half-sentences into whole ones, to try and deal with Germany's Nazi past.

In this respect, the fourth dimension of the author is crucial. For by combining her personal experience with her imaginative powers she can offer an interpretation of the events of the time and provide the reader with her view of the complex forces at work in people's minds which made them so susceptible to fascism. In addition she also has the freedom to move between the time levels and thus reveal the interdependency of past, present and future events. In this way she hopes to complement the extensive documentation of events leading up to the Third Reich with a view which, since it is a very personal and subjective view, appeals to the emotions and the imagination of the reader and thus addresses aspects of human understanding which objective facts may have left untouched. Again it is possible to draw a parallel with Anna Seghers' exile works, the full implications of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

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Kindheitsmuster embraces three different time levels. The first covers the period November 1972 - May 1975 and consists of the reflections of a narrator-author on the problems of writing about the past as she exposes the unreliability of memory, the inadequacy of documentary evidence and the impossibility of objectivity. The narrator-author is so alienated from herself that she is unable to refer to herself in the first person and instead addresses herself as "Du". The same is true of the second time level which focusses on a trip made by the narrator - again referred to as Du - together with her husband, brother and daughter, in July 1971 to her birthplace Landsberg/Warthe which is now part of Poland. The third traces the narrator's experiences as a child in the Third Reich until shortly after the end of the war when she and her family were forced to flee from the invading Russian troops. The child she once was is now so foreign to her, more foreign than the town in which she grew up, that she refers to her in the third person and gives her the name Nelly.

It is in fact during her childhood that the narrator-author's alienation from her self begins. For as a small girl Nelly finds it necessary to suppress her true feelings and adopt codes of behaviour more in line with her parents' image of a good daughter in order to gain their affection. In the Third Reich this process continues when she is forced to conform to National

Socialist ideals. This involves the suppression of natural reactions such as fear, weakness, and guilt and demands shows of strength and courage. In its worst form of course, it consists of the glorification of violence and the exclusion of any show of sympathy or sensitivity.

As a result of the demands placed on her both by the family and by National Socialist society, Nelly is unable to be true to herself and is often forced to dissemble. She thus comes to adopt an observer role which is in fact the basis of her artistic talent. In *Kindheitsmuster* the narrator-author is able to turn this self-alienation to her advantage to highlight and reflect on the consequences of her upbringing in National Socialist Germany. For it is the very distance she feels towards herself as a child which enables her to question and criticise her behaviour at the time and to expose its real roots. And even when her conscious self denies her access to the roots of that behaviour she employs dreams in order to expose those elements of her past which she continues to suppress.

It is a therapeutic process since it enables her to understand the reasons for her behaviour and to trace their repercussions for her actions today, and at the end of the work she is able to recover some sense of self when for the first time she uses the first person pronoun ICH. However, it is a tentative recovery expressed in the uncertainty of the statement "Ich weiß es nicht."⁵⁶ and

56. Ibid, p.378.

with it comes the sense that the attainment of self is not as important as the ability to change, to develop, not for the sake of what others want her to be, but because of what she herself wants to be:

Nachts werde ich - ob im Wachen, ob im Traum - den Umriß eines Menschen sehen, der sich in fließenden Übergängen unaufhörlich verwandelt, durch den andere Menschen, Erwachsene, Kinder, ungezwungen hindurchgehen. Ich werde mich kaum verwundern, daß dieser Umriß auch ein Tier sein mag, ein Baum, ein Haus sogar, in dem jeder, der will, ungehindert ein- und ausgeht. Halbbewußt werde ich erleben, wie das schöne Wachgebilde immer tiefer in den Traum abtreibt in immer neuen, nicht mehr in Worte faßbaren Gestalten, die ich zu erkennen glaube. Sicher, beim Erwachen die Welt der festen Körper wieder vorzufinden, werde ich mich der Traumerfahrung überlassen, mich nicht auflehnen gegen die Grenzen des Sagbaren.⁵⁷

The narrator's concern with people's inner lives, the concentration on the complex forces at work in people's minds, which made them so susceptible to fascism, expose Christa Wolf to the charge that this is a subjective approach totally incompatible with the Marxist interpretation of the causes of fascism, namely that it is the inevitable outcome of late capitalism. This point is made by Hans Kaufmann who, in an interview with Christa Wolf during the writing of *Kindheitsmuster*, expressed his concern that her "Pochen auf Erfahrung" might lead to a blurring of the real issues involved.

Ich möchte gern auf den Begriff der Erfahrung zurückkommen. Natürlich sehe ich auch, daß der Künstler nicht beliebige Dinge oder Vorgänge gestalten kann, zu denen er keine Beziehung hat, daß er als besonderer Mensch ein persönliches Weltverhältnis im Werk vergegenständlicht und keine subjektlose Welt hinstellt. Auf etwas Ähnliches zielst du, wenn du auf die Erfahrung pochst. Auf der anderen Seite ist nicht zu übersehen, daß der

57. Ibid.

Begriff dehnbar und verschwommen und deshalb philosophisch nicht viel wert ist.⁵⁸

Kaufmann's criticism is in some respects reminiscent of the criticism of Klara Blum and Georg Lukács in connection with Anna Seghers' novels *Die Rettung* and *Das siebte Kreuz* respectively. For here too both argued that Anna Seghers' concentration on the psychological dimension in the novels obscured the true roots of National Socialism.⁵⁹ In fact, Wolf's response to Kaufmann echoes that of Seghers to Lukács. She points out that it is ridiculous to expect a writer to exclude the subjective dimension from an art work since it is an integral part of the writing process - even when that process is concerned to produce an idealised view of reality as is the case with socialist realism:

Ist es dir schon einmal bewußt geworden, welch hemmungslosen Subjektivismus alle jene Empfehlungen ausstrahlen, die dem Autor zumuten, von Wunschbildern und Konstruktionen anstatt von seiner Erfahrung auszugehen?⁶⁰

Like Anna Seghers she suggests that it is the writer's task to offer his/her subjective experience, since s/he is neither a scientist nor a philosopher but rather a mediator between objective reality and subjective perceptions;⁶¹ and like Anna Seghers she insists that in her case writing on the basis of personal experience does not exclude the marxist point of view since it is a part

58. Christa Wolf, "Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann", DA, p.781.

59. See Chapter Two, p.59.

60. Ibid, p.782.

61. Ibid, p.783. Here Wolf quotes Seghers' description of the writer as "... eigenartige Umschlagstelle vom Objekt zum Subjekt und wieder zum Objekt." (See Chapter One, footnote 17).

of her "Grunderfahrung" and therefore plays an important role in the way she sees the world.

In fact the picture presented in *Kindheitsmuster* of National Socialism as a petit-bourgeois movement - particularly apparent in those episodes concentrating on Nelly's family's support for the new party, which is generally based on the economic advantages to be gained - is fully in accordance with the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of fascism. However, Christa Wolf does suggest, as does Anna Seghers, that economic forces are not the only forces at work in the rise to power of the National Socialists. The clearest example of this is to be found in Chapter Twelve, revealingly entitled "Ein herausfallendes Kapitel", in which Nelly's cousin Astrid is hypnotised by the photographer Richard Andrack. In the previous chapter we have already learned that the narrator-author's daughter is reading Thomas Mann's novella *Mario und der Zauberer*, and the implication is that the attractions of National Socialism were not only economic but also, since the National Socialists were able to capture the imagination of such a large proportion of the German people, psychological. This is of course a dimension which the marxist interpretation of fascism does not explain.

In fact, with their insistence on the economic causes, both of fascism and of man's alienation at work in capitalist society, many marxists fail to acknowledge the alienation felt by workers in socialist society,

alienation which Lenka shares when she works on the production line in a Berlin factory. Lenka's experiences are related in the chapter following the hypnosis episode, and the implication is that marxism needs to address man's inner life, his psychological as well as his economic needs, if it is to offer a true alternative to the exploitation of capitalist society.

That this should include an honest reappraisal of the past is revealed in those episodes concerning the narrator's relationship to her own past in the GDR. Reading through newspapers of 1937 in her search for information on German intervention in the Spanish Civil War, the narrator comes across a report on the Moscow show trials and finds herself trying to suppress the information rather than reflecting on it and assessing its consequences as she does with events related to National Socialism. Her memories of her own involvement in the Stalin years are still too painful and too recent for her to examine them honestly, but the taboos surrounding the figure of Stalin are later developed in her dream of his funeral. There, the questions of the mourners: "So ist er schon tot? Er liegt da schon? Und wen beerdigen wir eigentlich?"⁶² indicate both the extent of his influence in the GDR and the suppression of its existence, and the narrator asks:

Wann .. werden wir auch darüber zu reden beginnen?
Das Gefühl loswerden, bis dahin sei alles, was wir
sagen, vorläufig und dann erst werde wirklich
gesprochen werden?⁶³

62. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.228-9.

63. Ibid, p.229.

It would seem that the inability to come to terms with the Stalinist past is directly related to the inability to come to terms with the National Socialist past and that both have dangerous repercussions in GDR society today. Indeed, the fact that the narrator can only confront this aspect of her past in her dreams indicates the extent to which she has suppressed her memories of those years. However, as on so many other occasions, the narrator is able to turn the negative consequences of past repression to good use. By relating her dreams she allows the fears otherwise suppressed in her unconscious to break through the barriers of self-censorship she is aware of constructing and thus underlines a major theme of the work, the importance of dreams, invention, fiction, as a means of getting closer to the truth.

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This theme is further explored in *Unter den Linden* a trilogy of short stories written while Christa Wolf was working on *Kindheitsmuster* and published in 1974. All three stories employ a variety of fantastic elements - dreams, science fiction, the grotesque - to explore the role of the imagination in people's lives. This dimension is suppressed by the majority of the male characters who, unable to cope with any aspect of life which they do not fully comprehend, prefer to concentrate on what is scientifically measurable and proveable in the mistaken belief that this will bring them closer to the truth. As a result, subjective perceptions about human existence are entirely excluded from their work and, in the case of

the three scientists in "Neue Lenbensansichten eines Katers", from their definition of total human happiness - a dangerous development since these are shown to be the basis of man's ability to empathise and thus achieve an intuitive understanding of his fellow-men. Indeed, the attempt to develop such a concept is itself intrinsically defective, since there is no such thing, and its very conception is based on the exclusion of so many elements of human life.

This is most keenly felt by the female doctor in the third of the stories, *Selbstversuch*, who, by means of the drug "Petersein masculinum", which she has developed together with her professor, the man she secretly loves, undergoes a sex change, ironically in an attempt to win her professor's affection. The transformation is not immediate, however, and although she quickly acquires a man's body she retains the mind and memory of a woman, which, during the transition period enables her to observe male and female behaviour from both perspectives. Slowly she comes to understand the reasons for men's behaviour. Their insistence on systems of rules, their commitment to their work, their attempts to withdraw from relationships with women, are all to compensate for their inability to love. Realising the advantages of a woman's position and therefore the foolishness of her desire to be a man, she decides to change back to a woman and to work on a different experiment - the attempt at love and the invention of a person worthy of love.⁶⁴

64. Christa Wolf, "Selbstversuch". In: *Unter den Linden*

Woman's need and capacity for love is a major theme of all three stories, but particularly of "Unter den Linden" and "Selbstversuch" where it is shown to bind women more closely to life. It is presented as an antidote to the sterile thinking of male scientists who are blind to the richness of humankind's inner life and thus lead a sterile existence in which values such as conformism, opportunism and materialism hold sway:

Herr Jedermann gibt sein Geld aus, damit die Volkswirtschaft floriert, aber er spart sich seine Gefühle. Kollege Jedermann wird konkurrenzfähig. Genosse Jedermann hat Erfolg.⁶⁵

Like *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster*, therefore, the short stories insist on the need for invention and imagination as a means of presenting a truer picture of life and indicate the inadequacy of facts to penetrate the depths of reality. In the words of the narrator in "Unter den Linden": "Nicht mehr bin ich an die Tatsachen gekettet. Ich kann frei die Wahrheit sagen."⁶⁶ and she looks forward to a time when others will accept her new found insights:

An diesem fernen Tag wird man mir die verrücktesten Erfindungen als blanke Wahrheit aus den Händen reißen und mich dadurch zwingen, immer die Wahrheit zu sagen, nichts als die blanke, verrückte Wahrheit.⁶⁷

The use of absurd and at times grotesque inventions in all three stories underline this theme. They not only open up areas of experience otherwise closed to the

(Berlin/Weimar: 1974), p.133.

65. Ibid, p.41.

66. Ibid, p.7.

67. Ibid, p.17.

readers but also force them to take a second look at what is happening around them with the result that they see it in a new light. For in spite of their "improbable" nature all three stories are very much concerned with problems confronting us in present day society, particularly but not exclusively in the GDR. They warn of the dangers of materialism, of opportunism, of conformism and of the kind of thinking upon which such behaviour is founded, thinking which is shown to have its roots in man's obsession with scientifically proveable facts and in the relegation to a peripheral existence of both the female and the subjective emotional realm with which she is identified. The stories offer no solutions to these problems but they insist on the validity of our subjective perceptions, of our imagination, and suggest that these should be allowed to play a part in our understanding of reality, since only in this way will we be able to achieve greater understanding of ourselves and our role in the world.

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Kindheitsmuster and *Unter den Linden* provide both an illustration and a justification of Wolf's view of socialist literature, the aim of which is, in her eyes, not to instruct people in the benefits of socialism, but instead to provide people with space to explore the possibilities open to them. The writer must therefore be seen not as a teacher or guide but rather as a critical voice, exploring and challenging accepted wisdoms in an attempt to prompt reflection on the part of the reader

and thus indirectly prepare the ground for his development. This is clearly the position adopted by Christa Wolf in the two works, and in the early seventies she was convinced that a place for such a writer existed in the GDR. In November 1976, however, the expatriation of the poet-singer Wolf Biermann placed that conviction in doubt since it seemed to signal that the GDR was no longer prepared to tolerate open criticism.

This was the point made by a number of writers, including Christa Wolf, in a letter of protest to Erich Honecker following Biermann's expatriation. The letter, although submitted to "Neues Deutschland", was also delivered to the French press agency and first appeared in the Western media. As a result, many of the writers came under strong criticism from the party leadership.⁶⁸

In a later interview Christa Wolf was to refer to the event as "ein Einschnitt in der kulturpolitischen Entwicklung bei uns",⁶⁹ and it undoubtedly marked a time of great personal crisis for her. After years of believing that she could work through her writing for the realisation of socialist ideals, she suddenly found herself in the position of an outsider. Her response was to look to writers who had faced similar problems in their own time, writers like those mentioned by Anna Seghers in her exile essays when she had been concerned

68. *Der Spiegel* 24.11.81, p.86-108.

69. Christa Wolf, "Projektionsraum Romantik. Gespräch mit Frauke Meyer-Gosau", DA, p.878.

to point out how important it was for the writer to be needed and to play an active role in society.

Bedenkt die erstaunliche Reihe der jungen nach wenigen übermäßigen Anstrengungen ausgeschiedenen deutschen Schriftsteller. Keine Außenseiter und keine schwächlichen Klügler gehören in diese Reihe, sondern die Besten. Hölderlin, gestorben im Wahnsinn, Georg Büchner, gestorben durch Gehirnkrankheit im Exil, Karoline Günderode, gestorben durch Selbstmord, Kleist durch Selbstmord, Lenz und Bürger im Wahnsinn.⁷⁰

Christa Wolf spent several months researching the work of the two writers who most interested her, Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von der Günderode, in an attempt both to clarify her own problems and to examine the significance of writers outside the classical canon recommended by Lukács.

As a result of her research she wrote a number of essays - "Der Schatten eines Traums" (on Karoline von der Günderode), "Ein Brief über die Bettine" (on Bettine von Arnim), the afterword to Kleist's *Penthesilea* - and the fictional prose work *Kein Ort. Nirgends*.

In both "Der Schatten eines Traums" and "Brief über die Bettine" she draws a number of parallels between the situation of writers and intellectuals in the GDR and that of the early Romantics. In "Der Schatten eines Traums" she talks of a full revolution of the wheel of history,⁷¹ and in "Brief über die Bettine" she gives a striking example of history repeating itself when, in an examination of the expulsion of the Grimm brothers from

70. Anna Seghers, "Vaterlandsliebe" (1935), AAE I, p.36-7.

71. Christa Wolf, "Der Schatten eines Traums", DA, p.512.

the state of Hannover in 1837, she discovers that this was not only because of the contents of a letter they had signed together with five other Göttingen professors in protest at the suspension of the constitution by King Ernst August of Hannover, but also because the letter first appeared in an English newspaper.⁷²

In *Kein Ort. Nirgends* there is a strong sense of identification between the narrator and Kleist and Günderrode. The story is framed in such a way as to invite the reader to draw comparisons between then and now. The narrator begins the work by referring to the writers as predecessors - "Vorgänger" - and, at the end of the story reaches the conclusion that:

Wenn die Menschen gewisse Exemplare ihrer eignen Gattung aus Bosheit oder aus Unverstand, aus Gleichgültigkeit oder aus Angst vernichten müssen, dann fällt uns, bestimmt, vernichtet zu werden, eine unglaubliche Freiheit zu. Die Freiheit, die Menschen zu lieben und uns selbst nicht zu hassen.⁷³

This last quotation is one of the many occasions when the voices of narrator and central characters merge to express views and opinions shared by all three and throughout the work the exclusion of the words "sagte er"/"sagte sie" following statements by Kleist or Günderrode heightens the sense that the narrator and characters share a common voice and experience, and encourages the reader to draw parallels.

72. Christa Wolf, "Nun ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an! Ein Brief über die Bettine", DA, p.597.

73. Christa Wolf, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1979), p.118.

At the same time, however, although the problems of the artist's isolation in society are shown to be common to the central figures of Kleist, G nderrode and the narrator, there are a number of indications that the causes of that isolation are very different. In the case of G nderrode, for example, who in the fictional work is presented as a stronger and more determined character than in the essays, the main cause of her suffering is shown to be linked to the position of women in society. For in the early 19th century, following the division of labour, women were identified with the subjective, emotional realm and were relegated to a peripheral position in the home. For G nderrode, a poetess eager to play an active role in society, this is totally unacceptable, but she is unable to gain the recognition necessary for her to be able to participate more fully in society since men are not prepared to grant it to her. Instead they demand that she behaves as a woman should behave, and when she fails to comply, punish her with rejection. She is thus faced with a lack of acceptance on all levels, as a poet, as the kind of woman she wants to be and as a wife. For although in the fictional work we see her recovering from her relationship with Savigny and thus achieving a sense of liberation which gives her some hope, in real life she became involved in a second unhappy love affair which eventually led to her suicide.

Kleist's situation is very different. As a man he is free to play an active part in society but is unable to do so since such a role demands the suppression of his

creative powers which he cannot live without. He is torn apart by his desire to conform to the ideals of the Enlightenment - and in particular the view of the perfectability of man - and the forces inside himself, symbolised in the work by his ambivalent attitude towards his sexuality, which deny the validity of those ideals. On the one hand, therefore, his failure is determined by society and its insistence on a set of values for human behaviour which fail to take account of much of what is human, but on the other hand it is his inability to accept himself for what he is and to recognise the true causes of his dilemma that leads to his breakdown.

Wolf, however, through her work on Kleist and Günderröde, was able to overcome the despair which she herself had experienced in the wake of the Biermann affair, and to find a new basis from which to write. Once again, therefore, she highlights the importance of the therapeutic function of literature, which as we have seen, was so crucial for her in the writing of *Kindheitsmuster*. In the words of the narrator at the end of *Kein Ort. Nirgends*:

Begreifen, daß wir ein Entwurf sind - vielleicht, um wieder verworfen, vielleicht, um wieder aufgegriffen zu werden, darauf haben wir keinen Einfluß. Das zu belachen, ist menschenwürdig. Gezeichnet zeichnend. Auf ein Werk verwiesen, das offen bleibt, offen wie eine Wunde.⁷⁴

This was clearly a very different basis from the one she had enjoyed in her early years as a writer when she had felt totally in tune with developments in the GDR and

74. Ibid, p.118-119.

had seen the writer as an active participant in those developments. In many ways *Kein Ort. Nirgends* signals an increasing level of sobriety on Wolf's part, for not only is the role of the writer's influence seen to be increasingly limited, but so is the capacity of the GDR to offer its citizens the chance to realise their full potential. Indeed, Kleist's criticism of nineteenth century German society could just as easily be applied to the GDR where man's obsession with technological progress as the basis for economic development had led to a devaluation of qualities such as the imagination and sensitivity which Wolf felt were so important in people's search for fulfilment.

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In the years which followed, Wolf continued to occupy herself with and to search for possible explanations for these developments. In the afterword to Kleist's *Penthesilea*, for example, she explores Kleist's dilemma in more detail and examines more closely the misguided ideals of the writers of the German Enlightenment who, in her view, were able to achieve a harmonious view of man only by excluding aspects of human nature which did not fit in with their image of what human nature should be - one is reminded of the male scientists in "Neue Lebensansichten eines Katers". She traces this tendency back to the Ancient Greeks, who also, as she sees it, defined human behaviour in terms of those aspects which they felt they understood and excluded anything which they did not fully comprehend and

were therefore afraid of - in particular aspects of matriarchal culture which they identified as barbaric:

Was menschlich ist, kann man auf zweierlei Weise bestimmen: indem man möglichst viele, auch unheimliche, Erscheinungen des Menschlichen in den Begriff hineinnimmt oder indem man möglichst vieles aus ihm verbannt. Den letzteren Weg gingen die Griechen, und nach ihnen ging diesen Weg die abendländische Kultur; inselhaft, wie der freie Polisbürger, umgrenzt der griechische Philosoph und Tragiker, was zur menschlichen Gesittung gehört, jenseits dieses abgezielten Bereichs, der schon die griechische Frau nicht mehr aufnimmt, geschweige Sklaven und Angehörige anderer Völker, beginnt das Niedere, Barbarische.⁷⁵

In the fourth of her "Frankfurter Vorlesungen" which she held in 1982, Wolf is concerned with the way in which this development has manifested itself in literature, both in the way women are presented, namely, as in the case of Helen of Troy, as objects, as possessions to be fought over, and in the very nature of the heroic epic which Christa Wolf sees as forming the basis of modern literature.

In the lecture, entitled "Ein Brief über Eindeutigkeit und Mehrdeutigkeit, Bestimmtheit und Unbestimmtheit; über sehr alte Zustände und neue Seheraster; über Objektivität.", Christa Wolf sees a direct link between the strand of the hero's development, which is central to the epic form, and the single thread which the patriarchal system took from the web of matriarchal culture and developed to the exclusion of much which could have been so fruitful:

Erst als Besitz, Hierarchie, Patriarchat entstehen, wird aus dem Gewebe des menschlichen Lebens, das die drei Uralt-Frauen, die Moiren, in der Hand hatten,

75. Christa Wolf "Kleist's *Penthesilea*", DA, p.663.

jener eine blutrote Faden herausgerissen, wird er auf Kosten der Gleichmäßigkeit des Gewebes verstärkt: die Erzählung von der Heroen Kampf und Sieg oder Untergang ... Die Fabel wird geboren. Vorbildwirkung wird dem Helden auferlegt bis heute.⁷⁶

She sees a link too, between the epic's glorification of the exemplary hero, of his deeds and achievements - a glorification which excludes the realm of subjective feeling - and the obsession with analysis based on objective facts which dominates Western thought:

...eben diesen Weg ist doch, vereinfacht gesagt, das abendländische Denken gegangen, den Weg der Sonderung, der Analyse, des Verzichts auf Mannigfältigkeit der Erscheinungen zugunsten des Dualismus, des Monismus, zugunsten der Geschlossenheit von Weltbildern und Systemen, des Verzichts auf Subjektivität zugunsten gesicherter >Objektivität<.⁷⁷

The epic, she concludes, not only reflects but supports and re-inforces patriarchal structures:

Das Epos, aus den Kämpfen um das Patriarchat entstanden, wird durch seine Struktur auch ein Instrument zu seiner Herausbildung und Befestigung.⁷⁸

In attacking the classical literary form of the epic there can be no doubt that Christa Wolf is also attacking the views of Georg Lukács whose doctrine of socialist realism was an attempt to introduce classical ideals to socialist literature. She thus makes it clear that the GDR has not been untouched by the developments to which she refers. The words "Vorbildwirkung" and "Objektivität" are obvious references to the socialist realist principles of the positive hero and authorial objectivity

76. Christa Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra*, (see note 2), p.147.

77. Ibid, p.139.

78. Ibid, p.147.

and she points both to their inadequacy and to their dangers since they are based on principles of exclusion rather than acceptance. As on previous occasions when she had been concerned to distance herself from the doctrine of socialist realism, she turns to the work of Ingeborg Bachmann and in this case to *Der Fall Franza* as an example of an alternative aesthetic. For Bachmann's works are not concerned with idealisation. On the contrary, they encourage people to confront themselves honestly and to come to terms with their weaknesses, the suggestion being that only then will they be able to appreciate and accept rather than fear "otherness" and to integrate it into their own thinking:

eine andre Art Logik ... eine andre Art, Fragen zu stellen, ... eine andre Art Stärke, eine andre Art Schwäche. Andre Freundschaft, andre Gegnerschaft; da stürzen, wohin man blickt, wo man eine Seite aufschlägt, die Alternativen, die unsre Welt, die auch die Lehre vom Schönen und die von der Kunst, bisher gehalten und zerrissen haben, in sich zusammen, eine neue Art Spannung scheint da um Ausdruck zu ringen, in Entsetzen und Angst und in schlotternder Verstörtheit.⁷⁹

It is as part of that alternative that Wolf's fifth lecture, the fictional work *Kassandra* must be understood. In it, Wolf retells the story of Homer's *Iliad* from the point of view not of the male victor but of the female victim and presents the story of the fall of Troy not as a major achievement but as a considerable loss for Western culture. For Wolf parallels the Greek defeat of Troy with the establishment of the patriarchy and the subsequent exclusion from our value system of qualities associated with the female such as sensitivity,

79. Ibid, p.151.

imagination and vulnerability which she presents as being as necessary for our survival as the strength and bravery given such prominence by male society.

The same theme is touched upon in *Kindheitsmuster* in which Nelly found herself forced to repress her true emotions in order to live up to the ideal of the brave "deutsches Mädel" demanded by National Socialism. In fact, whilst the earlier work was a clear attempt by the author to come to terms with her childhood and youth in the Third Reich, *Kassandra* can in many ways be seen as an attempt by Christa Wolf to come to terms with her role in socialist society. For although Christa Wolf is not identical with the figure of Kassandra, a number of parallels can be established between the prophetess, who desires the office for the sake of the influence it brings her but comes to realize that such influence is only acquired at the price of conformism, and the writer, who was initially a fervent proclaimer of the socialist message but came to realize that her active participation in socialist society was only tolerated on the condition that she did not raise too critical a voice against the establishment. Whereas Kassandra's position is shown to be a hopeless one however - her prophecies go unheeded and we see her shortly before her death at the hands of Clytaemnestra - Christa Wolf's is not. The writing of *Kassandra* and its success as a work in the German Federal and Democratic republics are an indication that there are people who are prepared to listen.

Feminist elements can also be found in Wolf's next work, *Störfall*, in which a first person reacts to the news of the breakdown that day of the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl in the Soviet Union which has sent a cloud of radio-active particles half-way round the world. On the same day the narrator's brother is undergoing brain surgery made possible by the development of laser instruments which enable surgeons to remove the tumour safely, and she finds herself confronted with both the negative and the positive aspects of humankind's technological achievements. Her reflections on the implications of technological progress form the main body of the work. They occur in a completely domestic setting as the narrator performs the everyday tasks which the running of a house and garden require.

The narrator considers the reasons for man's obsession with technological progress even when it bears the seeds of his own destruction as it does in this case. In previous works, and particularly in *Unter den Linden* the suggestion had been that this was due to the fact that scientists were both out of touch with reality and also lacked the imagination to understand the full implications of their actions. In *Störfall*, too, the narrator hints that it is scientists' lack of contact with everyday life which enables them to develop weapons for man's annihilation when she lists those activities, generally performed by women, which are regarded by male scientists as trivial but which, in the narrator's view, form the essential scaffolding of our lives:

Liste der Tätigkeiten, die jene Männer von Wissenschaft und Technik vermutlich nicht ausüben oder die sie, dazu gezwungen, als Zeitvergeudung ansehen würden: Einen Säugling trockenlegen, Kochen, einkaufen gehn, mit einem Kind auf dem Arm oder im Kinderwagen. Wäsche waschen, aufhängen, abnehmen, zusammenlegen, bügeln, ausbessern, Fußböden fegen, wischen, bohnen, staubsaugen. Staubwischen. Nähen. Stricken. Häkeln. Sticken. Geschirr abwaschen. Geschirr abwaschen. Geschirr abwaschen. Ein krankes Kind pflegen. Ihm Geschichten erfinden. Lieder singen.⁸⁰

She reads an article on the "Star Warriors" of California who work fifteen hours a day on a diet of McDonalds hamburgers to develop the weapons necessary for the United States' Star Wars project, and the narrator considers whether similar behaviour could be expected from a mother who, through the very act of breastfeeding her child is able to establish a much closer bond with life:

Ich habe mir einfach überlegt, ob verschiedene Abschnitte unseres Gehirns vielleicht aufeinander einwirken, dergestalt, daß einer Frau, die monatelang ihren Säugling stillt, eine Hemmung einer bestimmten Hirnpartie verbieten würde, mit Wort und Tat diejenigen neuen Techniken zu unterstützen, die ihre Milch vergiften können.⁸¹

This is a naive suggestion and the extremely negative presentation of the United States is reminiscent in many ways of the picture of the West to be found in Wolf's reviews of the 1950s, a picture which reveals how difficult it is for Christa Wolf to free herself from the limitations of a "Feindbild". However, the fact that other technological advances save her brother's life force her to accept the positive as well as the negative

80. Christa Wolf, *Störfall. Nachrichten eines Tages* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1987), p.38.

81. Ibid, p.27.

aspects of technological developments which receive a far more differentiated presentation in *Störfall* than in her previous works. Indeed, on this occasion the narrator's main concern is not to condemn technological progress as such, but to establish the reasons for the "Zerstörungsdrang" which seem to govern the actions of those involved in certain scientific developments.

She comes to the conclusion that such behaviour is ultimately due to a blind spot in human consciousness and that the cause of that blind spot is language which, whilst it highlights certain aspects of our consciousness, at the same time allows regions of the unspoken inner life of the individual to remain in darkness. Hence language, which sets us apart from other animals, at the same time hinders our understanding of the basic instincts we have in common with them. As a result these elements remain undetected and due to our failure to confront their existence represent a constant threat on those occasions when they surface since we do not know how to deal with them.:

Die "Brillanz unserer jüngsten evolutionären Errungenschaft, die verbalen Fähigkeiten der linken Hemisphäre", verdunkeln also, "wie Sonnenlicht den Sternenhimmel, unser Bewußtsein für die Funktion der intuitiven rechten Hemisphäre, die bei unseren Vorfahren das Hauptwerkzeug zur Wahrnehmung der Welt gewesen sein muß."⁸²

Thus language, which in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster* is presented as a means of approaching the truth, albeit an imperfect one, is now revealed as an obstacle to our very survival, and the

82. Ibid, p.91.

narrator concludes that it is her role as a writer, as someone dealing with language, to confront her own blind spot, to confront the darker aspects of her own consciousness, in the hope that she might be able to penetrate them and thus learn to live with the tensions that their existence produces. And she points to Joseph Conrad as a writer who, in his novel *Heart of Darkness*, has understood the human capacity for evil and has still been able to use language to confront them productively. For here is a writer who speaks from the depths of his own experience to communicate his terrible insights about human life.

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Kassandra and *Störfall* mark the latest stage in a development which has seen Christa Wolf move from the belief that the writer should work hand in hand with the state and proclaim the benefits of socialism to the view that she should function as a critical voice, speaking on the basis of her own experience in the hope that that experience might be of relevance for others. Whilst Christa Wolf herself would still claim to be a socialist writer, therefore, she has a more differentiated and humane - and less provincial and ideological - idea of what a socialist writer can be.

Her voice still offers a vision, but it is no longer as prescriptively socialist as it was when she first started writing and is concerned not with the way in which the individual needs to adapt for the sake of socialist society but rather with the extent to which

society needs to accommodate the needs of the individual. Its aim is thus to reveal and release the possibilities which lie within people and help them find their full expression. In this respect she reveals her closeness to humanist ideals, although in more recent years she has reassessed those ideals and focussed on humankind's capacity for evil as well as good due to the existence of elements which she feels were ignored by certain Enlightenment philosophers for the sake of an harmonious ideal of humanity. She believes that it is the failure of Western culture to acknowledge the existence in man of animalistic forces that is at the source of many of the conflicts facing us in the twentieth century. The lack of acceptance of such forces in ourselves encourages us to project them onto others and results in the creation of "Feindbilder" which are at the centre of many of the conflicts between the superpowers. She thus suggests that we begin to confront these in ourselves since only in this way can we learn to deal with the tensions which their existence causes and thus put them to productive use.

This development in the themes of her work has been reflected in the narrative form she has chosen for their expression. She has broken away from prescriptive socialist realist models and the idealised view of reality they were expected to project and has instead chosen to write according to the principles of what she refers to as "subjektive Authentizität". This demands that she is true to herself, that she combines personal

experience and the projections of her imagination to provide a truer picture of reality than the method of socialist realism ever allowed for.

The above outline has indicated that Anna Seghers' role in this development has not been insignificant, but Wolf's most recent works bear little similarity to the work of the older writer - either structurally or thematically - and it is the aim of the next chapter to establish the precise extent of Anna Seghers' importance for Christa Wolf and the resulting similarities and differences in the work of the two writers.

4. ANNA SEGHERS AND CHRISTA WOLF - A COMPARISON

Wolf first became acquainted with the work of Anna Seghers in 1948 when, as a nineteen-year-old schoolgirl, she had to read *Das siebte Kreuz*, by that time one of the prescribed texts in East German schools.¹ This was to be the first of an important series of encounters for the younger writer, resulting in her writing twelve publications on Seghers, ten of which appeared in her most recent collection of essays *Die Dimension eines Autors*. These include the text of her first interview with Seghers in 1959, which is unique in the collection since it is the only text dating from her days as an editor with the journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur*.

Two years after the interview Wolf published a review of Seghers' novel *Die Entscheidung*. Both interview and review are full of Lukácsian terminology and judgements as Wolf measures *Die Entscheidung* against the standards set by the theory of socialist realism.

Vor allem rückt sie die Schicksale ihrer Menschen in das untrügliche Licht der großen geschichtlichen Kämpfe unseres Jahrhunderts, die sie in ihren einzelnen Phasen, in ihrer Gesamttendenz und in ihrem gesetzmäßigen Ausgang auf einmal durchschaut und überblickt: Sie sieht die Geschichte von ihrem Ende her.²

They thus provide evidence of Wolf's mechanical understanding of literature already referred to in connection with *Moskauer Novelle*. Indeed, in the interview Seghers is at times shocked by the naivety of

1. Christa Wolf, "Das siebte Kreuz", DA, p.276.

2. Christa Wolf, "Land, in dem wir leben. Die Deutsche Frage in dem Roman *Die Entscheidung* von Anna Seghers.", *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (5/1961), p.51.

her interviewer and clearly feels forced to correct some of Wolf's misconceptions about the writing of a work of literature, for example when Wolf asks whether Seghers had chosen to write about a steel works, because steel was the most important branch of the East German economy:

Christa Wolf: Wahrscheinlich haben Sie ein Stahlwerk gewählt, weil zu dieser Zeit die Stahlindustrie der wichtigste Zweig unserer Wirtschaft war?

Anna Seghers: Nein. Nicht bewußt. Ein Stahlwerk macht einen Eindruck wie das Meer und das Hochgebirge, nur daß es der Mensch ist, der hier die Macht hat. Man sieht dort eine große Kraftentfaltung; der Mensch, der das Feuer bändigt, wirkt mächtig. Der ganze Vorgang ist so real, daß er schon wieder märchenhaft wirkt, er zeigt Wildes und Gezähmtes zugleich. Ein Martinofen ist mit nichts zu vergleichen.³

At the same time, however, a number of moral and thematic points emerge which were clearly to be significant for Wolf's later development and reveal Seghers' importance for Wolf as an alternative voice to that of Lukács, a voice which was to help her to break away from the narrow prescriptions of socialist realist doctrine. These include Wolf's admiration for Seghers' ability to reveal the interconnectedness of past present and future (Es bedeutet, daß Gegenwart und Zukunft an die Vergangenheit geknüpft werden...⁴); her ability to explain and instruct, but also to awaken dreams and longings (Dieses Buch erklärt nicht nur, es belehrt nicht nur. Es weckt Wünsche und Sehnsüchte, Hoffnungen und Träume, die vielleicht weiterglimmen werden, wenn man schon vergessen hat, woran sie sich zuerst entzündeten.⁵); and to address a theme which was to

3. Christa Wolf, "Fragen an Anna Seghers", DA, p.260.

4. Christa Wolf, "Land, in dem wir leben" (see note 2), p.57.

5. Ibid, p.61-62.

become central to Wolf's work from *Der geteilte Himmel* onwards - the readiness of a society to enable its members to fulfil their true potential as a standard by which to measure it. (Ob sich ein Mensch entwickeln kann nach seinem Talent und seinen Fähigkeiten, oder ob er daran gehindert wird und dauernd zurückgestoßen, das ist ein wichtiger Maßstab für die Gesellschaftsordnung, in der der Mensch lebt.⁶).

Wolf also praises Seghers' presentation of the division of Germany in the novel:

Bisher gibt es in der Gegenwartsliteratur Ost- und Westdeutschlands kein Werk, das in ähnlich tiefer und zugleich umfassender Weise den Grundwiderspruch im geteilten Deutschland erfaßt...⁷

and it is not surprising, given Wolf's admiration for the work of the older writer, that a number of similarities can be traced between *Die Entscheidung* (1959) and her own novel dealing with the same theme, *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963).

In Wolf's novel the West receives a less hostile treatment than in that of Seghers in that it is not depicted as a hotbed of anti-communist activity, but it is nevertheless portrayed as a society in which people are concerned with their own gain and, since they have no consideration for the needs of others, lead shallow and empty lives. The wealth of goods available, the relative luxury in which people live, offers them a certain degree of satisfaction, but this quickly passes and cannot be

6. Christa Wolf, "Fragen an Anna Seghers", DA, p.257.

7. Christa Wolf, "Land in dem wir leben", (see note 2), p.53.

compared with the more lasting satisfaction to be gained in the East from working with others for the good of one's fellow men. In Rita's words:

Aber schließlich läuft alles doch auf Essen und Trinken und Sichkleiden und Schlafen hinaus. Wozu aß man? fragte ich mich. Was tat man in seinen traumhaft schönen Wohnungen? Wohin fuhr man in diesen straßenbreiten Wagen? Und woran dachte man in dieser Stadt, ehe man einschlief bei Nacht.⁸

In addition, many of the conflicts the novel contains are reminiscent of conflicts contained in *Die Entscheidung*. Manfred's frustration following the decision not to put his Spinning Jenny into production, for example, recalls the frustration experienced by Rentmair in *Die Entscheidung* when he is refused money to continue with his experiments in the Kossin Steelworks. On both occasions the intriguing of Western agents is responsible: Manfred's machine is rejected by a factory manager who leaves for the West shortly afterwards, while Rentmair is the victim of Büttner's plotting to get the Kossin engineers out of the GDR, but in both cases it is weakness on the part of the characters themselves which has such tragic consequences. For it is a lack of faith in the socialist system which prompts both Rentmair's suicide and Manfred's departure for the West, itself a kind of death since life there is shown to be so empty of meaning.

Sie sah: Er hatte aufgegeben. Wer nichts mehr liebt und nichts mehr haßt, kann überall und nirgends leben. Er ging ja nicht aus Protest. Er brachte sich ja selbst um, indem er ging. Kein neuer Versuch: Das Ende aller Versuche...Was ich von jetzt an tue, gilt nicht mehr.⁹

8. Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, p.173.

9. Ibid, p.179.

The relationship of Katharina and Riedl in *Die Entscheidung* also bears a number of similarities to that of Manfred and Rita in *Der geteilte Himmel* in that both couples are separated by the division of Germany and by sets of attitudes associated with the two German states. Thus, both Riedl and Rita find themselves forced to choose between a fleeting personal happiness with the one they love, and a more lasting happiness which comes from living in a society which works for the benefit of the collective. Indeed both are shown to be inextricably linked, for Riedl and Rita know that the happiness to be gained from such a relationship is not sufficient if it does not occur in a society dedicated to the good of all, and neither hesitate to return to the GDR after their visits to Katharina and Manfred respectively, in spite of the pain that their decision causes them.

As both Beicken and Smith point out in their essays on the relationship between Seghers and Wolf, the two writers employ the pronoun *WIR* to denote a sense of belonging to the new society. In *Der geteilte Himmel* this is particularly apparent in the prologue and epilogue which frame the novel and also occurs on those occasions when Rita identifies herself with GDR society, most significantly, perhaps, when she visits Manfred in the West:

"Wir haben gerade eine schwere Zeit", sagte sie, scheinbar ohne Zusammenhang mit ihrem Gespräch.
 "Wer: Wir?" fragte Manfred.

"Alle", sagte sie. "Der Druck nimmt zu. Besonders im Werk haben wir's gemerkt..."¹⁰

On the whole, however, it must be said that the main focus in *Der geteilte Himmel* is less on society in general than it is on Rita herself. Indeed, whereas in *Die Entscheidung* Rentmair, Riedl and Katharina are just three of many characters, Manfred and Rita are the central figures of *Der geteilte Himmel*, which examines the effects of the division of Germany on their relationship. Moreover, whilst the main characters in *Die Entscheidung* are largely defined by their commitment to socialism and tend to have a representative function, in *Der geteilte Himmel* that representative function is complemented by other characteristics which enable us to see the characters as individuals in their own right. Rita's belief in socialism is shown to be founded on her sensitivity and imagination, whilst Manfred's rejection of it is due to his bitterness and cynicism resulting from his experiences in the Third Reich.

This shift in emphasis from society to the individual is further developed by the author's extensive use of the interior monologue. This offers us direct access to the characters' thoughts and feelings, both in the case of Manfred but even more so in that of Rita, for whom inward reflection is crucial in enabling her to come to terms with her decision to leave Manfred and return to the GDR. The narrator thus moves from the *WIR* of the prologue to *SIE* and ultimately to *ICH*:

10. Ibid, p.175.

sie sieht immer noch die beiden Waggon, grün und schwarz und sehr groß. Wenn die angeschoben sind, laufen sie auf den Schienen weiter ... Und wo sie sich treffen werden, da liegt sie. Da liege ich.¹¹

In so doing she not only introduces a questioning element to the novel as she reveals Rita's doubts and uncertainties about her past behaviour, but also throws light on the importance of broader social changes for the individual herself and her "kleines wichtiges Leben".¹²

As we have seen, Seghers also made extensive use of the interior monologue in her exile novels, but failed to exploit it in *Die Entscheidung* since at the time she was more concerned to comply with the demands of socialist realism. This discouraged an excessive concentration on individual characters' feelings, as it was felt that it resulted in a blurring of the issues involved and was detrimental to the communication of the socialist message. Riedl's decision to return to the GDR is thus presented in extremely stark terms. When asked by his wife whether he does not want to ask other engineers why they have left the GDR he responds as follows:

Riedl zögerte einen Augenblick mit der Antwort. Er dachte. Nun ja, das wäre vielleicht vernünftig. Und er dachte: Wozu? Sie sind auf jeden Fall weg, und ich will zurück, auf jeden Fall.¹³

His decision is accompanied by none of the soul-searching which follows that of Rita and he is never shown to feel any sense of regret about the correctness of his choice, not even after his wife dies in childbirth after making her own way across the border from West to East Germany.

11. Ibid, p.10.

12. Ibid, p.15.

13. Anna Seghers, *Die Entscheidung*, p.517.

Indeed, if he feels any regret at all it would seem to be connected with his failure to convince Katharina of the positive aspects of life in the GDR.

Ich hätte sie in den Arm nehmen müssen und mitschleppen. Wie ist es nur möglich, daß ich es nicht tat? Sie hätte hereinwachsen können in unser Leben. Lernen, Gebrauchtwerden, Helfen. Das ist jetzt unmöglich. Es gibt nur hüben und drüben.¹⁴

Whilst both works bear a number of thematic similarities therefore, and can be said to be concerned with the way in which people achieve a sense of belonging in the new socialist state, this theme is presented with a somewhat different focus connected with the presentation of society and the individual. For whereas *Die Entscheidung* concentrates very firmly on the establishment of the new socialist society, *Der geteilte Himmel* is far more concerned with the effect of developments in the new society on the individual. The building of the Berlin Wall is thus seen from the point of view of its effect on the lives of Rita and Manfred, and although the novel clearly states that the building of the wall is justified (and is indeed only an outward manifestation of a division of attitudes which have existed in the two German states since they came into being), at the same time it does not try to disguise the despair which Rita feels when she realizes that its existence will make it impossible for her to see Manfred again - a realization which leads to her breakdown.

The significance of individual thoughts and feelings in the two works finds its clearest expression in the

14. Ibid, p.325.

narrative techniques employed by the two writers. Seghers is distanced and authoritative, her central figures are characterised by their words and deeds and she avoids the psychologising so negatively received as "subjectivity" by socialist critics in her exile works. By contrast, the very structure of *Der geteilte Himmel* makes such "subjectivity" inevitable. The novel focusses on Rita's memories as she recovers in a sanatorium and later at home from her accident and her break with Manfred. With the exception of the prologue and epilogue which place Rita's experiences within the broader framework of socialist society, therefore, the novel is exclusively concerned with individual thoughts and perceptions and points both to their validity as a register of experience, and to the importance of the process of reflection as a means for people to come to terms with their past.

In this respect, of course, *Der geteilte Himmel* fails to fulfil socialist realism's requirement for objectivity, a fact which explains much of the negative criticism which the novel received on publication.¹⁵ The fact that the novel was awarded the Heinrich-Mann-Preis, however is an indication that the cultural establishment recognised the socialist commitment it undoubtedly contained, and were prepared to tolerate the shift in focus which Christa Wolf had introduced to the novel.

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15. See Chapter Three, p.94-95.

The importance of reflection as a means of coming to terms with one's experience and thus of preparing the ground for the future was to become central to Wolf's work in the years which followed. Its importance for the writing process was in fact the subject of Wolf's second interview with Anna Seghers in 1965 in which she asks a number of questions about the biographical nature of Seghers' work and the extent to which her writing has enabled her to come to terms with her experiences. .

Significantly Seghers avoids direct answers:

die Erlebnisse und die Anschauungen eines Schriftstellers, glaube ich, werden am allerklarsten aus seinem Werk, auch ohne spezielle Biographie. Ich fürchte, ich mache damit etwas Schlimmes, weil Sie sich für das Biographische interessieren, und ich muß auch gleich sagen, daß ich selbst schon viele biographische Arbeiten geschrieben habe, aber keine autobiographischen.¹⁶

she replies, showing a degree of caution which must be seen to be due to her desire not to emphasise the subjective elements of her work at a time when objective presentation of facts was called for. 1965 was, after all, the year in which socialist realism was reaffirmed as the creative method of GDR literature at the Eleventh Plenum of the SED,¹⁷ and Anna Seghers was very reluctant to place herself in opposition to the socialist state she had fought so hard to bring about and might well be very wary of saying anything which could be seen to call the doctrine of socialist realism into question.

16. Christa Wolf, "Ein Gespräch mit Anna Seghers", DA, p.280.

17. See Chapter One, p.33.

Yet although Wolf fails to obtain any direct confirmation of her views on literature in the interview - and Seghers quickly realizes that this is what Wolf is seeking -, it is on precisely these aspects of Seghers' writing that she chooses to focus in her major essay on Seghers, "Glauben an Irdisches" (1968). The essay thus suggests that Wolf's interest in Seghers was not only the result of her admiration for the older writer but also of a desire to find legitimation for her own views in Seghers' works.

The title refers to Seghers' belief in what Wolf interprets as "die irdische Vernunft, die denkende, mitfühlende, verstehende und handelnde Vernunft".¹⁸ Wolf's participles focus on the totality of human activity and reveal a search for wholeness which is less evident in Seghers' own understanding of the term. Indeed, the latter is never quite as precise as Wolf in her interpretation of it and her belief in mankind could be said to be based more on the existence of an inner, creative power which makes a vision of the future and therefore progress possible. Wolf traces its presence in Seghers' work from her early years as a writer and finds its clearest expression in the words of the prisoners in *Das siebte Kreuz* when they speak of the inner strength which helps them to stand up to the oppression of the National Socialists:

jene Kraft, die lang genug taxiert worden war, sogar von uns selbst, als sei sie bloß eine der vielen gewöhnlichen Kräfte der Erde, die man nach Maßen und

18. Christa Wolf, "Glauben an Irdisches", DA, p.317.

Zahlen abtaxiert, wo sie doch die einzige Kraft ist, die plötzlich ins Maßlose wachsen kann, ins Unberechenbare.¹⁹

It is a belief which Wolf, at this point in her career, clearly shares. It finds expression in the figure of Rita in *Der geteilte Himmel*, who has "gerade genug Exaktheit, gerade genug Phantasie"²⁰ for the new socialist state, and appears in a more sober form in the figure of Christa T., who has "eine Vision von sich selbst"²¹ but dies before she is able to realize it. It is present in *Kindheitsmuster*, too, on those occasions when Nelly, although a fervent supporter of the Nazi regime, finds herself unable to condone the behaviour of the National Socialists. For example, when she reads an article about Lebensborn houses, in which blonde-haired, blue-eyed men and women are brought together for the production of the Aryan race, her reaction is one of horror:

Wahrheitsgemäß soll gesagt sein, daß Nelly, als sie den Artikel gelesen hatte, das Blatt sinken ließ und deutlich dachte: Das nicht. Es war eine jener seltenen, kostbaren und unerklärlichen Gelegenheiten, bei denen Nelly sich in bewußtem Widerspruch zu den geforderten Überzeugungen sah, die sie doch gerne geteilt hätte. Das schlechte Gewissen, wie so oft, prägte ihr den Augenblick ein. Wie sollte sie ahnen, daß das Ertragen eines schlechten Gewissens unter den waltenden Verhältnissen eine notwendige Bedingung zur inneren Freiheit war?²²

Such occasions are rare in the novel, and it must be said that *Kindheitsmuster* reveals Wolf's increasing concern with the darker sides of the human personality, a concern which dominates later works such as *Kassandra* and

19. Anna Seghers, *Das siebte Kreuz*, p.7.

20. Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, p.47.

21. Christ Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, p.114.

22. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.208.

Störfall. The reasons for this have been examined in Chapter Three. Nevertheless a belief in a creative inner force in humankind persists, a belief which is central to the conviction of both writers that literature has a role to play in society. For it is precisely this unassailable and creative force within man that literature can unleash, thereby contributing to people's development. Thus, Christa Wolf's words in "Lesen und Schreiben", in which she talks of prose learning to exploit its ability to penetrate the reader's consciousness ("Die epische Prosa sollte eine Gattung sein, die es unternimmt, auf noch ungebahnten Wegen in das Innere dieses Menschen da, des Prosalesers einzudringen. In das innerste Innere, dorthin, wo der Kern der Persönlichkeit sich bildet und festigt"²³). recall the motto which opens Seghers' short story, "Die schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok":

Und habt ihr denn etwa keine Träume, wilde und zarte, im Schlaf zwischen zwei harten Tagen? und wißt ihr vielleicht, warum zuweilen ein altes Märchen, ein kleines Lied, ja nur der Takt eines Liedes, gar mühelos in die Herzen eindringt, an denen wir unsere Fäuste blutig klopfen? Ja, mühelos rührt der Pfiff eines Vogels an den Grund des Herzens und dadurch auch an die Wurzeln der Handlungen.²⁴

Like Anna Seghers, Wolf sees the function of literature to be different from that of the political pamphlet since it appeals to the emotions rather than the intellect, and shapes her writing accordingly. It should however be noted that her prose is far more complex and sophisticated than that of Seghers' folk-tale and

23. Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben", DA, p.490.

24. Anna Seghers, "Die schönsten Sagen vom Räuber Woynok", (see Chapter Two, note 23)

suggests an important difference in her understanding of how to exploit literature's ability to penetrate human consciousness, a difference which will become more apparent later in this chapter.

As has been said, Wolf's main concern in "Glauben an Irdisches" is Seghers' use of experience as a basis for her work. "Sie kennt keinen Satz, den sie nicht erfahren hat", she writes, and goes on to look in detail at the Seghers-Lukács correspondence, concentrating in particular on Seghers' insistence on the importance of the writer's experience in the creative process:

Gegenüber einer Theorie, die den Schriftsteller in die Rolle eines passiven Spiegels der objektiven Realität zu drängen suchte, hebt Anna Seghers die aktive Arbeit des Autors hervor, der ein Produkt seiner Zeit, aber auch ein schöpferisches Subjekt ist, das den Mut und die Verantwortung finden muß, rücksichtslos "auf die Realität loszusteuern", keine "Furcht vor Abweichung" vom unmittelbaren Erlebnis zu haben, da diese Furcht "entrealisierend" wirkt, aber auch nicht auszuruhen auf dem "Vollbesitz der Methode".²³

"Glauben an Irdisches" was written as an afterword to a collection of Anna Seghers' essays which Christa Wolf edited in 1968. It was the year in which Wolf also wrote "Lesen und Schreiben", as she sought to find a literary form more appropriate to the times and to her own experience as a writer than the doctrine of socialist realism. In "Lesen und Schreiben" Wolf makes no direct mention of Seghers, but her rejection of the reflection theory which was central to Lukács' theory of socialist realism, recalls Seghers' rejection of the same theory in

25. Christa Wolf "Glauben an Irdisches", DA, p.303.

her correspondence with Lukács in the 1930s.²⁶ Similarly, Wolf's reasons for that rejection, namely that reality is transformed in the consciousness of the writer,²⁷ echo Seghers' famous words about the writer as "einzigartige, eigentümliche gesellschaftliche Verknüpfung von subjektivem und objektivem Faktor, Umschlagestelle vom Objekt zum Subjekt und wieder zum Objekt".²⁸

Her essay on Seghers must therefore be seen both as part of that search, and also as a further example of her desire to place herself in the socialist tradition which we have already looked at in the previous chapter in connection with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* In fact, in addition to the quotation from Johannes R. Becher which forms the motto of the novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* also contains a number of indirect references to the essays of Anna Seghers. Christa T.'s desire to hold on to things through her writing, for example, ("Dichten, dichten machen, die Sprache hilft."²⁹) can be seen to have its roots in Anna Seghers' own description of Johannes R. Becher in her obituary of 1958:

Nichts hat er übersehen, alles war ihm wert, gedichtet zu werden - dichten kommt ja von dem Wort dicht, dichter machen, zusammenfassen, was etwas unzerstörbar Menschliches, was eine Spur Hoffnung gab.³⁰

26. Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben", DA, p.496.
Lassen wir Spiegel das Ihre tun, spiegeln, sie können nichts anderes. Literatur und Wirklichkeit stehen sich nicht gegenüber wie Spiegel und das, was gespiegelt wird. Sie sind ineinander verschmolzen im Bewußtsein des Autors.

27. Ibid.

28. Anna Seghers, "Briefe an Georg Lukács", AAE I, p.80

29. Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, p.20.

30. Anna Seghers, "Unser Hans Becher", AAE II, p.120.

whilst Christa T.'s enthusiasm for the Russian teacher and writer Makarenko which prompts her decision to become a teacher ("Ja, so wird es sein. Dies ist der Weg zu uns selber. So wäre diese Sehnsucht nicht lächerlich und abwegig, so wäre sie brauchbar und nützlich."³¹) can be compared to that of the young teacher whom Anna Seghers refers to in her speech of 1961, "Die Tiefe und Breite in der Literatur": "Da las ich Makarenko. Ich wußte plötzlich: Nur Lehrer werden. Ein richtiger Lehrer."³²

Furthermore, Wolf's defence of her choice of character in the essay "Selbstinterview", in which she preempts much of the criticism which later followed the novel's publication, is also reminiscent of Seghers' words in her interview with Wolf in 1959. Wolf writes:

Die Literatur nimmt sich, wie unsere Gesellschaft, gerade der Unruhigen an. Menschen darzustellen, denen diese Unruhe fremd ist: Selbstzufriedene, Platte, allzu Anpassungsfähige - das erscheint mir langweiliger und unergiebig. Es kann allerdings nötig sein. Zum Beispiel, um den Hintergrund zu zeigen, von dem ein unruhiger, produktiver Mensch sich abhebt oder um die besondere Qualität seiner Unruhe herauszuarbeiten. Auch um die Gründe zu finden, warum seine Unruhe stecken bleibt - wenn dies der Fall sein sollte; warum sie nicht aus sich heraustreten und sich voll verwirklichen kann.³³

Seghers said, in reference to Robert Lohse of *Die*

Entscheidung:

Ich habe Lohse gern, weil er es nicht leicht hat. Menschen, die es immer leicht haben und besonders strahlend sind, mißtraut man etwas, ehe man sie nicht auf die Probe gestellt sieht.³⁴

and she continues:

31. Christa Wolf, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, p.33.

32. Anna Seghers, "Die Tiefe und Breite in der Literatur", AAE II, p.150.

33. Christa Wolf, "Selbstinterview", DA, p.33.

34. Christa Wolf, "Fragen an Anna Seghers", DA, p.257.

Ob sich ein Mensch entwickeln kann nach seinem Talent und seinen Fähigkeiten oder ob er daran gehindert wird und dauernd zurückgestoßen, das ist ein wichtiger Maßstab für die Gesellschaftsordnung, in der der Mensch lebt.³⁵

Clearly Seghers' work was not without significance for Wolf's development as a writer, therefore, since it often enabled her to find her way towards a view of socialist literature which differed from the prevailing doctrine of socialist realism. However, it is important to note that the closeness between the two writers is not as great as Wolf suggests. Evidence of this can be found both in Seghers' reticence in her interview with Wolf on the subject of the incorporation of the writer's experience in a work of art, and in the fact that the works Seghers was producing at the time were very different from the kind which Wolf was advocating, and conform much more to the doctrine of socialist realism than Wolf was suggesting Seghers wished to. It would thus seem that at this stage in her career Wolf was constructing an image of Seghers in order to lend her own view of socialist literature greater legitimation.

In fact it is possible to trace differences in the narrative stance of the two writers even in those works which bear a number of thematic similarities. This has already been seen to be the case in connection with *Die Entscheidung* and *Der geteilte Himmel*, and it is also apparent in those works dealing with the Third Reich, namely *Das siebte Kreuz* and *Kindheitsmuster*.

35. Ibid.

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The two works present a very similar picture of Nazi Germany. They show a basically unpolitical people whose main concern is the security of their home and family. This is true both of the Marnets in *Das siebte Kreuz* and of the Jordans in *Kindheitsmuster*, all of whom are shown to be fairly aware of what is going on around them but prefer to ignore anything which does not affect them directly. Many know, for example, that concentration camps exist, but many share the opinion of Charlotte Jordan that such camps are for criminals who deserve to have been locked up in them.

In both works the appeal of National Socialism is shown to lie not only in the economic benefits it brings - although these play an important part - but also in the ability of the movement to capture people's imagination and offer them the chance to be something better than they feel they are. However, in *Kindheitsmuster* Wolf presents a far more reserved view of people's capacity for good than Seghers in *Das siebte Kreuz*. For whereas Seghers, writing to present an active model, concentrates on people's ability to break out of the daily routine and to reveal a strength and courage they had not imagined possible, Wolf, writing to understand, although she does not deny that these possibilities exist within people, is much more concerned to show the difficulties entailed in such a break when it means the disruption of all that they have lived and worked for.

These differences can of course be put down to the difference in generation separating the two writers (although, as we shall see, the generation gap is not the only reason for them). Seghers wrote *Das siebte Kreuz* whilst in exile at a time when she was thousands of miles away from home and had no direct contact with what was happening in her country. It is imbued with her love for that country and faith in her countrymen and, dedicated to the "toten und lebenden Antifaschisten Deutschlands", was clearly intended to inspire hope and courage and to encourage resistance to National Socialism. Wolf, on the other hand, wrote *Kindheitsmuster* in the 1970s, forty years after Hitler came to power. Having grown up in Nazi Germany she was well aware of the effects of that upbringing on her thinking and in particular on patterns of thought which she saw as being perpetuated in the GDR. Her main concern in the work was the effect of those patterns on life in contemporary Germany, and her main aim in the novel was therefore not to inspire courage and hope but rather to prompt reflection on the significance of Germany's National Socialist past for the present and the future.

This basic difference in intention also finds expression in the narrative stance of the two writers. The author of *Das siebte Kreuz* is authoritative and able to offer insights into and explanations for human behaviour, the narrator-author of *Kindheitsmuster* is questioning and uncertain and constantly casts doubt on the accuracy of her account of the time. She exposes the

unreliability of memory by comparing what she remembers with what she must have known and thus makes it clear that she is unable to offer explanations for what happened and can only prompt reflection on the significance of this for our daily lives. She acknowledges the complexities of truth telling, since truth is compromised by the process of its telling, but accepts that any truth that is going to operate in the world has to be told and hence compromised. As a writer, therefore, she has to live with and deal in muddled truths and point out to the reader that she is doing so.

Das Gewissen des Schreibers hat sich, so sieht es aus, nur um die Wahrheit zu bekümmern, "die reine Wahrheit und nichts als die Wahrheit". Da aber die Mitteilung zum Wesen der Wahrheit gehört, produziert er, oft zweifelnd, eine vielfach gebundene Wahrheit: an sich selbst gebunden, den Mitteilenden, und den immer begrenzten Freiheitsraum, den er sich abgezwungen hat; gebunden an den, über den er aussagt, und nicht zuletzt an jene, denen die Mitteilung gilt und die man nur warnen kann: Nicht "rein" - mehrfach getrübt ist die Wahrheit, die sie erreicht, und sie selbst werden sie, durch Urteil und Vorurteil, noch einmal verunreinigen. So mag sie brauchbar sein.³⁶

This difference in approach is also apparent if we compare *Kindheitsmuster* with Anna Seghers' short story "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen". At first glance the story seems very similar to Wolf's work for here too is a first person narrator-author remembering her youth. Her memories occur when, suffering badly from the trauma of exile in Mexico, from the heat and from the loneliness, she dozes in the midday sun and suddenly finds herself transported to the landscape of her childhood in the area around Mainz:

36. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.296.

Es schimmerte grün hinter der langen weißen Mauer. Wahrscheinlich gab es dort einen Brunnen oder einen abgeleiteten Bach, der das Rancho mehr bewässerte als das Dorf. ..Ich trat in das leere Tor.. Ich konnte das Grün im garten jetzt riechen, das immer frischer und üppiger wurde, je länger ich hineinsah...Jetzt war meine Neugier so wach, daß ich durch das Tor lief, .. Im selben Augenblick rief jemand: Netty.³⁷

The transition from the emptiness of her life in Mexico to the richness of her youth is signalled by the contrasting adjectives - "leer" and "üppig", "weiß" and "grün" - used to describe the landscape of the two countries, as the narrator attempts to convey complex and volatile sense impressions of this happy time of her past. Like *Kindheitsmuster* therefore, the story affirms the importance of unashamedly subjective perceptions, an importance underlined by the narrator's use the first person pronoun "ich". The first person narrator is otherwise extremely rare in Anna Segher's work, and on other occasions when it is employed - as in *Transit* (1944) and the much later work *Überfahrt* (1971) - it refers to a fictional male character. In "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", however, the use of the name Netty (Anna Seghers' real name was Netty Reiling) reveals a clear connection between the narrator and the author herself, and what follows is an intensely personal conjuring up of a school outing shortly before the First World War.

The story is circular in form, ending as it began in Mexico, with the narrator awakening from her dream-vision

37. Anna Seghers, "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", (Darmstadt und Neuwied: 1979), p.34.

and remembering the task set her by her schoolteacher so many years before, namely to describe the events of the day in a class composition. The narrator thus ends determined to do what she has in fact just done.

Man hat uns nun einmal von klein auf angewöhnt, statt uns der Zeit demütig zu ergeben, sie auf irgendeine Weise zu bewältigen. Plötzlich fiel mir der Auftrag meiner Lehrerin wieder ein, den Schulausflug sorgfältig zu beschreiben. Ich wollte gleich morgen oder noch heute abend, wenn meine Müdigkeit vergangen war, die befohlene Aufgabe machen.³⁸

In the story the narrator makes the most of the freedom afforded by fiction to move between the various time-levels in order to reveal the connections between the events she describes. The childhood idyll with which she begins is thus shown to be totally destroyed by the events set in motion, first by the Great War, itself the result of imperialism, and later by National Socialist rule. As such the story offers both an explanation of the events of the preceding years and a celebration of a good time of youth as the narrator attempts to come to terms with the loss of her home, her family and her friends through the writing process. The story thus has a therapeutic function, it is itself a recovery and helps her to recover.

Christa Wolf greatly admires this short story. She has referred to it on more than one occasion in her essays and used it as the starting point of her interview with Seghers in 1965 when she was concerned to explore the autobiographical nature of the older writer's work.

38. Ibid, p.52.

Her admiration is based firstly on the intensely personal nature of the story, its therapeutic function, and secondly on Seghers' use of the dream form to enable her to move between interlapping levels of time.

An der Beschreibung dieses Weges durch Anna Seghers kann man lernen was Prosa ist. Treffpunkt zwischen Subjekt und Objekt. Phantastische Genauigkeit. Strenge Gebundenheit, grenzenlose Freiheit. Verzauberung von Fakten in neue Realität.³⁹

In other words, what fascinates Wolf are precisely those elements of the work which do not conform to the prescriptions of socialist realist literary theory, namely the subjective elements, and it is not surprising that Wolf perceived the story as representing an alternative form of socialist literature and thus as a point of departure for her own development away from socialist realism.

This aspect of Seghers' importance for Wolf is particularly marked in *Kindheitsmuster*, in which she herself attempts to come to terms with the events of her childhood through her writing and employs the same narrative freedom afforded by fiction to move through time and explore the connections between past and present events. Yet there are also important differences apparent both in the structure of the two works - for whereas "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" is circular in form and tightly constructed, *Kindheitsmuster* is loose, essayistic and episodic - and in their treatment of similar themes. In order to highlight the differences in the similarities

39. Christa Wolf, "Anmerkungen zu Geschichten", DA, p.323.

I have chosen to compare Chapter Ten of *Kindheitsmuster*, entitled "Verführung zur Selbstaufgabe. Gedächtnisverlust. Die Lehrerin", with "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" since it contains a number of passages reminiscent of the earlier work.

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In Chapter Ten of *Kindheitsmuster* the narrator pays a visit to the countryside of her home town. Like the narrator of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", therefore, she is confronted with the beauty of the landscape of her youth, but whereas the former rejoices in that beauty, the latter is first surprised by it - since she had not been aware of it as a child - and then resistant to it, indeed she attempts to devalue it by comparing the scene with that of a picture postcard:

Über das Panorama warst du selbst überrascht. Der Fluß, der gerade hier zu seinem großen Bogen ansetzt und sich nach Osten hin verbreitert, in Ufergestrüpp verliert. Und jenseits des Flusses die Himmelslinie der Stadt - Bahnbögen, Speicherhäuser, die Kirche, Wohnhäuser -, wie es heute am Kiosk als Postkarte verkauft wird.⁴⁰

Her resistance can be put down to the alienation she feels in connection with her past and with herself as a young girl - alienation which, as we saw in Chapter Three, is further underlined by her use of the term "Du" to address herself. This contrasts strongly with the "ich" of Seghers' narrator, whose sense of self is far more intact - indeed, since this is one of the rare occasions that Seghers uses the first person, it could be argued that her sense of identity was at its strongest at

40. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.200.

this point. This leads to a difference in narrative stance which is further illustrated by what follows.

As in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" the narrator dozes and dreams she sees two former classmates walking towards her, accompanied by her Jewish friend, Jossel, whom she did not get to know until much later. The words which introduce the vision, "eine gewisse Zeit muß vergangen sein", underline the use of same stylistic device employed by Seghers and point to the capacity of dreams, of fiction to reveal connections otherwise closed to us:

Dann kamen dir auf einmal - eine gewisse Zeit mochte immerhin vergangen sein - in einem ungewissen Wetter auf einer unbekannten grauen Straße drei Menschen entgegen, die, wie du scharf empfandest, überhaupt nicht zusammengehörten: Vera Przybilla und Walpurga Dörting, zwei Mädchen aus deiner ehemaligen Klasse, mit denen du nie befreundet warst, und zwischen ihnen dein alter Freund Jossel.⁴¹

As in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" the vision is accompanied by a sense of exclusion. Seghers writes:

Ich wurde gerade ein wenig traurig, kam mir, wie es in der Schulzeit leicht geschah, ein wenig verbannt vor aus den gemeinsamen Spielen und herzlichen Freundschaften der anderen.⁴²

and in *Kindheitsmuster*, although the narrator is surprised to see Jossel with friends he couldn't possibly have known, she quickly realizes that the three people, all of whom were victims of Nazi persecution due to their religious beliefs, belonged together far more than they belong with the child Nelly.

Wäre er damals in diese Stadt gekommen... dann hätte er eher noch mit Vera Przybilla, der Baptistin, und

41. Ibid, p.201-202.

42. Anna Seghers, "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", p.37.

mit ihrer Freundin Walpurga, der Tochter eines christlichen Missionars... irgendeine Straße entlanggehen können als mit Nelly.⁴³

But whereas in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" the narrator never explores the reasons for her feelings of exclusion and quickly reasserts the childhood idyll: "Da blieben die beiden noch einmal stehen und nahmen mich in die Mitte."⁴⁴ in *Kindheitsmuster* the vision prompts both a reflection on the function of dreams, which, it is suggested often force us to confront elements of ourselves and our past we would like to forget, and a confrontation of the narrator with Nelly's own past. In so doing she highlights an important difference between Netty and Nelly (the similarity between their names is also striking), between the narrator of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" and the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster*. For whilst we can speculate that Netty's Jewishness might be the reason for her exclusion from the group, it is Nelly's non-Jewishness and her loyalty to the National Socialist regime that prevents her from joining Vera, Walpurga and Jossel.

Thus, although both works are similar in that both acknowledge the importance of subjective perceptions and both have a therapeutic function for their writers, there is an important difference in the narrative position that the writers are able to adopt, since the narrator of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" was always opposed to National Socialism, but the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* was once a

43. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.202.

44. Anna Seghers, "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", p.37.

firm believer in National Socialism. In other words, the narrator of the former work was always on the right side, while the narrator of the latter was once on the wrong side.

This means that the narrator of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" can write with an authority not open to the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster*, an authority which, significantly, does not arise out of her own behaviour. For despite the intensely personal nature of the story the narrator says little about her own position under the Third Reich, and it is important to note that in this respect the story is not subjective. On the contrary, the fates of the narrator's classmates are quite objectively represented in accordance with the Marxist Leninist interpretation of events, and the narrator's authority must be seen to be based on Marxist Leninist theories, which find their confirmation in the destruction caused by National Socialism.

That authority is further legitimated by the fact that she is given the task to relate the story by her teachers, themselves innocent victims of the National Socialist regime who, recognizing Netty's gift for writing, ask her to describe the events of the day in a class-composition. By writing, therefore, Seghers is both able to satisfy her own inner compulsion to "work through" her experiences, to "commemorate" them, and to fulfil her duty to those in charge. In other words the story provides a perfect illustration of the combination

between "Intuition" and "Auftrag" which she herself was later to describe in her letter to Jorge Amado as a necessary pre-requisite for a work of art.⁴⁵

The position of the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* however is very different. As a once-fervent supporter of the National Socialists she can hardly condemn the Third Reich without condemning her own behaviour and attempting to explain how it came about. As we have seen in Chapter Three, her explanation is extremely personal and occasionally conflicts with the official Marxist Leninist explanation that National Socialism was purely the outcome of late capitalism.⁴⁶ Nor is it legitimated by the authority of the teacher. Nelly's teacher, Juliane Strauch, is herself a committed National Socialist and Nelly's relationship to her is far more problematic than that of Netty to her teachers in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen". For although Nelly idolises Juliane, although she longs to win her admiration, she cannot help having misgivings when that admiration is forthcoming. It is as if, deep down inside, she understands that everything Juliane believes in is wicked and Juliane's acceptance of her must therefore mean that she is wicked, too. For Nelly, therefore, there is no harmony between "Intuition" and "Auftrag", on the contrary, her intuition is constantly in conflict with what she feels to be her duty as a good German citizen of the Third Reich. She frequently feels pulled in two directions since she is

45. See Chapter Two, p.70.

46. See Chapter Three, p.119.

faced with the choice between suppressing her self for the sake of the National Socialist ideals she wants to believe in, or being true to herself and thus betraying those ideals - a predicament which Wolf was later to explore in the figure of Kleist in *Kein Ort. Nirgends*.⁴⁷

However, the self-alienation created by this conflict also has its positive side in that it results in a critical and questioning attitude which is entirely lacking in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", in which the narrator-author is simply concerned to pass on to the reader her insights into the present social and political situation. For the narrator of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" is sovereign, she is a traditional storyteller in the mould of the nineteenth century realists as described by Walter Benjamin. She examines problems and provides solutions, "sie weiß Rat"⁴⁸. The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* does not, indeed she is so aware of people's tendency to suppress things they do not want to confront that she cannot help doubting her own memories and constantly casts doubt on what she herself has written. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Three, a major theme of Wolf's later works is the fact that it is no longer aesthetically or politically possible to have a narrator "der Rat weiß".

The difference in narrative stance is perhaps best illustrated in connection the narrators' attitudes when

47. See Chapter Three, p.128.

48. Walter Benjamin, "Der Erzähler". In: Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. II* (Frankfurt/M: 1972), p.464.

their respective school classes are set an essay. For whereas Netty accepts her task unquestioningly and is concerned to relate her experiences, Nelly cannot help doubting the truth of her story:

Als sie jenen Sonntag beschrieb, an dem dieses Jahr der erste Schnee gefallen war, hatte sie keine Sekunde aus dem Auge verloren, für wen sie diese Beschreibung anfertigte. Über jeder Zeile lag ein Hauch von Unwahrhaftigkeit, sie hatte ihre Familie eine Spur zu idyllisch, sich selbst um mehr als eine Spur zu brav geschildert: Genau so, wie sie glaubte, daß Julia sie zu sehen wünschte. (Die Heuchelei und daß sie ihr schwach bewußt blieb, ebenso wie die Sehnsucht nach Aufrichtigkeit. Vielleicht war das eine Art von Rettung? Ein Rest von Eigenleben, an den sie später anknüpfen konnte?)⁴⁹

The passage is important for several reasons. It can be read as a critique not only of Nelly's own behaviour in the Third Reich, but also of Christa Wolf's own early years as a writer when she was only too willing to write what was expected of her rather than what she herself felt. In this respect it is interesting to note the mention in this chapter of Christa T.'s name in connection with the development of Nelly's more critical attitude towards Juliane Strauch,⁵⁰ for it was the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* that marked the beginning of a more critical attitude on the part of Christa Wolf both towards socialist realist literature and towards the authority of the socialist state itself.

Given the allusions to Seghers' work contained in the chapter, however, it can also be read as a modern variant of Seghers' own narrative position in "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen". Of course, *Kindheitsmuster* is

49. Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster*, p.210.

50. Ibid, p.213.

not only a much longer and more complex work than "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", it was also written in a different historical context, and it is not surprising that Seghers, writing at a time when it was considered important to explain the reasons for the events in Germany to others, felt no need to address the issues which Wolf found it necessary to confront thirty years later when she feels compelled to adopt a more critical and questioning stance.

Thus, although Wolf draws on Seghers' work, and although she herself makes use of the narrative technique employed by Seghers in works such as "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", a technique which, since it underlines the validity of dreams and subjective perceptions, offers an alternative to the prescriptions of socialist realism, she is unable to adopt the same narrative position of authority. This can be seen to be due both to the different experience of the two writers resulting from their difference in generation, and to a difference in temperament. In this respect it is interesting to note that in *Kindheitsmuster* it is Nelly's ability to stand outside, to observe the behaviour of both herself and others that results in her critical and questioning attitude. In "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen", Netty's desire to belong, to be part of the group, makes such an observer role impossible.

Whilst the two writers share a similar view of the role of literature and what literature can achieve,

therefore, a view based on their belief in the existence of a human personality, open to and affectable by art; and whilst both believe that the aims of literature and of socialism are the same since both assist in the development of that personality, they are separated by their different responses to the demands of the socialist state, their difference in generation and in experience which makes them write, as I have indicated, in such different ways.

From the 1920s onwards Anna Seghers worked through her writing to bring about a socialist Germany. On many occasions, particularly after her return to Germany after the war, that involved the suppression of what she intuitively felt was the source of the power of literature, namely the ability to penetrate people's consciousness, to capture their imagination and present them with a vision. Indeed, it is only really during the the popular front years, when she was able to justify this aspect of her work on the basis that the imaginative dimension was necessary if literature was going to reach as wide an audience as possible, that she was able to give her talent free rein. As has been said, this resulted in the writing of what are generally regarded as her most innovative and successful works, namely *Das siebte Kreuz*, *Transit* and "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen". But after her return to Germany she was again ready to suppress these aspects of her writing, which she clearly felt were less important at this point than the spreading of the socialist message.

Christa Wolf's relationship to socialism, however, was very different. A generation younger than Anna Seghers she could not perceive it as the culmination of all she had lived and worked for and therefore something to be preserved at all costs. Instead her relationship is characterised first by rejection, then by relief that she again has something to hold onto, and later by a critical distance as she comes to realise that the state is working for its own preservation rather than for the individuals it purports to serve.

This changing relationship is reflected in her writing, for whereas in her early years as a writer she was eager to conform to the demands of socialist realism and indeed employed it as a standard by which to measure the success or failure of literary works, she gradually came to feel that the doctrine was inappropriate both for herself as a writer and for the times in which she was writing, and instead sought a more appropriate form which aimed not to instruct and explain but rather to prompt reflection and thus assist the development of the individual. In fact, the basic difference between the two writers is that whereas Seghers saw the main purpose of her art to lie in the service of the new socialist state, Wolf sees hers to lie in the service of the individual in that state.

This essential difference is best illustrated if we look at the two collections of short stories published in

the early 70s by the two writers: Seghers' *Sonderbare Begegnungen* (1973), and Wolf's *Unter den Linden* (1974).

Both collections take the imagination as their central theme. As we have seen in Chapters Two and Three it is an important theme for both writers and one which they see as the key to the development of the individual since it is man's capacity to dream, to long for change that makes human development, makes progress possible.

This is the theme of a number of Seghers' exile works but it is excluded from her major post-war novels, in which she was more concerned to provide the objective depiction of reality in its revolutionary development as demanded by socialist realism. The imagination is again an important theme in *Das wirkliche Blau*, however, in which it is shown to enrich and illuminate man's experience, and its central role in *Sonderbare Begegnungen* marks a further attempt by Seghers to reassert its significance for our understanding of life.

The first story is science fiction and focusses on the ways in which technological developments and artistic inventions can both enrich our lives. The second story is set in the Nazi years in Germany and reveals that man's imagination can be a source of paranoia but also has healing effects, whilst the third is an imaginary discussion of the role of the imagination in literature between E. T. A. Hoffmann, Gogol and Kafka.

The stories do not represent a plea for the imagination at all costs, however. For although, as we saw in Chapter Two, Seghers argues in favour of the imagination by stating that the socialist state itself was once a vision which has, in her view, now been realised,⁵¹ (and thus very cleverly makes the point that the imagination is an element of our perceptions which we cannot and should not ignore), at the same time she makes it clear that she is not arguing in favour of a break with the doctrine of socialist realism, but rather for a reassessment of what the doctrine should encompass.⁵² As in her years in the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers, therefore, her chief responsibility is not to art but to the extent to which art can serve the aims of the socialist state.

Wolf, however, is far more radical. The three "improbable" stories which make up the trilogy *Unter den Linden*, range from dream-vision to satire to science fiction, and must be seen as stories of exploration and experimentation. This is true both of Wolf as a writer - she refers to the stories as "Kleine Proben auf anderen Instrumenten"⁵³ - and for the characters, who are able, by means of the freedom afforded by their dreams and experiments, to find out more about themselves and thus find the basis for future development. In "Neue Lebensansichten eines Katers" this is presented ex

51. See Chapter Two, p.82.

52. Ibid.

53. Christa Wolf, "Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann", DA, p.802.

negativo, but this is because the male scientists totally exclude the realm of the imagination from their lives and thus condemn themselves to a sterile and meaningless existence.

Whilst Seghers' stories represent a plea for a broadening of the concept of socialist realism therefore, *Unter den Linden* can be seen to present a direct challenge, not only because all three stories insist on the impossibility of objectivity, but also because in them the imagination is shown to be essential as a means of enabling the individual to explore possibilities which might otherwise be closed to him. Indeed, this is how Christa Wolf's works from "Juninachmittag" onwards must be seen, as "Spiele mit offenen Möglichkeiten".⁵⁴ as explorations of possibilities open to the individual which enable him/her to find out more about him/herself and thus prepare the ground for future development.

The idea that art, literature, the imagination can act as a mediator between human nature and human reason and thus provide the individual with room for his/her development, is a humanist ideal which Schiller examines in "*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*", in which he talks of the mediating role of beauty between the human intellect and human nature:

Es ist dem Menschen einmal eigen, das Höchste und das Niedrigste in seiner Natur zu vereinigen, und wenn seine Würde auf einer strengen Unterscheidung des einen von dem andern beruht, so beruht auf einer geschickten Aufhebung dieses Unterschieds seine Glückseligkeit. Die Kultur, welche seine Würde mit

54. Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben", DA, p.478.

seiner Glückseligkeit in Übereinstimmung bringen soll, wird also für die höchste Reinheit jener beiden Prinzipien in ihrer innigsten Vermischung zu sorgen haben.⁵⁵

This ideal finds expression in Seghers' work too, particularly in her exile years when she was less subject to the constraints of a literary programme and was able to justify her personal view that literature's chief strength lay in its ability to affect people's emotions and thus sensitize them to the injustices at work in society. These humanist aspects of Seghers' work provide the basis for the similarities between the work of Seghers and that of Wolf for both believe in the existence of a creative force in man, and both believe that literature has a role to play in the releasing of that force. In this respect it is interesting to note that Seghers' later essays not only reiterate her arguments to Lukács but do so in words which are very reminiscent of those used by Wolf to defend her concept of "subjektive Authentizität". This suggests that she drew strength from Wolf's arguments and was not herself unaffected by the work of the younger writer.

In a letter to Christa Wolf in 1979 in honour of the latter's fiftieth birthday, Seghers praises both *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, but is more reserved in her judgement of Wolf's most recent work, *Kindheitsmuster*, and the letter provides evidence of the different attitudes of the two writers towards the

55. Friedrich Schiller *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Stuttgart: 1965), p.101.

socialist state, attitudes which, as this chapter has shown, reveal themselves in their works.

In *Die Entscheidung* and *Der geteilte Himmel* these differences are connected with their views of the relationship between the individual and society. Seghers places greater emphasis on the need for the individual to make a commitment to socialist society, whilst Wolf places more emphasis on the developmental process which the individual undergoes before making that commitment. This in turn is reflected in the narrative stance which each chooses to adopt. Seghers, for example, is more concerned to present what she sees as the truth to her readers and seeks to gain their support for the socialist state. She realizes that a work of literature functions differently from a political manifesto in that its appeal is to the emotions rather than to the intellect, but she would seem to feel that the aim of a work of literature should nevertheless be the same as that of a manifesto, namely to win people over to socialism. Wolf, on the other hand sees art as part of a developmental process, both for writers themselves, since it enables them to come to terms with their experience and to explore possibilities - hence her belief that the writer should "wahrheitsgetreu erfinden aufgrund eigener Erfahrung" - and for individual readers who, she suggests, could use the space which literature provides to explore the manifold possibilities open to them and thus find out more about themselves.

In her essays on Seghers, Wolf has tended to underplay those differences and, if she has admitted to them at all has generally put them down to the difference in generation separating herself and the older writer:

Man steht auf verschiedenen Seiten der Generationsschranke; man versteht sich nicht immer, man ist voneinander befremdet... Nicht von Ideen ist hier die Rede (nicht allein von Ideen) sondern von Kunst: Ihre Zeit fließt anders, sie trägt ihr andere Beispiele zu, geschlossener Schicksale. Sie sah nicht nur eine andere Wirklichkeit - sie sieht auch Wirklichkeit anders. Ein pädagogischer Rückhalt in manchen ihrer Bücher ist unverkennbar.⁵⁶

This is of course a valid argument. It is totally in accordance with the belief of both writers that artists are shaped by their time and themselves shape their time by communicating their experience of it in the art work, and the comparison of Seghers' *Das siebte Kreuz* and Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* has revealed the extent of the influence which the author's experience can have on a work of literature.

At the same time, however, the difference must also be seen to be based on a different view of literature's precise role within socialist society. This is a point which Wolf never really confronts when writing about Seghers. She talks of the increased pedagogical element in Seghers' works, but never goes into this in detail, and she is able to create the impression of an affinity between herself and Seghers by concentrating on Seghers' exile works. She omits to mention that although after her return to the GDR Seghers continued to argue in favour of

56. Christa Wolf, "Fortgesetzter Versuch", DA, p.343-344.

writers writing according to their experience, she argued that they do so for the purpose of fulfilling the principles of socialist realism.

As a result, the picture Wolf presents of Seghers is incomplete and, in the case of the works she refers to highly selective, and must be seen less as a full portrayal of Seghers herself than as an attempt by Wolf to lend credence and support to her own views of socialist literature at a time when the doctrine of socialist realism still held sway.

The last occasion on which Wolf calls upon Seghers as an influence in her work is in connection with *Kein Ort. Nirgends*,⁵⁷ the novel in which she relates an imaginary meeting between Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von der Günderrode, two writers who for many years were regarded as decadent in the GDR, due to Lukács' influence, but whom Seghers frequently defended in her exile essays. Since then Wolf's references to Seghers have been rare. It is as if, confident of her own voice and of her position as one of the GDR's leading writers, she no longer needs to call upon the authority of the older writer for support.

57. In an interview with Karin McPherson in 1979 Wolf gives the following answer to a question concerning her special interest in Kleist and Karoline von der Günderrode:
 "First I must say that it was an external stimulus, the frequent mention of this name in Anna Seghers' work, which first aroused my interest." Karin McPherson, "Christa Wolf in Edinburgh. An Interview". *GDR Monitor* No 1, (Dundee: 9/1979), p.10.

This perhaps explains Wolf's inability to talk about the precise nature of Seghers' influence on her work. For whilst it is true that Seghers is not without significance for her development as a writer, Wolf is well aware that her significance is less as a direct influence but as an authority which Wolf was able to employ to lend support to her own view of literature, albeit at the cost of misrepresenting Seghers herself. And although she continues to speak of the older writer as a model, she tends to do so less in connection with Seghers as a writer than as a mother of two children who, in spite of the many obstacles she faced, was nevertheless able to become an extremely successful writer and spokeswoman for socialist literature. As she said in a recent interview with Theresa Hörnigk:

Ubrigens ... mag sie auch für mich eine Art Zeichen dafür gewesen sein, daß man es als junge Frau mit Kindern schaffen kann zu schreiben - in ihren unendlich viel schwierigeren, den meinigen gar nicht vergleichbaren Verhältnissen, hatte sie es jedenfalls geschafft.⁵⁸

58. Theresa Hörnigk, "Gespräch mit Christa Wolf". In: Hörnigk, (1989), p.25.

CONCLUSION

This study opened with a presentation of three contrasting views of the nature of the relationship between Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf, namely those of Peter Beicken, who sees Wolf as Seghers' successor, of Joseph Pischel, who sees Wolf's concern with Seghers' work to result from her search for her own poetological position, and of Colin Smith who believes that Wolf misreads the older writer to the detriment of our understanding of Seghers' work.

However, although Smith is right to suggest that Seghers' significance for Wolf results in part from the fact that Wolf is very selective in her reading of Seghers to the extent that she even misreads the older writer, and although he is correct in stating that: "The direction in which Wolf has moved has proved to be one of increasing distance from the premises of Seghers's art"¹, he is wrong to suggest that Seghers' influence on Wolf is only minimal. For this study has shown that not only are there a number of genuine similarities in their works, but also that Seghers' exile writing, and in particular her letters to Georg Lukács, was essential for Wolf in enabling her to break away from the prescriptions of socialist realism and in providing the basis from which she could fight for a more differentiated understanding of socialist literature.

1. Colin Smith, "Christa Wolf and Anna Seghers". In: *German Life and Letters*, Vol. XLI (4/1981), p.235.

In fact, what we have is an excellent example of the nature of influence as described by Borges in his essay on the relationship between Robert Browning and Franz Kafka, in which he explains that without his own reading of Browning, Kafka would not have been able to become the writer he did, and that, as a result of Kafka's work, we ourselves see Browning differently.

Robert Brownings Gedicht Fears and Scruples weist prophetisch auf Kafkas Werk voraus; jedoch infolge unserer Kafkalektüre verfeinert und verschiebt sich das Gedicht in der Vorstellung des Lesers. Browning las er nicht so, wie wir es heute lesen. Im kritischen Vokabular ist das Wort "Vorläufer" unentbehrlich; man sollte jedoch versuchen, es von jedem polemisierenden oder rivalisierenden Beiklang zu reinigen. Tatsache ist, daß jeder Schriftsteller seine Vorläufer erschafft. Seine Arbeit modifiziert unsere Auffassung von der Vergangenheit genauso wie sie die Zukunft modifiziert.²

This is precisely what happens in Wolf's reading of Seghers. By concentrating on those elements in Seghers' work which appeared to diverge from the socialist realist orthodoxy, Wolf has been able to find the basis she herself needed to break away from prescriptive realist forms, has been able to find her own voice. Peter Beicken's view of Wolf as Seghers' successor can be seen to be justified, not only for the reasons he suggests, but also because Wolf has chosen to construct an image of Seghers which lends her own literary programme greater legitimation. In so doing she has highlighted aspects of Seghers' work which are all too frequently ignored by critics East and West alike, and far from contributing,

2. Jose Luis Borges, "Kafka und seine Vorläufer". In: Jose Luis Borges: *Gesammelte Werke. Essays* (Munich: 1979), p.116-117.

as Smith suggests, to "the comparative neglect of the bulk of Seghers' oeuvre"³. Wolf has actually made Seghers more interesting for us.

To conclude, therefore, it is true to say that both Anna Seghers and Christa Wolf are convinced that literature has a role to play in shaping people's socialist consciousness. This is not only expressed in their essays and speeches but is frequently thematicised in their works. Seghers' novels, for example, contain a number of characters who are deeply affected by works of literature which are shown both to illuminate aspects of their everyday experience and make them aware of possibilities otherwise closed to them, thereby encouraging them to act for change. Similarly, Christa Wolf's works contain a number of central characters who are shown to look to literature to help them make sense of their own lives, whilst more recent works such as *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Kassandra* reveal the importance of this aspect of literature for the author herself, who is able, by means of identification with other writers and literary figures to explore and come to terms with the problems she herself faces.

In the works of both writers literature is shown to offer people room to experiment, to find out more about themselves. It acts as a mediator between their emotions and their intellect, thereby contributing to their development and assisting them in their attempts to

3. Ibid, p.245.

realise their true potential. By so doing, literature is seen to assist the realisation of socialism's chief goal, namely to aid people in their search for fulfilment.

Since the appeal of literature is shown to be different from that of rational argument, it is important that writers incorporate their own subjective perceptions, their own experience, as these are shown to be equally valid in helping readers to understand what is happening to them. Indeed, both Seghers and Wolf argue that it is impossible for writers to exclude this element as writers are themselves determined by their times and this is inevitably communicated in their work.

This is the point Anna Seghers makes to Georg Lukács in the thirties when Lukács himself was arguing that realistic works should objectively reflect reality, and it is the basis of Anna Seghers' appeal for Christa Wolf, as her essays on the older writer, which focus on precisely this point, reveal.

However, whereas Seghers, throughout her career, tends to subordinate this belief to what she sees as the demands on literature by the fight for a socialist Germany, and only really foregrounds this aspect of her work when that fight takes second place to the need to win people over to the anti-Nazi cause, Wolf makes the need for the writer to be true to herself and her own experience the basis of her literary credo.

Seghers and Wolf do not represent two different views of socialist literature, therefore, but whilst their belief that literature has a role to play in shaping socialist consciousness shares the same humanist foundation, each writer has chosen to employ literature in the way that she felt was best suited to furthering the aims of socialism. Seghers thus tended to write in the service of the socialist state, whilst Wolf writes in the service of the individual. My analysis of "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" and *Kindheitsmuster* has shown that this basic difference between them can be explained by their contrasting attitude towards their "Auftrag", towards authority. For whereas Seghers, for a variety of motives, always chose to align herself with the authority of the party, Christa Wolf, having herself adopted a similar position in her early years, later chose to break away from that authority and to adopt the function of a critical voice which prompted people to reflect on rather than accept what was happening around them. Indeed, at the mass demonstration in East Berlin on November 4th 1989, Christa Wolf's statement that "Mißtrauen ist gut, Kontrolle ist besser" gave a clear indication of how far her critical judgement now extends, even though her loyalty to socialist ideals remains as strong as ever, as her T.V. appearance just four days later, calling for her fellow-countrymen to remain in the GDR, revealed.

In many respects the works of the two writers are representative of the shift in emphasis which has taken place in literary developments in the GDR since the war,

as more and more young writers, realizing that they were not in a position to adopt the authoritative stance of the older generation of writers who had returned from exile, broke away from the prescriptive models of socialist realism and chose instead to write according to their own experience of the world.

Yet although Seghers is frequently dismissed as a writer of the old guard who capitulated to the socialist regime, Christa Wolf's example has shown that we should not forget her significance for younger writers and thus her role in enabling those developments to take place. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that, without the backing of Seghers' arguments to Lukács, Wolf's concept of socialist literature would not have received the acceptance it did.

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