Carol Anne Costabile-Heming
Intertextual Exile
Volker Braun's Dramatic
Re-Vision of GDR Society

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For Ralf, Paula, Alfons, and Anne

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Pennsylvania Furnace, Pennsylvania
August 1996

INTRODUCTION

For over twenty-five years, Volker Braun, born on 7 May 1939 near Dresden, was one of the most prolific and controversial writers in the former German Democratic Republic. For Braun, literature was more than a form of entertainment: he saw it as his means to touch the lives of ordinary citizens. He utilized his status as a writer in order to position himself as an educator, cloaking a message in each of his texts. Within the realm of the theater Braun saw the opportunity for dialogue, and attempted to promote an exchange of ideas with his audience in an open arena: "Im Theater passiert die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Publikum direkt und öffentlich. Solange die Literatur nötig hat, Kollektivität zu befördern, kann sie das besser in Formen tun, die einen kollektiven Vorgang enthalten."¹

Central to depicting this message was Braun's dramaturgical technique: society serves as the protagonist, occupying the starring role in every play. Braun's goal was to lay bare contradictions and mistakes as he perceived them within his society. Like his predecessor Bertolt Brecht, Braun was not satisfied with a theatrical work that merely presented solutions on stage. Rather, he believed in didactic theater and intended his plays for education. He wanted his audience to contemplate the contradictions and mistakes he portrayed and seek their own solutions in productive ways for societal reform to occur.

A simplistic message, Braun repeatedly informed his audience that society had not yet gone far enough: the existing socialist state was merely a stepping stone along the path to the

communist utopia. Routinely, Braun portrayed GDR society as stagnant, hoping his audience would recognize the social paralysis as such and urge a change. These pleas for reform may or may not have gone unheard. In 1989, the people of East Germany did finally take to the streets and protest the injustices that they perceived in their society. The constant stream of refugees escaping to the Federal Republic through Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia, and Poland forced those in power to act--the result was the opening of the Wall between East and West Berlin on 9 November 1989 and a unified Germany in October 1990.

Because of these political changes, GDR literature has assumed a precarious position within literary-historical spheres. While GDR literature cannot be severed totally from its political and Marxist ideological context, Marxism is also no longer the sole valid approach for interpreting GDR literature. Intertextuality, as just one example, permits us to question the spheres of influence that inform literary texts. We can ponder to what extent GDR writers used past texts to open up their own in order to carry on the critical thought begun in previous literary periods.

Volker Braun's position in a new context of GDR literature lies in the realm of aesthetics, not in political ideology.² There is no denying that Braun was a staunch idealist, who remained so even after unification was immanent.³ Braun's significance within this new context lies in his approach to his topic. Although all of his plays essentially call for a reform in society and an end to stagnation, he continuously approached this topic from different literary and historical perspectives. His employment of intertextuality ranges from predecessors to contemporaries that served as models for his own literary production. Although we can conclude that, because of his steadfast utopianism, his message eventually lost its relevance for his audience, when we probe beyond this surface interpretation, we find that Braun's dramatic

works trace the author's own journey through literature, a voyage he began in his search for an appropriate form to give voice to his message. The reader who accompanies Braun on this journey embarks on an excursion in not just German but World literature (Shakespeare, Beckett, Chekhov). The earliest plays presented production themes, and Braun's literary models dutifully followed the dictates of literary heritage mandated by the cultural politicians. Other works read like an excursus into history. In turning to historical figures, Braun examined how the questions of equity and justice were handled, seeking a context for his own work. Later plays present their message abstractly: the last works to appear before the fall of the Berlin Wall represent thematically the reforms that Braun desires.⁴ Their form, however, becomes more philosophical and the connection between forebear and theme is blurred. The plays published after the unification of Germany present trite messages once again in Classical forms. This cyclical development illustrates that it is the literature (not the message) that assumes an imposing role for the author. Through this reliance on literary references, Braun retreats into this literature.

Braun's journey into the history of literature resembles a self-imposed internal philosophical exile. Unable to come to terms with the contradictions in his society, Braun's intertextual references migrated from the programmatic use of the mandated literary heritage to a personal journey into the history of literature. Because his own society could offer him no answers, he turned to literature. When Braun no longer perceived that his message was reaching his audience, he began to use his writing as his means to attain inner peace. The resultant literary works are an external manifestation of the author's inner turmoil.

By retreating into literature, Braun willingly exiles himself; he resides in "inner exile" (*innere Emigration*) within the borders

of the GDR. Metzler defines *innere Emigration* as: “[die] Bezeichnung für die politisch-geistige Haltung derjenigen Schriftsteller, die während des Dritten Reiches in Deutschland ausharrten und mit den ihnen verbliebenen literarischen Möglichkeiten *bewußt* gegen den Nationalsozialismus Widerstand leisteten.”⁵ Inner exile thereby describes an attitude, namely that writers chose to stay in Germany during the period of National Socialism but did not support the National Socialist agenda. Because of the difficulties involved in distinguishing between complicity and resistance, the term inner exile becomes controversial.⁶ Most writers during the Third Reich stayed silent, as it was difficult to find publishing houses willing to print any texts considered to be anti-regime. Many of the works written during this period typically remained in the desk drawers of the authors (*Schubladeliteratur*). Representative characteristics of literature produced under the conditions of inner exile included the necessity to encode criticism within the texts, forcing the reader to read between the lines. This coded language, *Sklavensprache*, was intended to fool those in power.

In order to compare Braun's situation to that of writers during the Third Reich, a few qualifications are necessary. Like those before him during the Third Reich, Braun did remain within his society. Writers like Volker Braun, as well as Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, Stefan Heym, Heiner Müller, or Stephan Hermlin, produced texts that were critical of the society in which they lived. For writers living in the GDR, the successful publication of critical texts was not an easy task. Writers were subjected to an elaborate system of censorship--each publication went through a complex series of reviews, a scrutiny that examined the criticalness of the works and their appropriateness (that is their adherence to Marxist critical thought) for the people of the GDR. These works should promote and defend, not castigate, socialism. Despite his critiques of the impracticalities and inefficiencies in GDR society, Braun's

literature did very little damage to those in power.⁷ Unlike those in inner exile during the Third Reich, Braun did, in fact, favor the political system in place--his critiques merely acknowledged that the system was not perfect, and he hoped to point society in the direction of making it better. Furthermore, Braun never desired an end to socialism in Germany, but sought instead a progression away from socialism toward the communist utopia. Despite these caveats, we can state that Braun lived in a psychological exile within his own country. His dramas do depict his ever-increasing withdrawal from the actual realization of the problems at hand to an ultimate retreat into the Classics (Goethe and Shakespeare) of world literature.

Because of political and cultural upheavals during 1989 and 1990, GDR literature in general is in need of closer scrutiny. Most of the events in the Fall of 1989 took place without the writers. Although many writers and intellectuals did sign documents⁸ promoting reform within society, these texts did not effect any real change. Indeed, these signatories merely pleaded for a continuation of socialism, albeit in a more democratic form. On 4 November 1989 Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, and Stefan Heym addressed a crowd of one million at Berlin's *Alexanderplatz* begging East Berliners and East Germans not to give up hope. Yet, as these documents and addresses fell on deaf ears, these popular writers were beginning to lose credence with their readers.

Another factor that later contributed to the loss of credibility was the critical reception that Christa Wolf's narrative *Was bleibt* (1990) received. It met with immediate opposition from West Germany's literary critics, who had had high hopes to see some revelations of truth.⁹ In the *FAZ*, Frank Schirrmacher lamented that the book could have had an effect if it had appeared 10 years earlier. Its publication in 1990 was meaningless, anachronistic, and displayed traits of the ridiculous.¹⁰ Similarly, Ulrich Greiner

chided in *Die Zeit* that the book's appearance after November 9 is just embarrassing.¹¹ These first reviews sparked a debate that escalated into the first phase of a *Literaturstreit*. In his defense of Wolf, Hans Noll correctly observed that the literature of the privileged GDR authors was celebrated in West Germany as a believable, authentic source, from which one could extrude truths about the situation, everyday life and mood in the other Germany.¹² The situation became further complicated by Wolf's own admission that she worked for the *Stasi* during the 1950s.¹³ Other disclosures have revealed connections between writers and the *Stasi* ranging from Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski in the Prenzlauer Berg scene to influential members of the *Schriftstellerverband* such as Hermann Kant.¹⁴

In grappling with this "new" information about the GDR, we must ask ourselves different questions. In terms of examining Volker Braun's contribution to German literature, I will emphasize that the text is more important than its political context. The critical reception of Braun's works has depicted him as controversial, yet his texts were widely recognized in the GDR. His accolades included Erich-Weinert-Medaille (1964), Heinrich-Heine-Preis (1974), Käthe-Kollwitz-Preis and Heinrich-Mann-Preis (1980), Lessing-Preis (1981), Literaturpreis der Stadt Bremen (1987), Nationalpreis der DDR I. Klasse für Kunst und Literatur (1988), Berliner Literaturpreis (1989) and Schillerpreis (1993). Despite this notoriety, censorship and publication difficulties did often accompany Braun's official recognition.¹⁵

Braun belongs to the generation of writers who count the founding of the GDR and establishment of socialism among their earliest memories. This is the foundation that shaped Braun's political views and, ultimately, his literary endeavors. Braun perceived history from the point of view of Marxist tenets: because he regarded history as a process, he logically turned to the past in

search of portrayals of development. As a writer, he models his literature on historical periods and authors that correspond to his need for expression.

Braun demonstrated an early interest in literary activities. In 1948, under the auspices of the Red Cross, he fled to Switzerland with his mother and four brothers. There, he encountered the works of Friedrich Schiller and made his own first authorial attempts, a play, *Die Jägeroper*, which has never been published.¹⁶ He later returned to the Soviet occupied zone with his family and completed his *Abitur* in 1957. Following graduation, he worked for the *Sächsische Zeitung*. He was unable to finish this practical year, however, because he was thrown out for political contradictions. This also prevented him from immediately matriculating at a university. In the interim, 1957-1960, he worked in industry as a printer, an excavator, and a machinist. These years provided him with a wealth of experiences on which he would later draw in his literary works. Finally admitted to the university in Leipzig in 1960, Braun studied philosophy until 1964, receiving the degree of *Diplom*. After completing his education, he moved to Berlin, where he still resides today.

Braun intentionally built criticism and intertextuality into his works: critical analysis and literary reference exist side by side. From the very beginning, his works presented provocations, calls for action to improve GDR society, while simultaneously working within his understanding of literary tradition. Braun saw a practical side to literature, advocating texts that not only criticized in the abstract, but that had some connection to reality. The reality of Braun's literature was, however, to serve socialist politics:

Nicht bloße Kritik kann noch ihre Inspiration sein,
sondern die praktische Haltung zum Wirklichen. Die

kann sie nur gewinnen, wenn sie sich als Teil aller menschlichen Tätigkeiten begreift . . .

Poesie muß ans Ende gehen: das in den Dingen selber liegt. Sie muß aufzeigen oder ahnen lassen, wohin alles fährt. Sie kann nur vorwegnehmen, wenn sie *für* das Wirkende spricht; wenn sie die menschlichen Möglichkeiten aufspürt; diese sind ihre Möglichkeit. Sie zielt im Grund auf das Ende aller Politik, indem sie die sozialistische Politik betreibt.¹⁷

Despite an early adherence to cultural dogma in the form of literary heritage, Braun defined his own view of literary tradition broadly:

. . . Am interessantesten, weil sie so viele Zeiten überdauerten, sind die sehr Alten; am interessantesten, aber nicht am verlässlichsten. . . Man geht auf ein Feld. Und sucht sich seine Leute. Der junge Schiller, der junge Goethe beispielsweise, Büchner, endlich Shakespeare. Später Brecht, Müller: falls man schon Eigen kann. Dann sucht man schon nach Kollegen, die noch nicht da sind.¹⁸

Of consequence for Braun was the connection between his intertextual references and the message of his own text. Whereas his own theoretical standpoint juxtaposed *Politik* (provocations) and *Poesie* (literary reference),¹⁹ my analysis will present the use of literary references as a means to examine Braun's own internal turmoil.

In each drama, Braun highlights the contradictions within society while conducting a dialogue with the texts of his forebears. Braun's dramaturgy facilitates his critique that the "social" system

at the time of portrayal was imperfect. His dramas thereby served to expose society's inefficiency to the audience. It is, however, the strict adherence to literary and historical models that makes Braun's theatrical works worthy of investigation. I will analyze not only the relationship between the Braunian text and its model, but I will also trace these literary developments from their early stages through 1992 as indicative of a process, evidence of Braun's literary journey. The extant Braun scholarship has investigated Braun's preoccupation with literary traditions as well as his provocation of social reform. This study seeks to extend the groundwork that Christine Cosentino and Wolfgang Ertl,²⁰ Jay Rosellini, Ulrich Profitlich,²¹ Jos Jacquemoth²² and Wilfried Grauert have laid out.

In defining intertextuality, Thaïs E. Morgen has pointed out that intertextuality shifts the focus from author / work / tradition to text / discourse / culture.²³ By interpreting Braun's appropriation of his literary heritage as a dynamic relationship between past and present texts, I will demonstrate that his later texts go beyond the literature of his historical and contemporary influences. Indeed, within Braun's *oeuvre* an additional level of literary reference plays an important role, namely intratextual relations among the texts.²⁴ For this analysis, intratextual relations will refer both to revisions of texts and to thematic repetitions. In most cases, Braun chose to revise his own texts in order to make them acceptable for publication. The play *Hinze und Kunze* is one example, which required three major changes before mass publication. Closer examination of these modifications will reveal that Braun also tried to make his arguments more concrete. Thematic repetitions, text segments or themes that are repeatedly introduced, serve to reinforce Braun's ideas for the audience. Indeed, when characters reappear in a new form, we can examine how Braun is trying to reformulate his message.²⁵

In 1972, Silvia Schlenstedt questioned Braun about the various references and influences informing his texts. While he indicated his desire to work with older and familiar texts, he also acknowledged that mere imitations of bourgeois reality, would not reflect the reality of GDR society. His aim was to adapt these texts in order to demonstrate the extent to which situations had changed:

Große Vorgänge, die zu ihrer Zeit bewegende Geschichten waren, [werden] *aufgehoben*, nicht sie sind als Vorgang zu geben, sie scheinen nur durch, es wird an sie erinnert, um etwas ganz anderes zu zeigen, was dadurch deutlicher wird. Man muß diese Geschichte preisgeben, um zu zeigen, wieviel von ihnen sich erhalten und wieviel sich verkehrt hat.²⁶

Christine Cosentino united Braun's belief in the dialectic with his use of literary tradition in his poetic works. She maintained that Braun's weaving of traditional references in his own texts served to present his readers with stagnating trends in their own society. She also recognized Braun's close ties to the Marxist tradition:

Braun sieht in der Einbeziehung tradierter Motive, Wendungen, Bilder oder Symbole eine dialektische Methode, historisches Neues zu "bilden": im folienhaften Aufleuchten traditionellen Bildungsgutes, das er variiert, negatiert oder auf den Kopf stellt, werden entweder neue gesellschaftliche Haltungen sichtbar oder kontrapunktisch stagnierende Beziehungen entlarvt, die der Dichter aus Stillstand und Beharrung wieder in den Strom kämpferischer dialektischer Bewegung zwingt.²⁷

Thus, Braun interpreted his criticism as loyal to tradition because he was encouraging society toward improvement.

Intertextual references support and intensify a thematic unity built into Braun's dramatic works: all of these plays treat the themes of revolution and reform. Before examining Braun's approaches to these themes and his specific adaptations of both historical and literary references, we turn our attention to his theories of literature within the context of literary tradition and theory articulated by GDR cultural magnates.

Notes

¹ Braun, "Interview mit Bernd Kolf," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge 4* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990) 315.

² See also Walfried Hartinger, "Gesellschaftsentwurf und ästhetische Innovation--Zu einigen Aspekten im Werk Volker Brauns," *Volker Braun*, ed. Rolf Jucker (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995) 30-54.

³ "...aber ich frage, ob es nicht etwas Moderneres, etwas Demokratischeres gibt..." Braun, "Kommt Zeit, kommen Räte," in *"Die Geschichte ist offen". DDR 1990: Hoffnung auf eine neue Republik*, ed. Michael Naumann (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990) 20.

⁴ Wilfried Grauert views these texts from the 1980s as Braun's attempt to break out of the traditional social and aesthetic discourses in the GDR. Grauert, *Ästhetische Modernisierung bei Volker Braun. Studien zu den Texten aus den achtziger Jahren* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1995) 16-17. While Grauert concentrates his analysis on Braun's discursive practices, his interpretation supports my thesis that Braun's later works are decidedly distanced from GDR reality.

⁵ “Innere Emigration,” *Metzler Literatur Lexikon*, 2. Auflage (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990) 220.

⁶ Although inner exile is generally considered to express resistance, some authors who were forced into exile (e.g. Thomas Mann) maintained that the inner exile literature could not be considered a literature of resistance, because the writers chose to remain in Germany.

⁷ Because the literature by writers such as Braun was critical of the system but effected no real change in the political and social structures, many argue that GDR writers cannot be described as inner exiles. See for example Ursula Heukenkamp, “Konjunktur-- und was danach?” in *Verrat an der Kunst. Rückblicke auf die DDR-Literatur*, eds. Karl Deiritz und Hannes Krauss (Berlin: Aufbau, 1993) 29-40.

⁸ See for example “Entschließung von 28 Mitgliedern des Schriftstellerverbandes vom 2. November 1989” and “Aufruf für eine eigenständige DDR vom 26. November 1989” in Charles Schüddekopf, ed. “*Wir sind das Volk!*” *Flugschriften, Aufrufe und Texte einer deutschen Revolution* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990); “Für unser Land, Appell vom 26. November 1989” in *Der Fischer Weltalmanach. Sonderband DDR* (Frankfurt/ M.: Fischer, 1990).

⁹ Because the controversy surrounding Wolf’s text was so widespread, the *GDR Bulletin* invited six literary scholars (Christiane Zehl Romero, Therese Hörnigk, Peter Rossman, Anna K. Kuhn, Marilyn Sibley Fries und Dieter Sevin) to present their views of the debate. *GDR Bulletin* 17.1 (1991): 1-18.

¹⁰ Frank Schirrmacher, “‘Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten’. Auch eine Studie über den autoritären Charakter: Christa Wolfs Aufsätze, Reden und ihre jüngste Erzählung *Was bleibt*,” in Thomas Anz, “‘*Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf.*’ *Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*” (München: Spangenberg, 1990) 87.

- ¹¹ Ulrich Greiner, "Mangel an Feingefühl," in Anz 67.
- ¹² Hans Noll, "Das lächerliche Pathos alter Schwärmer," Anz 59.
- ¹³ See *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf. Zerrspiegel und Dialog*, ed. Hermann Vinke (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1993).
- ¹⁴ See Peter Böthig und Klaus Michael, eds. *MachtSpiele. Literatur und Staatssicherheit im Fokus Prenzlauer Berg* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1993).
- ¹⁵ The *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* is but one example of the censorship process involved in the production of Braun's works. See York-Gothart Mix, ed. *Ein "Oberkunze darf nicht vorkommen." Materialien zur Publikationsgeschichte und Zensur des Hinze-Kunze-Romans von Volker Braun* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993).
- ¹⁶ Fritz Rudolf Fries, "Laudatio für Volker Braun und Paul Gratzik," *Sinn und Form* 3 (1980): 541.
- ¹⁷ Volker Braun, "Politik und Poesie," *Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit. Notate* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1976) 98. Braun's emphasis. Subsequent references to this edition will be included parenthetically in the text with EG.
- ¹⁸ Jay Rosellini, *Volker Braun* (München: Beck, 1983) 158.
- ¹⁹ In his review of *Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit*, Manfred Jäger similarly acknowledged the unity that existed for Braun between *Politik* and *Poesie*. See Jäger, "Das Handeln als Basis und Ziel dichterischer Praxis. Zu Volker Brauns Reflexionen über Poesie und Politik," *Volker Braun*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: text und kritik, 1977) 12-21.
- ²⁰ Christine Cosentino und Wolfgang Ertl, *Zur Lyrik Volker Brauns*, Hochschulschriften: Literaturwissenschaft 59 (Königstein/Ts.: Forum Academicum, 1984).
- ²¹ Ulrich Profitlich, *Volker Braun. Studien zu seinem dramatischen und erzählerischen Werk* (München: Fink, 1985).
- ²² Jos Jacquemoth, *Politik und Poesie. Untersuchungen zur Lyrik Volker Brauns* (Berlin: Schmengler, 1990).

²³ Thaïs E. Morgen, "Is there an Intertext in this Text?: Literary and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Intertextuality," *American Journal of Semiotics* 3.4 (1985): 2.

²⁴ Morgen differentiates between two types of textual reference: intertexts, in which an author reacts to surrounding discourse; intratexts and autotexts, in which an author reacts to self-produced discourse. Morgen 20-21. See also Lucien Dällenbach, "Intertexte et autotexte," *Poétique* 27 (1976): 282-296. Dällenbach distinguishes between internal and external intertextuality and bases his interpretation on the assumptions of Claude Simon. According to Dällenbach internal textuality is an intertextual communication among texts by the same author; external textuality is an intertextual communication among texts by different authors.

²⁵ The characters Hinze and Kunze serve as an example: after their debut in the play, Braun returned to the characters for *Berichte von Hinze und Kunze* (1983) and *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* (1985).

²⁶ Silvia Schlenstedt, "Interview mit Volker Braun," *Positionen der DDR-Literaturwissenschaft: Auswahl aus den Weimarer Beiträgen (1971-1973)*, ed. Hans Kaufmann (Kronberg/Taunus: Scriptor, 1974) 166. Braun's emphasis.

²⁷ Christine Cosentino, "Literarische Tradition und Montagetechnik in der Lyrik Volker Brauns," *Basis. Jahrbuch für deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur* 8, eds. Reinhold Grimm und Jost Hermand (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1978) 191.

CHAPTER ONE

FORGING A PATH: BRAUN'S USE OF LITERARY TRADITION

When we view Volker Braun's dramatic works over time, we notice a series of trends that describe his use of literary reference. Early in his career we detect Braun's attempt to tie his adaptations to the GDR's cultural strategies. Despite all of the best intentions, however, Braun's application of intertextual references was often not enough to prevent his message from angering the cultural policy magnates. Later works indicate a decided shift in Braun's thinking. Whereas early works gave the semblance of compliance with cultural policy, those plays which came later depicted a more independent Braun, a writer searching among forebears and contemporaries for a means of expression. Braun gradually developed his own cultural policy, and many of his forebears, (e.g. Büchner, Rimbaud) were not considered ideal in the eyes of the culture magnates. In order to frame the discussion of Braun's plays, I will present an overview of Braun's developments as a writer by examining his own theoretical musings. *Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit. Notate*, a collection of essays, speeches, and reports from 1964 to 1973,¹ contains Braun's interpretation of literature, society, and cultural politics. It also presents significant ideological information that explains Braun's identity struggles as a writer in the GDR.

In the former GDR, political ideology played a significant role in the establishment of cultural policy, which mandated that artists and writers promote socialism. Wolfgang Emmerich once characterized the function of literature in the GDR as follows: “In der DDR ist ohne Zweifel von Beginn an versucht worden, die Literaten und ihre Werke aus dem Ghetto des inneren Reiches zu befreien und Literatur zu einer öffentlichen Angelegenheit, einer *res publica*, zu machen, die die Bevölkerung als ganze bewegt.”² Recent scholarship has investigated GDR literature as an *Ersatz-öffentlichkeit*.³ Yet the public sphere was not really “open” in the GDR. Rather, censorship and other oppressive practices turned literature into an extension of the state. In the case of Volker Braun, we find a writer whose personal struggle in coming to terms with socialist reality forced him to seek solace in literature. In this instance, the “public” institution became something personal for Braun.

During the early development of GDR literature, particular emphasis was placed upon the Classical heritage and Socialist Realism. The elements that comprised the GDR’s literary development were not arbitrary, but were grounded in the Marxist ideologies integral to the GDR’s self-definition to such an extent, that the literary developments could not be completely separated from the political, cultural, and historical advancements. In the process of self-legitimation, the GDR chose to sever its history from the common bonds it shared with the Federal Republic, opting to distance itself from those aspects of heritage it deemed undesirable. Specifically, following the end of World War II, the Eastern, Soviet zone chose to deny its National Socialist heritage, and established itself, according to its propaganda, as an anti-fascist, humanist state. Hans Kaufmann has argued that the role of heritage in such a state was to function as a means to free oneself from the past, a means to conquer the past.⁴

By the time Volker Braun came on to the GDR literary scene in 1959, the basic course of heritage appropriation and literary production had been set. The theoretical postulations resulting from the literature debates in the 1930s, as well as the establishment of Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union, served as the key concepts for the heritage discussions in the Soviet occupied zone after 1945 and the GDR after 1949. After his return from exile, Johannes R. Becher was instrumental in cementing the Classical ideology as the prototype for the GDR's literary heritage. His 1949 essay, "Der Befreier", a speech written to commemorate the 200th birthday of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, praises Goethe as a model, and touts Goethe's ability to free the German people from the bonds of the Middle Ages through his works and ideas. Becher, citing both the unsuccessful revolution of 1848 and the terror and tragedy of the Nazi regime as demoralizing experiences for the German nation, described the emotional state of the German people after World War II as one of desperation and hopelessness. In order to conquer this despair, Becher urged readers to view Goethe as a source of escape: "Man gehe bei Goethe in die Lehre, um sich nicht um diesen hohen Menschheitsbegriff betrügen zu lassen, sondern um ihn richtig zu verwenden und ihn wieder konkret begreifbar zu machen."⁵

Socialist Realism was added to Classical ideology as an integral part of cultural policy when the SED Central Committee (March 1951) mandated that the cultural development of the new society become one of its main goals. For the GDR's cultural policy, the tenets of Socialist Realism were combined with Gyorgy Lukács' interpretation of Realism, emphasizing the Classical literature of Goethe and Schiller. The first Bitterfeld Conference (1959) challenged this traditional understanding of heritage through its promotion of a socialist cultural revolution, which could occur by producing a literature that would find resonance in the working class. The conference promoted a two-step process

with writers entering factories (in order to represent better working and social conditions in their texts), and workers writing about their own experiences. The conference in Bitterfeld proposed to make the Classical heritage accessible to the working class, a major step towards a definition of literature that was particular to the GDR.⁶

Volker Braun's literary debut exemplifies the ideology that the conference in Bitterfeld espoused. The report "Der Schlamm" (1959)⁷ reflects the experiences he gained working as an excavator for the *Kombinat Schwarze Pumpe* in 1958 and 1959. Though not a direct result of the Bitterfeld Conference, this text corresponds to the representation of the working class that the conference demanded, and as such reflects the literary trends of the time. Braun continued his representation of the working class in the plays *Die Kipper*, *Hinze und Kunze*, *Tinka*, and *Schmittchen*.

Braun began to demonstrate a distinct political-cultural persona as early as the 1960s. Political events during this decade, particularly the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the participation of GDR officers in the invasion of Prague by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, contributed to unrest among the writers, who began to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the apparent contradictions in their society. As the literature in general began to embrace political themes more critically, Volker Braun became particularly vocal in his criticisms. Braun began to cultivate a decided independence in his development as a writer as the telling example, "Die Goethepächter" (1968), demonstrates. In this essay, Braun expressed concern about the applicability of the definition of heritage at that time. Bemoaning the inappropriate adaptation of Goethe's heritage, Braun called for a re-evaluation of current interpretations:

Sie haben aus Goethes Werk einen Werkhof gemacht für die schwer erziehbare Nation. Sie schalten darin wie Gouvernanten. Wie wenig Liebe zum Heutigen spür ich in ihrem Gehabe.

Sie haben sein Erbe gepachtet und bleiben darin sitzen. Sie haben seine Schwellen gebohnt--aber wagen sich nicht mehr darüber. Sie leben so mit seinen Büchern, als würden die Bücher schon leben. Sie haben so mit ihnen zu tun, als hätten sie nichts mit sich zu tun . . . (EG 49).

This treatise clearly shows that Braun began to develop a new attitude towards the concept of literary heritage. His ruminations on the possibility of a great period for art indicate his own confrontation with literary heritage:

Die "Goethezeit" war zu Ende, als die industrielle Revolution in Deutschland begann. Ich halte es für heute möglich, daß mit der sozialistischen technischen Evolution (von einer technischen Revolution kann man nur in der Waffentechnik sprechen) zugleich eine Kunstzeit beginnt. Das wäre neu, aber neu ist auch, daß hier eine Gesellschaft als Ganzes sich in Bewegung setzt und große Stoffe, bedeutende Wirklichkeit griffbereit sind (EG 27).

Thus, Braun predicted that art (in socialist society) could experience another great period as it did during Goethe's age. This corroborates early official cultural policy, which urged writers to produce a literature representative of the new culture.

Despite his apparent compliance with official doctrine, Braun was indeed critical of contemporary literary trends. He condemned literature's failure to portray the results of revolution;

in his opinion, literature of the time depicted only the symptoms of revolutionary processes:

Bisher hat sich unsere Literatur oft damit begnügt, *Symptome* für die treibenden und hemmenden Vorgänge unserer Revolution zu zeigen, aber sie hat kaum diese Vorgänge selbst gezeigt, geschweige denn ihre Wechselwirkung, ihre Notwendigkeit erklärt. Die Symptome erscheinen da in einem nationalen oder gar geschichtslosen Raum. Sie erlauben selten Schlußfolgerungen, sie wirken da in ihrer geschichtlichen Abstraktheit (Zufälligkeit) eher lähmend als beflügelnd.... Die Literatur operiert da innerhalb der Grenzen dieser Revolution, statt *mit ihr* die Grenzen aufzusprengen (EG 38).⁸

Contrary to this trend, Braun depicted not only symptoms, but also wanted his audience to understand the results of these revolutionary processes in his own works. Furthermore, he remarked that literary production does not embody the social and revolutionary processes of society: literature lacks “Fortgang, Streit und Streitbarkeit” (EG 54). Braun argued that a literature unconcerned with social change could not be very humanistic (which was one of the goals which GDR cultural politicians had set for literature). He encouraged writers to produce a literature that corresponded to reality; otherwise, literature would function as a refuge, rather than an educational institution:

Wenn sich jetzt die Literatur die Aufgabe stellt, eben das Gefühl des Zuhause-seins, der Heimeligkeit zu stiften, aber die sozialen Bedingungen nicht wahrhaben wollte oder vergäße oder übertünchte, liefe sie Gefahr, sich dem Leben zu entfremden. Sie würde Idylle liefern, und ihre “schönen Menschen” würden bloß

dumme Menschen sein. Die Kraft dieser Literatur würde die Fliehkraft sein. Sie würde nichts beim Leser auslösen, außer daß sie ihn von sich selbst loslöste (EG 60).

In his early dramatic works, Braun portrayed the conditions and inconsistencies of his society, forcing the audience to contemplate possible solutions. Later texts broke with this trend. In the 1980s, plays such as *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* depicted a confused Braun, who seemed to advocate surrender.

Of the numerous literary influences one can trace throughout Braun's *oeuvre*, Bertolt Brecht was particularly important for his early dramaturgical development. For Braun, Brecht's theoretical accomplishments in the theater are the most far-reaching; in his opinion, new techniques in dramaturgy are impossible:

Brechts Dramaturgie hat es zum letztenmal, und nun rücksichtslos, mit Klassenkämpfen zu tun; etwas Neues ist in dieser Richtung nicht zu leisten. Dieser Antagonismus der Widersprüche hat dem Theater massenhaft individuelle Katastrophen geliefert, er hat es überhaupt gegründet. Alle bisherige Dramatik bezog ihre Wucht und Sonderlichkeit aus dem Zerfleischen von Körpern oder wenigstens Seelen (EG 19).

Braun was, however, aware of the need to portray important aspects of socialist life through Brechtian dramaturgy. Particularly relevant to his own works was Brecht's portrayal and resolution of contradictions:

Der menschliche Befreiung ist ein langer Prozeß, und die jeweiligen Widersprüche, die ihn machen, müssen wir stückweise, in Stücken, sich äußern lassen; es ist

müßig aus den abzusehenden Zeilen der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung eine Dramaturgie aus der Zukunft auf heutige Stoffe zu pressen (EG 19).

Recurring contradictions, in particular, demanded the active participation of literature to find a resolution. Literature's role in socialist society occupied a position that commanded engagement and production from both readers and writers:

Es geht nicht schlechthin darum, die Lösung der Widersprüche vorzuführen, sondern ihre Lösbarkeit. Sie ist ins Bewußtsein zu bringen, und das können wir nicht, wenn wir die Gegenstände abbaun auf das Maß, mit dem der Augenblick fertig wird--als wenn die Literatur nicht mit mehr fertig würde; als wenn die Menschheit nicht mit mehr fertig würde! (EG 44)⁹

The deciding factor that set Braun apart from Brecht, however, was a political point of view. Despite the praise that he afforded Brecht, Braun recognized that his own political situation was decidedly different. Whereas Brecht's dramas presented contradictions brought about through class struggle (*Klassenkampf*), Braun no longer confronted this social construct. Brecht's dramas represented the struggle between Marxism and capitalism, a political situation that had been rectified by the time Braun embarked on his literary career. Brecht presented enemies on stage that represented warring political ideologies. The contradictions Braun portrayed resulted from a different kind of struggle, namely between those in power and their subjects. This indicates that the construction of hierarchy was an early concern of Braun's. But just as important for Braun was the manner of representation on the stage: the process should be organized in such a way, that "die Masse ('der Zuschauer') *über sich selbst* erregt wird" (EG 46).¹⁰ Acknowledging the playwright's duty to

present a process, Braun did, however, also expect his audience to learn something from the play itself. Inverting Schiller's words, Braun proposed: "So ist die neue Bühne nicht mehr eine moralische Anstalt"; the stage should take its place in history as "Geschichtsprozeß" (EG 48).

These theoretical texts from the 1960s demonstrate an early dedication on the part of the author, Braun, to create a viable and productive literature for his socialist society. In addition, his concern for justice and righteousness informed not only his writing but also his *Weltanschauung*.

Braun's confrontation with cultural-political policy continued in the 1970s. Although Erich Honecker, shortly after his nomination as Party Chief of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), proclaimed in 1971 that aesthetic taboos would no longer exist in the GDR, Braun wrote in the same year that one can only eliminate taboos through direct confrontation:

Ja, diese Gesellschaft kann nur weiterexistieren und sich entwickeln, indem sie sich selbst rigoros anrührt. Wir müssen die Verhältnisse *bis zu Ende* vom Kopf auf die Füße stellen, und nicht auf den Bauch legen. Tabu darf nicht länger heißen: daß da etwas nicht geändert werden kann, es muß heißen: da ist eine Aufgabe (EG 106).¹¹

Braun recognized the power that a text can possess: "Die Literatur kann ja nur aufregen zu Veränderungen. Darüber regt man sich also auf" (EG 105). Following his own advice, he turned to literary influences such as Büchner, who did not necessarily conform to the heritage ideals expressed in official cultural policy. Later, he introduced topics (*Staatssicherheitsdienst* [Stasi] in *Unvollendete Geschichte*) that had hitherto remained unnamed in literary works.

Sole credit for the changing conception of heritage by no means rests with Honecker. Rather, scholars and authors deemed a confrontation with the traditional interpretation necessary; the *VIII. Parteitag* merely granted writers the permission to search for a new means of expression. The desire to create a critical understanding of and relationship to heritage characterized this liberalization. In 1972 Braun echoed this need for an altered relationship to tradition and heritage:

Unsere Literaturwissenschaft kommt mitunter mit den Forderungen der Tradition. Soweit das so ist, steht sie in einer schlechten Tradition. In einer guten Tradition kann man nicht einfach fortfahren wie in einem Zug, da muß man neue Gleise bauen, und zwar nach den Forderungen des gegenwärtigen Geländes. Es wäre uns nicht zu helfen, wenn wir uns nur auf Traditionslinien von Kunst befreien und nicht vor allem auf die Zukunftslinien des Lebens (EG 109).

Here we note a future-orientation to Braun's arguments. He views the past as merely a learning tool; future success lies in forging new paths in literary production.

An important indication that the perception of heritage was already changing is Robert Weimann's essay "Gegenwart und Vergangenheit in der Literaturgeschichte" (1970), wherein the author presented the dialectical relationship between *Gegenwart* and *Vergangenheit*:

Gegenstand der Literaturgeschichte ist dann nicht schlechthin die Literatur vergangener Zeiten, sondern auch unsere gegenwärtige Beziehung zu dieser vergangenen Literatur, die erst durch diesen Bezug wieder zu etwas Lebendigem wird. Der Inhalt der

Literaturgeschichte wird dadurch aktuell, aber nicht auf vulgäre Weise aktualisiert; denn unsere lebendige Beziehung zum Erbe wird um so reicher, vielseitiger und fruchttragender, je mehr wir seine durch größtmögliche historische Rekonstruktion zu gewinnende geschichtliche Objektivität respektieren.¹²

Such an interpretation presented an original approach to conceptualizing the role of heritage. Though it is difficult to assess Weimann's influence on cultural policy, it is interesting to note that his dialectical interpretation of *Vergangenheit* and *Gegenwart* found expression in the mandates originating with the *VIII. Parteitag*.

Despite policy changes in the early 1970s, an immediate liberalization of dogma did not transpire. As Wolfgang Emmerich has pointed out, noted authors such as Volker Braun, Stefan Heym, Rainer Kirsch, Günter Kunert, and Heiner Müller continued to suffer the consequences of censorship.¹³ Volker Braun's narrative *Unvollendete Geschichte* serves as but one example that met with controversy. Though it was published in *Sinn und Form* in 1975, thirteen years passed before the narrative appeared in book form in the GDR (1988).

The expatriation of the oppositional East German singer, Wolf Biermann, in 1976 produced a crisis for GDR writers; twelve signed an original letter of protest that *Neues Deutschland*, the official Party newspaper, refused to print.¹⁴ The letter subsequently appeared in the West. Braun was one of the original twelve signatories, but considerable controversy surrounded his participation. He did not approve of the letter's publication in the West and asserted, that Western media used the protest as a propagandistic means to criticize literary life in the GDR. This reaction prompted critics to accuse him of distancing himself from

the entire affair. Braun himself has refuted this view,¹⁵ but his controversial behavior does indicate that there was a lack of commitment on his part. It appears that because the controversy intensified, Braun did try to tone down his criticism (perhaps in an effort to avoid sanctions). He claims that a follow-up letter he addressed to *Neues Deutschland* on 25 November 1976 was merely his attempt to justify the writers' actions.¹⁶ Although Biermann's expatriation did not directly affect the GDR's confrontation with its literary heritage, it did change the future literary landscape significantly. The subsequent tightening of publication policies proved impossible for many writers to overcome. Considering conditions in the GDR unsuitable for their further literary production, many chose to emigrate to the Federal Republic.¹⁷

Throughout the remainder of the 1970s and during the 1980s, Braun's notations became increasingly critical and radical. No longer satisfied to remain solely in the realm of literature, later musings (in *Verheerende Folgen mangelnden Anscheins innerbetrieblicher Demokratie*¹⁸) gained in their political tenor. The essays of this collection differ greatly from the notations of his first volume: many of the entries are fictional and portray societal problems. In "Der Freizeitpark" (1982) Braun addressed the fundamental flaw of socialism as it existed in the GDR: "Die alte Teilung der Arbeit reproduziere den Unterdrücker, möge er auch immerhin VEB heißen" (VF 46). Braun justifiably points out that the old order, the old hierarchy, the old class distinctions inherent in capitalism were also present in GDR socialist society. The hierarchical power structure had not been destroyed when the Eastern part of Germany embraced socialism; it just received a new name: *Volkseigenerbetrieb*, which obscured the power of the hierarchy, but did not eliminate it.¹⁹ Perhaps as a response to the unrest following Biermann's expatriation, Braun proposed: "wir müssen den Leuten *ihre* Grenzen setzen. Die Verteilung auf die

Staaten muß Ausdruck ihrer Ansichten sein, nicht ihrer Abstammung" (VF 10).²⁰ Braun's plan reads as a radical proposition--the elimination of boundaries and oppression--designed to benefit society's welfare. Aware of the radicality of his suggestion, he further warns those in power that they cannot ignore his suggestions: "*ein bißchen Sozialismus rettet uns nicht*" (VF 12). This signals some loyalty on Braun's part to his utopianism--he still had hoped for a more democratic socialism.

A continued confrontation with heritage as well as with the role of literature in the State characterized GDR literature in the 1980s. During this decade writers were more outspoken, choosing to criticize such topics as technology (Christa Wolf's *Störfall*, 1987) and power structures (Volker Braun's *Hinze-Kunze- Roman*, 1985). Two of Braun's essays from this period, "Büchners Briefe" (1977) and "Rimbaud. Ein Psalm der Aktualität" (1983), demonstrate most clearly the new route that his literary and political thought was to follow. Neither Büchner nor Rimbaud, both revolutionaries in their own right, conformed to the GDR's vision of positive heritage appropriation.

Büchners Briefe

This essay depicts the manner in which Braun's appropriation of Büchner served both as a commentary on and a criticism of GDR society, epitomizing the importance Braun attached to Büchner's ideas for GDR society as a whole. Braun's text was originally conceived as an afterward to a collection of Büchner's letters that was to be published by the Berlin Buchverlag Der Morgen. The collection of letters was, in fact, published, but without Braun's essay.²¹ Indeed, one could argue that it was the critical and questioning nature of Braun's essay that

was objectionable: Braun used Büchner to promote reform from within the framework of socialist society.²²

Throughout the text, Braun incorporated quotations from Büchner's letters into his own commentary, paraphrasing Büchner and thus actualizing 19th century dilemmas for the GDR quotidian. Whereas Büchner lamented in 1832 that political proceedings had become trite and comical, Braun elaborated on the success of the [French] Revolution in Büchner's time: the aristocrats were removed from power. Braun draws a parallel with the October revolution, pondering whether the revolution had been at all beneficial: "HAT DIE REVOLUTION GELOHNT? WAS IST NUN DIESE NEUE EPOCHE?" (VF 84). The mere fact that Braun posed this question underscored his waning confidence in society. Comparing economic conditions in the GDR with those of Büchner's time, Braun commented: "Hundert Jahre später und östlich davon eine analoge Herrschaftsweise der Arbeiterklasse, wobei allerdings und entscheidendermaßen die administrativen Beamten nicht gegen alle Klassen sondern für alle Klassen zu regieren suchen" (VF 85). Braun had at this time realized, that although socialism had been established in the GDR, economic inequality still existed. This topic of inequality was prominent in many of Braun's literary works, particularly in *Schmitten* and *Unvollendete Geschichte*. Braun further qualified the nature of the inequality, namely the hierarchical structure of socialist society. Extending Büchner's original comment on the storming of the Frankfurt *Hauptwache*: "Wenn in unserer Zeit etwas helfen soll, so ist es Gewalt" (VF 85), Braun suggested: "Solange eine Gesellschaft . . . auf Gewalt beruht, nämlich solange, es 'die da oben und die da unten' gibt, bedarf es der Gegengewalt, sie zu verändern" (VF 85).

Society's hierarchical structure allowed the development of a "class" society within the GDR: the class was determined by one's position in the socialist society:

Wo das Oben und Unten sich nicht mehr in der archaischen Gestalt von Klassen gegenübersteht, aber doch die verschiedene Stellung der Individuen in der Pyramide der Verfügungsgewalt anzeigt, geht der Kampf nicht mehr um den Platz an der Spitze, sondern um die Zertrümmerung der Pyramide (VF 85).²³

Whereas Büchner can be viewed as non-committal, excusing his own lack of participation in revolutionary acts by explaining that these acts would be performed in vain, Braun offered a more positive interpretation. Noting that it was only ten years after Büchner that Marx and Engels began their provocations, Braun recognized that the future could only improve. In remarking: "Büchner blickte in ein Nichts. Und wohin denn blicken wir?" (VF 86), he answered his own question:

Wo, wenn nicht in den neuen Qualitäten der sozialistischen Arbeiterklasse, die unsere radikalen Schwärmer schon abgeschrieben haben, weil sie nicht zehn oder zwanzig Jahre warten können, wo, wenn nicht im berühmten Neuen, auf das wir mit amtlicher Billigung den Blick lenken dürfen, sind wir dem radikalen Sprengstoff am nächsten (VF 87).

While warning that socialism in the GDR should not stagnate, Braun clearly believed that progress would be made in the future.

Throughout the entire essay, Braun adapted Büchner's musings to demonstrate that there was still work to be done. Büchner's comment on the masses versus the individual: "[ich]

habe aber in *neuerer* Zeit gelernt, daß nur das notwendige Bedürfnis der großen Masse Umänderungen herbeiführen kann, daß alles Bewegen und Schreien der *Einzelnen* vergebliches Thorenwerk ist" (VF 87)²⁴ becomes a moment of critical inflection for Braun, as he critically applied Büchner's statement to GDR society: "Wir haben in neuerer Zeit verlernt, ein notwendiges Bedürfnis der Masse, nur weil es sich noch nicht artikuliert, überhaupt für möglich zu halten: indem die neuere Zeit die NEUE ZEIT ist" (VF 87-88). While Büchner had recognized that only the masses could force change to occur, Braun indicated that Büchner's *neuere Zeit* had already arrived in the GDR, because, at least ideologically, the masses had attained changes and power. Yet stagnation within GDR society hindered further progress. In recognizing that the original revolutionary impetus of the masses had stagnated, Braun attempted to recall this impetus in his audience.

Unlike Büchner, whom Braun perceived as fatalistic, Braun possessed a positive stance toward history. Because Braun commanded active involvement in historical processes, he did not succumb (at least initially) to the fatalism for which Büchner is so well-known. In the so-called *Fatalismus-Brief* (March 1834), Büchner wrote to his fiancée that having studied the French revolution, he could only conclude that there is a certain fatalism inherent in history. Braun, on the other hand, claimed that because Büchner succumbed to this fatalism, he did not recognize the possible didactic aspects of history. Paraphrasing Büchner, Braun stated: "Ich studierte die Geschichte der Oktoberrevolution und watete durch das Blut der 30er Jahre" (VF 90). These comments acknowledge that Stalinism was an incorrect solution, but Braun refused to accept that Stalinism was the only viable form of socialism.

Büchner believed that a writer should portray history as it is: “Wenn man mir übrigens noch sagen wollte, der Dichter müsse die Welt nicht zeigen wie sie ist, sondern wie sie sein soll, so antworte ich, daß ich es nicht besser machen will, als der liebe Gott, der die Welt gewiß gemacht hat, wie sie sein soll” (92-93). Yet, he also conceded, that many criticisms would arise against his works because, as he interpreted it: “die Regierungen müssen doch durch ihre bezahlten Schreiber beweisen lassen, daß ihre Gegner Dummköpfe oder unsittliche Menschen sind” (VF 93). In this instance, Braun chose not to comment, which expresses more than any written commentary could. Braun utilized an approach that was similar to Büchner: he portrayed his world as it was, not as it should be. But, in literature’s role as an extension of the State, such an approach could lead to publication difficulties as Braun himself often experienced. This passage indicates that GDR authors often wrote for posterity. Although they wrote about the present, they only hoped that this *Schubladenliteratur* would be published and performed in the future. Braun was well aware of the difficulties that writers in the GDR often faced as evidenced by the eighteen year lag between composition and the performance/publication of *Lenins Tod*.

Through his interpretation of Büchner’s personal letters, Volker Braun, more than any other GDR author, managed to appropriate Büchner’s literary and political ideologies for socialist society. It proves significant, however, that it was indeed the critical aspects of Büchner’s works that Braun chose to appropriate. Even in those instances where Braun borrowed from Büchner’s literary works, he employed Büchner solely for commentary and criticism. Braun adopted Büchner in order to make a political statement. It is for this reason that Braun’s Büchner-related works encountered problems in the GDR. The year 1988 served as a turning point for Braun, with two previously unpublished works making an appearance, *Lenins Tod* and

“Büchners Briefe”, and with the publication in book form of *Unvollendete Geschichte*. In choosing to appropriate Georg Büchner’s political ideologies, sometimes alone, sometimes combined with elements of Büchner’s literary genius, Braun’s Büchner-related works were received with disfavor. I propose that the lack of recognition of Braun’s Büchner-related works in the GDR stems from a misinterpretation of Braun. Rather than succumbing to the same fatalism as Büchner, Braun attempted to use Büchner as an example and as a warning, in order to prevent a re-occurrence of this fatalism in his own society. Braun was a Marxist, but he was also a utopianist: he admitted that socialist society as it existed in the GDR was not perfect and believed that society could improve. Braun chose Büchner as an example, because Büchner portrayed the feelings of resignation that were rampant in his own age. A revolution was necessary to bring about reforms in Büchner’s time. Through his use of Büchner, Braun hoped to illustrate that, while reform was necessary, revolution could be avoided. Braun concluded his essay: “Wir kennen Büchner, um uns unser[en] Teil zu denken” (VF 95). Through Büchner, Braun hoped to demonstrate that by learning from history [the October Revolution], the necessary reforms could be accomplished from within society and further revolution would be unnecessary. The criticisms which Braun expressed can be interpreted as his effort to suggest a new and better society within the framework of socialism. Unfortunately for Braun, a new revolution did indeed take place in 1989, eliminating forever Braun’s utopian vision for the future.

“Rimbaud. Ein Psalm der Aktualität”

Speaking before the *Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur* in Mainz (1984), Braun admitted that he had first heard

of Rimbaud when he was nineteen. Similar to the technique he employed in his Büchner essay, Braun chose Rimbaud's "Begriffe, Überschriften" as an "Untertext" (VF 96) for this speech, using Rimbaud for commentary and criticism. Rimbaud, insofar as he serves as a symbol of modernism, was not an acceptable forebear according to heritage mandates. In the seven years following the Büchner essay, Braun became hardened: "Rimbaud kein Georg Büchner, der mit der Kreatur empfand" (VF 100). He traced Rimbaud's actions to highlight his own and took account of his own literary history: "Diese Frühphase unseres Dichtens. . . Kindlich versifiziertes Programm, von sozialer Erfahrung kaum betroffen. Wirklich eine 'Provokation für mich'--und anders als ich dachte" (VF 100). In this way, Braun began to highlight a new direction for his works, departing from his initial strict adherence to policy, indicating his further experimentation with other traditions.

Significant is Braun's description of Rimbaud as "im *Exil* seiner Revolte" (VF 102).²⁵ This rather negative depiction indicates that Braun perceived Rimbaud as unwelcome in his time: Rimbaud's ideals did not correspond to reality. As we shall see later, Braun himself became an exile as the 1980s progressed, and the exile theme even appeared in his play *Transit Europa* (1984). At this point, Braun was becoming disillusioned, gradually relinquishing his hold on his utopian ideals.²⁶ Whereas Wilfried Grauert maintains that Braun juxtaposed Rimbaud's exile with a realistic literature,²⁷ a closer analysis indicates that Braun's literary endeavors of this period did indeed cling to his utopian ideals.

In Rimbaud, Braun found an ideological compatriot, one who believed that literature could be used to make society better: "Poesie sieht durch in die Schrecken/ Freuden der Verwandlung. Sie ist nicht zu brauchen, wo man die *vortrefflichen Verhältnisse* nicht ändern will" (VF 105).²⁸ Braun was also drawn to Rimbaud

for his political idealism. Rimbaud drafted a constitution that granted the citizenry the opportunity to form communes that would decide on issues according to their usefulness to the group, without interference from any governing authority. While Rimbaud's treatise was visionary for his time, it describes for Braun the ideal communist society. Despite his own idealism, Braun could not help but become disillusioned, for the revolution (as he described it in "Büchners Briefe") was progressing very slowly: "Der Kommunismus, als Erbteil des Klassenkampfes, mit der Menschheit und der Natur beladen, bleibt im Sozialismus subversiv wie die Poesie: wir wissen, worauf wir uns eingelassen haben" (VF 108).

Whereas Braun maintains that Rimbaud was not realistic enough to bear the truth of reality, he himself was unable to come to terms with the GDR quotidian. Because he could not reconcile his utopian visions with reality, he felt trapped:

Aus welcher Tiefe heraus schreibe ich. In der Hölle lebe ich. In dem Panzer. Ich lebe in Ungeduld, unfähig, mich ganz hinzugeben. Daher rührt meine Obsession: auszubrechen aus den Zwängen. Aus dem Panzer zu brechen. Aber ich stehe auch Panzern gegenüber (VF 114).

The tank metaphor symbolizes Braun's frustration, and it makes the audience aware that he could not compose what he really wanted to write. Further frustration became evident as he wrote: "Und doch, ohne die Literatur und die Gesellschaft zu verlassen, schleppe ich mich durch die Kälte der fadenscheinigen Beziehungen und zehre mich vom Kleister der Hoffnung. Ein gebremstes Leben" (VF 114).

Uncertainty characterized Braun's prospects for the future. Whereas Rimbaud left France for Africa, Volker Braun refused to forsake his heritage:

Keine Ausflüchte; wir müssen ins Innere gehen. Das ist ein schrecklicher Gang: in das Ende der Schrecken. Kommunismus oder Barbarei. Wir werden den Kontinent nicht verlassen. Die Unterdrückung begraben wir auf diesem blutigen Grund. Über den Gräbern empfangen wir den Auftrag. Die Paradiese nicht noch die Hölle: der *Aufenthalt auf Erden*, Realismus. Er wird uns ins innerste Afrika führen (VF 116).²⁹

We could say that Braun's exile is in "inner Africa", a term that has nothing to do with the distant continent, but rather, one that describes Braun's inner turmoil. Because he would not flee his homeland, thereby placing himself in a physical exile, his only alternative was to turn inward, representing an inner exile: "Wir öffnen die Augen, die *Seele*: wir können ein Land erschließen. Wir können schalten in dieser neuen Welt" (VF 120).³⁰ By turning inward, Braun retreated from reality. Rimbaud's physical exile thereby proved symbolic for Braun's psychological exile.

Because of his subjectivity and his selfish lifestyle, Rimbaud could never be considered an appropriate model for GDR literature. Yet Braun's essay reads as a lament, as if he regrets the restraints imposed on his own life and works. Indeed, Wilfried Grauert argues:

Die Kultfigur einer auf radikale Subjektivität verpflichteten Lebens- und Schreibweise, eines gleichsam "ungebremsten Lebens", dient ihm als Medium einer fundamentalen Kritik im ästhetischen Offizialdiskurs, der Subjektivität dem Wahrheitsmonopol der parteilich

dekretierten Dogmatik und ihrer autoritativen Geltung unterwirft.³¹

Braun was clearly attracted to Rimbaud's subjectivity and decadence, an indication not only of Braun's aesthetic rift with GDR doctrine but also of a political schism as well.

The restlessness evident in this essay was by no means unique to Braun. Indeed, many writers demonstrated signs of unrest at the *X. Schriftstellerkongreß* (November 1987). As both factions, writers and political leaders, attempted to assess the development in GDR literature during the previous five years, it became obvious that writers' mounting concerns about contradictions were often overlooked by Party functionaries. In his greeting to the assembly, SED Party Secretary Erich Honecker chose to praise the accomplishments of the GDR writers,

die ganz im Sinne des IX. Parteitages der SED wertvolle Anregungen für die umfassende geistige Verständigung über das Wesen unserer sozialistischen Gesellschaft, ihren zutiefst humanistischen Charakter, ihr historisches Gewordensein und ihre künftige Entwicklung vermitteln und Impulse geben für die öffentliche Diskussion.³²

Honecker stressed what he perceived as a consistency in GDR literature: the emphasis on humanism and an awareness of the relationship of literature to history remained the hallmarks of desirable (GDR) literature. As a Party functionary, Hermann Kant, president of the Writers' Union, echoed the idea of continuity in his opening speech: "Die Eigenart von DDR-Literatur, nah an den Dingen zu sein, und die Stärke dieser Literatur, sich stets im Dialog zu wissen, verlieren sich mit der Wanderung von Generationen nicht."³³ This cohesiveness reflected on the strength

of the concept of heritage. Yet these speeches also indicate that the Party functionaries were relatively unaware of the extent of the writers' malaise. It is also clear that Braun's provocations from the Rimbaud essay went unheard.

The idyllic atmosphere proposed by Honecker and Kant was shattered by signs of rebelliousness during the Congress, with the most critical remarks made by Christoph Hein on the topic of censorship. Hein justified the practices of the censor in the years immediately following World War II, a time in which the censor served as a means to cleanse Germany of the vestiges of Fascism: "Damals hatte die Zensur, ähnlich den Lebensmittelmarken, die Aufgabe, den allgemeinen Mangel zu ordnen, das Chaos zu verhindern und die Aufbauarbeit zu ermöglichen."³⁴ However, the censors had exaggerated their duties, resulting, in Hein's opinion, in the extensive loss of writers to the West.

Although Braun did not speak on this topic at the Congress, he did address the silencing of writers in diary excerpts (August 1984). Referring to a rejection ("Ich wußte, daß das Buch keiner genehmigen kann, und durfte es nicht wahrhaben" [VF 126]), he wrestled again with the dilemma of contradictions:

Nicht nur die satirische Prosa: auch die Gedichte, nichts scheint mehr druckbar. . . Aber wenn das, was ich schreibe, "im Widerspruch zur Partei" steht, wie kann ich dann Mitglied sein? Niemand fragt mich das, aber es ist unerträglich, diesen Widerspruch zu leben: eine bedeutende Kulturpolitik mitzutragen und ihr ein Ärgernis zu sein (VF 126-127).

Braun knew it was his responsibility as a writer to promote the official cultural policy, but since he himself had problems coming to terms with the contradictions between doctrine and real life, he

believed he could not successfully fulfill his task. While he has described himself as a disbeliever (“Ungläubiger”) from childhood on, his skepticism had only increased: “Freilich der Radius des Unglaubens hat zugenommen, die Produktion--die Demokratie--die Formation, der weltgeschichtliche Gesichtspunkt, der das Zentrum des Schreibens, die Revolution, verfremdet. . .” (VF 130). Clearly, Braun expressed resignation and was disappointed that he could not help society to attain its goals. He even began to question the feasibility of these goals. Throughout the 1980s, then, these feelings of desperation began to transcend and infiltrate his literary writings (particularly the poetry volume *Langsamer knirschender Morgen* [1987].) The polemical structure of his works which initially offered his audience hope and alternatives, became overshadowed by his turning inward, by his immigration into literature.

A short time after the Congress, a relaxation of censorship occurred (1988). Previously unpublished works by Volker Braun and Heiner Müller (to name only two examples) finally reached their audiences. In the case of Braun, this included the publication and performance of his drama *Lenins Tod*, originally written in 1970; the first GDR publication of the essay “Büchners Briefe”; and the appearance in book form of *Unvollendete Geschichte*. Reasons for their initial suppression had included an allegedly unsuitable appropriation of heritage and an unfavorable representation of historical events.³⁵

The continuity that Kant advocated at the Congress, the continued promotion of a canonical literary heritage, implied a naive appropriation of this heritage. Additionally, this ignored the contemporary heritage of GDR literature--that is, the interdependence of the writers within the GDR context. Dieter Schlenstedt appropriately characterized GDR literature as fraught

with self-quotations and references to other prominent GDR authors:

Die Literatur in der DDR ist durchzogen von vielfältigen Bezügen der Autoren aufeinander. . . Die Literatur ist so sehr durchzogen von einem Geflecht der lauten und leisen, offenen und geheimen Berufungen, Widmungen, Zitate, Gedankenaufnahmen und Gedankenablehnungen, Kritiken, Polemiken, daß sie sich für den intimen Kenner wie ein widerspruchsvoller Gesamttext lesen läßt. . .³⁶

The writers' interdependence was an integral part of the GDR's literary heritage; it promoted a dialogue not only among the writers, but also between author and audience. It is precisely this interdependence, Braun's struggle with historical and literary traditions, that serves as the focal point of my analysis. Braun viewed the relationship between GDR literature and the literature of its heritage as productive rather than imitative:

So geschieht die "Rückkehr" der Dichtung zur alten, "vorsentimentalischen," aber ohne daß sie leugnet, durch die sentimentalische (entfremdete) hindurchgegangen zu sein; Dichtung wird wieder naiv, aber nicht arm, borniert; sie faßt die Gegenstände, aber nicht nur die Erscheinungen, nicht knechtisch; sie bildet ab, aber nicht kontemplativ, sie will Totalität, aber veränderliche. Sie übernimmt aus dem Sentimentalischen allen künstlerischen Fortschritt, aber ihr Sentiment kommt nicht aus Sehnsucht nach der "Natur" (der "natürlichen" Gesellschaft), sondern aus Vergnügen oder Mißvergnügen an ihr (EG 26).

Clearly, Braun believed that literary and historical traditions should serve as models of expression for contemporary literature. Yet, as Braun's utopian vision for the future began to wane, as the GDR ceased to exist, as the socialist alternative was no longer viable, Braun aborted his productive use of literary heritage. Instead of serving as a vehicle that transported Braun's message to his audience, his literary references in the late 1980s and into the 1990s only served to console the writer in his despair.

In the excursus that follows, I will present two plays, *T.* and *Lenins Tod*, as essential background information. These two plays do not fit neatly into the developmental concept of Braun's appropriation of heritage. Yet, they are essential for an understanding of Braun's basic theme, namely the examination of the roots of the GDR's socialist heritage through portrayals of the evils of power dominant in early Soviet history. Indeed, they also afford the reader insight into Braun's political-ideological understanding of literature.

Notes

¹ The individual pieces first appeared separately. They were published in book form in the GDR in 1975 and in the Federal Republic in 1976.

² Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1989) 21.

³ See for example, Patricia A. Herminghouse, "Literature as 'Ersatzöffentlichkeit'? Censorship and the Displacement of Public Discourse in the GDR," *German Studies Review* (Special Issue: *Totalitäre Herrschaft--totalitäres Erbe*) Fall (1994): 85-99

⁴ Hans Kaufmann, "Zehn Anmerkungen über das Erbe, die Kunst und die Kunst des Erbens," *Weimarer Beiträge* 1 (1973): 39.

⁵ Johannes R. Becher, "Der Befreier," *Bemühungen, Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1971) 418

⁶ According to Karl Robert Mandelkow this Bitterfeld Conference "[muß] als ein erster Versuch gesehen werden, die Fixierung auf das klassische Erbe zugunsten spezifisch sozialistischer Literaturtraditionen zu relativieren." Mandelkow, "Die literarische und kulturpolitische Bedeutung des Erbes," *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart. Band 11. Die Literatur der DDR*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schmitt (München: Hanser, 1983) 98.

⁷ The report was first published in 1972 along with "Der Hörsaal" and "Die Bühne" as *Das ungezwungene Leben Kasts*.

⁸ Braun's emphasis.

⁹ Braun's emphasis.

¹⁰ Braun's emphasis.

¹¹ Braun's emphasis.

¹² Robert Weimann, "Gegenwart und Vergangenheit in der Literaturgeschichte," *Weimarer Beiträge* 5 (1970): 32-33.

¹³ Emmerich 243.

¹⁴ For details concerning the events before and after Biermann's expatriation see *Exil. Die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns aus der DDR. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Peter Roos (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1977).

¹⁵ Rosellini 25-26. Braun corroborated this assessment in our conversation in November 1990.

¹⁶ The text of the letter is as follows: "Westliche Kommentatoren, nicht entwöhnt der Einmischung in unsere Angelegenheiten, führen bestimmte Namen, auch meinen, genüßlich im Munde und spekulieren über eine Opposition oder gar eine Plattform gegen die Partei. Ich halte es deshalb für nötig zu erklären: in Erwägung, daß die Ausbürgerung Wolf Biermanns bei vielen fortschrittlichen Kräften in der Welt auf Unverständnis stoßen würde, haben wir die Partei gebeten, die Maßnahme zu überdenken. Ich sehe jetzt,

wie unsere Stellungnahme dazu benützt wird, eine Kluft zwischen uns und unsere Partei zu konstruieren. Diese Versuche weise ich entschieden zurück. Und ich füge für Freund und Feind hinzu: am Aufreißen dieser Kluft kann nur interessiert sein, wer die Politik des VIII. und IX. Parteitags behindern will, die die Arbeit der Schriftsteller beflügelt hat und ihre Hoffnung bleibt." Reprinted in "Der Fall Biermann," *Deutschland Archiv* 1 (1977): 86.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the writers who emigrated to the West see Emmerich 252-253

¹⁸ Volker Braun, *Verheerende Folgen mangelnden Anscheins innerbetrieblicher Demokratie* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1988). Subsequent references to this edition will be noted parenthetically with VF.

¹⁹ Braun retained this view even after unification. In our conversation in November 1990, Braun pointed to the inequitable distribution of power as the impetus for the peaceful revolution.

²⁰ Braun's emphasis.

²¹ "Büchners Briefe" was, however, published in France, *Connaissance de la RDA*, Heft 7 (1978): 8-17, and in the Federal Republic, *Georg Büchner Jahrbuch* 1 (1981): 11-21 and *Georg Büchner III*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: text und kritik, 1981) 5-14. It did not appear in the GDR until 1988 (VF 83-95).

²² Jay Rosellini argued that the reasons for the publication problems surrounding "Büchners Briefe" were that Braun dared to consider seriously the ideologies adhered to by a pre-Marxist writer. Rosellini further suggested that Braun's essay clearly allied him with those who sought a third road between monopoly capitalism and socialism. Rosellini, "Kulturerbe und Zeitgenossenschaft: Volker Braun und Georg Büchner," *German Quarterly* 60 (1987): 606.

²³ This became the main theme of the play *Großer Frieden* (1976).

²⁴ Braun's emphasis.

²⁵ My emphasis.

²⁶ Braun reformulated his concept of literary utopia in the 1980s. See Braun, "Utopisch ist es, wahrzunehmen, was mit uns ist. . ." in *Positionen 4. Wortmeldungen zur DDR-Literatur* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1988) 179-187.

²⁷ Wilfried Grauert, "Der Autor verläßt den Eisenwagen oder Unterwegs zu einer neuen Poetik. Zu Volker Brauns Essay 'Rimbaud. Ein Psalm der Aktualität'," *Wirkendes Wort* 43 (1993): 276-277.

²⁸ Braun's emphasis.

²⁹ Braun's emphasis.

³⁰ Braun's emphasis.

³¹ Grauert 268-269.

³² Erich Honecker, "Grußadresse des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschland," *X. Schriftstellerkongreß der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Plenum*, Schriftstellerverband der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1988) 18-19.

³³ Hermann Kant, "Rede," *X. Schriftstellerkongreß der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Plenum* 37.

³⁴ Christoph Hein, *X. Schriftstellerkongreß der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. Arbeitsgruppen*, Schriftstellerverband der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Köln: Pahl- Rugenstein, 1988) 228.

³⁵ In our conversation, Braun remarked that he had had numerous conversations with Cultural Minister Kurt Hager regarding *Lenins Tod*. Braun was informed that the play could not be published nor performed because it focused on Soviet history, and the Soviet embassy would never grant permission. The Soviet Union's reassessment of its own history under Michail Gorbachov made examinations of Stalinism in other East Bloc countries possible.

³⁶ Dieter Schlenstedt, "Entwicklungslinien der neueren Literatur in der DDR," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 9.1 (1988): 20.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOVIET MODEL: THE HERITAGE OF HEGEMONY

An Excursus

Politically and ideologically the GDR was a satellite of the Soviet Union. The Allies' creation of four occupied zones following World War II placed the Eastern part of Germany under Soviet influence. After four years as the Soviet Occupied Zone, the Eastern part of Germany declared itself an independent state on 7 October 1949. Despite this independent status, the influence of the Soviet Union remained prevalent. In fact, one could argue that the Soviet Union never really relinquished control of socialist Germany until Michail Gorbatschow assumed power. The reaction of Soviet troops to the 17 June 1953 workers' uprising and their involvement in the resolution of this problem is an excellent example of the extent of Soviet involvement in East German affairs. This Soviet sphere of influence even extended beyond the political realm to include the arts.

Because of the political-ideological connection between the two countries, it is perhaps not surprising that Volker Braun would choose to portray Soviet history in two relatively early plays, *T.* (1968) and *Lenins Tod* (1970). In both of these works, Braun employs Soviet history as a means of educating his own society. Although Braun's portrayals are fairly true to historical reality, the works themselves fall drastically short of Soviet and GDR

aesthetic ideology. Rather than produce seminal works of socialist realism, Braun fell prey to improper role models. Both dramas focus on Trotsky: this portrayal of Trotsky as a hero is nothing less than radical.

In these two plays, Braun broaches a theme that informs all of his dramatic works, namely the relationship between the people and the Party. The two works concentrate on depictions of the contradictions within the Soviet system, particularly as manifested in the evils of power. This examination of Soviet history thereby enables Braun to stage the antecedents of GDR socialism, allowing him to forge comparisons to GDR society at the time he composed the plays.

Unfortunately, Braun's approach was too reactionary for the late 1960s and early 1970s, and censors suppressed both of the plays. Braun wrote *T.* in 1968 after witnessing the disastrous outcome of the Prague Spring, fully aware that its critical nature might prevent it from ever appearing on stage.¹ It was not published until 1989 by Henschelverlag. In 1970, Braun broached the Soviet subject again, penning *Lenins Tod* as an alternate approach for the material in *T.* Here, Braun succumbed to compromise; the later attempt is decidedly less critical than *T.*, in the hope that it would be staged. Both the Deutsches Theater and the Berliner Ensemble attempted to produce *Lenins Tod*, and, despite conversations with the then Minister of Culture, Kurt Hager, performance was not permitted. Hager feared that the Soviet Embassy would intervene with production: Braun, as a German, could not understand the intricacies of Soviet history, and the portrayal was definitely too critical.² While *T.* remained in the *Schublade*, Braun openly spoke of the existence of *Lenins Tod*, often naming it in interviews. It also appeared in biographic and bibliographic information. In 1972, when asked his opinion on his most successful work, Braun replied: "*Lenins Tod* weil ich das

Stück gespielt sehen will.”³ This wish was finally fulfilled in 1988 when it was performed at the Berliner Ensemble.⁴

T.

T., the first of the two Soviet plays Braun composed, depicts the events that took place after Lenin’s death in 1924. The party apparatus assumes a dominant role, and Braun clearly marks the various levels of power in the play. The *Volk* is separated from the overriding power structure: “In diesem Teil kann der Apparat von einer doppelten oder dreifach besetzten Gruppe dargestellt werden, die Straße/ Fabrik von einer andren.”⁵ While Braun displays and criticizes Stalin’s oppressive measures, the central theme of the play is Trotsky, as he forces the audience to focus on Trotsky’s removal from the Politbüro and the Party. Contrary to socialist realism, Braun depicts a “negative” hero--Trotsky becomes the model. The actual portrayal of Trotsky is not negative, but rather naive and philosophical. Trotsky’s treatise is for a world revolution: “Die Geschichte ist ein mächtiger Mechanismus, aus unsern Knochen gebaut, unsere Gedanken halten ihn in Gang. Er arbeitet langsam, barbarisch langsam, doch wir kommen voran” (247). Volker Braun, too, remains idealistic and philosophical: Trotsky’s importance for Braun lies in the recognition that the people are making progress, albeit slowly.

The division between the masses and the Party functionaries is readily apparent throughout the text. In the opening scene, a struggle for food ensues among the masses. Markin, as the major representative of the *Volk* appears as an educated individual; he speaks in political slogans, albeit uncritically, not stopping to question the meaning behind the words. Markin’s apparent lack of understanding is not central to an interpretation of the play, for the

Volk is not really at the center of attention. Rather, the play concentrates on a depiction of the power struggle between Stalin and his supporters and Trotsky and the opposition. The struggle focuses solely on words and the understanding of these words, thereby situating itself outside the realm of the *Volk*, who Braun depicts as suffering under Stalin's policies. Audience attention becomes focused on the detailed portrayal of the political machinations, as members of the Politbüro, dissatisfied with Stalin's rule and regretful of their own maneuvers that had made him head of the Party, struggle to come to terms with the political situation. As but two examples, Kamenev and Zinoviev, who supported Stalin against Trotsky at the time of Lenin's death, now side with Trotsky as members of the opposition: "Stalin's Weste blieb weiß, während wir uns anschwärzten; nur er hat aus dem Streit gewonnen. Vereinigen wir unsre Kräfte, so werden wir sie verdreifachen" (193).

Markin, as the representative of the *Volk*, is politically engaged. He participates in an uprising, appealing to the workers to act: "Wer wird in euch siegen, der Held oder der Sklave?" (212). This type of engagement is frowned upon by the Party, and, Markin eventually loses his job. Insofar as Braun emphasizes Stalin's oppression and the lack of freedoms permitted the people, he has portrayed the Soviet Union in a decidedly negative light. The presence of a workers' uprising within the context of the play recalls in the minds of the audience both the workers' uprising in the GDR in June 1953 and the use of Warsaw Pact troops to crush the Prague Spring in 1968. Thus, Braun draws a direct correlation between political policies under Stalin and the oppressive interference of the Soviet Union in other East Bloc countries. In this way, Braun attempted to make the more distant Soviet history productive for his own audience. This also contributed to the play's suppression.

Instead of following Lenin's plan for the Party, Stalin created a dictatorship, promoting censorship and oppression. Although he had been judged a traitor, Trotsky is still able to promote his theories. And, despite Stalin's imposition of silence, Trotsky's message reaches the people. Molotow, one of Stalin's staunchest supporters, warns the Central Committee of Trotsky's continued influence, comparing Trotsky to Napoleon:

Keiner wird sich anmaßen, Nachfolger Lenins zu sein, Stalin nicht, Bucharin nicht--aber Einer. Er kann der Bonaparte unsrer Revolution werden. Ist er nicht bekannt, wie Bonaparte? Ist er nicht eine Persönlichkeit, wie Bonaparte? Ist er nicht ein Redner, wie Bonaparte? Ist er nicht ein Jude, wie Bonaparte? Ist er nicht ein Feldherr, wie Bonaparte? . . . Hüten wir uns vor Einem (197).

In setting Napoleon and Trotsky as equals, Braun draws a parallel between the French Revolution and the October Revolution. As he would later argue in "Büchners Briefe", the French Revolution did have a positive side because the aristocracy was removed from power. For Braun, there is a logical historical progression from the French Revolution to the October Revolution. The Soviet Revolution ended capitalism and class struggle. While Braun indeed viewed this as a positive historical development, Stalin's oppressive rule can only be viewed as a hindrance to further societal progress. Yet, Molotow's characterization of Trotsky as another Napoleon is entirely false: Trotsky does not seek power as did Napoleon (and Stalin). Rather, he strives to point out the inefficiencies within the current economic system. Making his objections known in the Central Committee, he argues:

Das Leben der Arbeiter ist elend, ihre Löhne sind geringer als vor dem Oktober. Die Regierung befiehlt,

die Löhne einzufrieren; wir sagen: so wird die Produktion einfrieren. Wir fordern die strengere Besteuerung der NÖP-Leute, deren Profit aus dem Schweiß der Arbeiter gemacht ist. . . . Die riesige Masse der Kleingütler lebt einen erbärmlichen Tag. Die Kollektivierung wird träg betrieben als Geschäft eines späteren Jahrhunderts. . . . Die Industrie bewegt sich in einem Schneckentempo, daß sie tatsächlich den offiziellen Erwartungen entspricht (203-204).

Trotsky's criticisms place him in conflict with Stalin's leadership. Thus, Stalin and his supporters must resort to political intrigue to weaken the opposition. First, Stalin suggests the expulsion of Zinoviev from the Politbüro. When Molotow recommends that they also expel Trotsky, Stalin disagrees, hoping to force Trotsky's capitulation through the weakening of his opposition forces. This scheme compels Trotsky to accept Stalin's plans for production; otherwise, Stalin would remove the voice of the opposition from the Politbüro entirely. Trotsky must therefore accept the current political structure in order to try to overcome it. He recognizes that he has placed himself in a compromising position:

Man kann nicht recht haben gegen die Partei. Sie macht Fehler. Aber letzten Endes hat sie recht, weil sie das einzige Werkzeug ist, Geschichte zu machen. *Schreit* Man kann nur mit ihr, und durch sie, recht haben--oder die Geschichte nimmt dein Recht nicht (213).

Trotsky must therefore capitulate to Stalin. At the same time, he realizes that Stalin is trying to build oppression into the system. The end result, according to Trotsky, is a dictatorship, and the end to the dreams and goals of the socialist revolution:

Das Verbot der Diskussion führt zur Bildung von Fraktionen; das Verbot der Fraktionen führt zum Verbot, anders zu denken als der unfehlbare Führer. Erst trat die Partei an die Stelle des Volks, aber jetzt setzt sich der Apparat an die Stelle der Partei, bald ersetzt den Apparat der einzige Diktator. Das ist Lebensgefahr für die Revolution. *Streckt den Arm gegen Stalin*: Der Generalsekretär kandidiert für den Posten des Totengräbers der Revolution (216-217).

Meanwhile, Stalin couches his arguments in Party rhetoric, attempting to hide his quest for power from the other members of the Politbüro. Only Trotsky sees through Stalin's ruse.

Stalin's supporters in the Politbüro peruse Lenin's theses for justification for their actions. Molotov, quoting from Lenin's essay "Was tun?" (1905) provides the grounds for the enactment of Stalin's oppressive measures:

Je breiter die Masse ist, die spontan in den Kampf hineingezogen wird, . . . um so fester muß die Organisation sein . . . Die Organisation der Revolutionäre muß hauptsächlich Leute erfassen, deren Beruf die revolutionäre Tätigkeit ist . . . (234).

The perversion of Lenin's words allows Stalin to manipulate doctrine to suit his own aims. This is the ultimate denial of the original humanitarian thrust of communism, namely that the masses should no longer be the subjects of those in power.

The play concludes with a negative image: in the final scene, militia men take Trotsky away. Stalin's intrigue was successful; Trotsky and his supporters are expelled not only from their positions in the Politbüro but from the Party as well. With this

play, Braun concentrates on negative images: the negative hero, the negative conclusion. Although Braun sides ideologically with Trotsky, it is Stalin's authoritarianism that is the victor. Stalin's success resulted from his inability to conduct rational discussions with the opposition and his unwillingness to compromise.

The play operates on a philosophical level and Braun questions the entire cultural spectrum: art, the Party, politics, ideology, philosophy. Although the negativity is not representative of Braun's works at the time, the questioning nature of the play appropriately reflects Braun's personal quandry. The mobilization of Warsaw Pact troops under the auspices of the Soviet Union in Prague in 1968 contradicts what Braun and other writers saw as socialist ideology. Braun believed in the right of the individual to protest and actively seek out justice and democracy. When the spirit of the Prague Spring was crushed by the invading troops it created an ideological crisis for Braun. By portraying Trotsky as the hero, Braun sided with the underdog, expressing artistically what his political leanings were in 1968.

Lenins Tod

Although composed two years later than *T.*, *Lenins Tod* actually depicts an earlier period of Soviet history. Here, Braun examines the period of Soviet history following the October Revolution up to Lenin's death in 1924. Two scenarios play out concurrently: the first deals with the plight of the Soviet people under Lenin's New Economic Plan; the second depicts the political intrigue in the Politbüro Central Committee, as Stalin and Trotsky present contradictory visions for the future of the Soviet Union. As in *T.*, Braun's cast of characters includes a number of nameless individuals from the proletariat, the *Volk*. Braun's intent

was to illustrate the importance of the base for the superstructure. To underscore this significance further, Braun advises that "die Darsteller der Führer zugleich das Volk spielen [sollten], so daß jeder in beiden Ebenen auftritt: im Apparat und auf der Straße. . . Dieses 'doppelte Spiel' ergäbe ein poetisches Bild der Widersprüche--der Kämpfe in der Brust".⁶ Here we note a decided difference to the portrayals in *T.* Braun now emphasizes the equality of society--the leaders come from the ranks of the common people. The ultimate betrayal of this ideal occurs later, when those in power lose sight of their roots.

Of the play's twenty-one scenes, only six depict the *Volk* directly. Although the masses are for the most part nameless, Braun symbolically allows the character Markin to develop and progress, thereby representing the positive evolution of the *Volk*. To further emphasize the importance of the *Volk*, Braun begins the entire play with a scene that underscores the economic plight of the people: a businessman catches a boy stealing, beats him up, then encourages him to eat the food he has stolen out of hunger, and finally, for no apparent reason, beats the boy again.⁷ Both of these characters are nameless and symbolize two levels in society: the businessman profits from the new economic structure of the country, while the nameless masses must starve. Markin arrives on the scene as an illiterate nobody, who cannot understand the political rhetoric being spoken around him.

Gradually, the *Volk*-scenes concentrate on Markin's development. In his second stage appearance the audience is privy to his unfeeling relationship to women--Braun sets him in a love scene with Anje, a woman of no consequence to him. By the time of his next appearance, Markin has abandoned Anje, learned to read and write, and begins to speak in a manner of political slogans ["Wir werden dich in die Produktion eingliedern!" (145)]. A few scenes later we find Markin and Anje together again--it

turns out that Anje is pregnant. A social worker helps Anje to convince Markin that he should marry her. Another comrade implores Markin: "Komm mit, Bürger, in den Klub, wir werden den neuen Menschen entwerfen" (158). Here we note a decided similarity to the message of many expressionist plays: the idea of the "new man" as the future and solution to society's ills.

Markin has indeed developed into a "new man". Later in the play Braun presents a scene in which Markin reads the newspaper and begins to think critically. He recognizes the severity of the economic problems and begins to react. The former *Mitläufer* now wants to take part in decision-making and participate in the development of society: "Dann liegt es an uns [das Volk]" (164). In the final scene of the play, Markin delivers the news that Lenin has died. This is significant, because Markin's development represents Lenin's vision and ideals. At the same time that Markin announces Lenin's death, he learns of the birth of his son, Wolodja. The prophecy of "the new man" and a better future appears to be fulfilled, and, despite Lenin's death, the play concludes positively. Interestingly enough, Braun actually overshadows Lenin's death with the baby's birth. This final scene takes place in the street, the domain of the *Volk*, allowing the audience to see only the reactions of the proletariat and not those of the Party leaders.

While the economic plight only plays out in the realm of the masses, the effects of economic necessity do serve to inflect the political power structure. Although the opening scene emphasizes the situation of the masses, Lenin (and other political functionaries, Radek and Dersshinski) also make their first appearances. Lenin recognizes the inconsistencies within this political system and strives to find a solution. He appears as a man of reason, one who understands what is necessary for his Party to succeed:

Jeder gewöhnliche kapitalistische Kommis, in einer Mehlhandlung, versteht sein Fach tausendmal besser als der Genosse, der Kerker und Kugeln nicht fürchtete, und nicht kapiert--daß er arbeiten lernen muß. Wir kapieren das nicht, weil es den kommunistischen Hochmut gibt . . . Entweder wir kapieren es jetzt--oder die Sowjetmacht kann nicht fortbestehn . . . Alle revolutionären Parteien sind daran gescheitert, daß sie überheblich wurden und nicht sahn, was ihre Kraft ist--und Angst hatten, von ihren Schwächen . . . zu reden. Entweder wir lernen es jetzt, oder wir werden zugrundegehen (119).

Lenin acknowledges that the Party is not perfect and strives to end the evils. Unfortunately, he receives little support from his comrades in the Politbüro, which is fraught with chaos.⁸ Aware that his own death is near, Lenin struggles to find the best successor: either Stalin or Trotsky. Division within the Central Committee, where the members fight among themselves, promoting individual interests compounds the chaotic state of the Politbüro.

A power struggle based on ideology and personality ensues between Stalin and Trotsky. Whereas Trotsky remains true to Marxist theory thinking only in terms of a world revolution, Stalin focuses on the immediate national situation. He views Trotsky as a traitor and begins to plot against him: "Er [Trotzki] will Iljitschs Krankheit nutzen . . . [er] meint sich berufen, Rußland durch eine Lebenslüge zu retten. Wir müssen Iljitsch warnen" (129).

During this confusion, Lenin struggles to retain some semblance of reason. He objects to Trotsky's loyalty to dogma, arguing that Trotsky has lost sight of the objectives of socialism:

Ein Genosse, der aufgibt, der sich an den Rand stellt und zuschaut, über den geht die Geschichte hinweg.-- Sind wir denn verloren, nur weil unsre Methoden versagen? Können wir nicht von vorn beginnen?--Wir verteidigen uns nicht mehr gegen Waffen sondern gegen die Apathie. Wir können nicht mehr angreifen. Geben Sie Ihre reinen Vorsätze auf--statt sich selber! (132).

Here, Trotsky's ideals diverge from Lenin's plan and he counters with the argument: "Entweder man will eine Revolution, oder man will sie nicht. Wer das Ziel will, muß die Mittel wollen; das Mittel zur Befreiung der Arbeiter ist die revolutionäre Gewalt" (132-3). While Lenin seeks to better conditions for his own people, Trotsky, thinking globally, maintains that a complete (world) revolution must take place before Lenin's methods are effective.

Lenin's dilemma, finding a successor, is complicated further by the fact that both Trotsky and Stalin possess leadership qualities. Although each has considerable power within the established structure of authority, Lenin fears that their personalities will lead to conflict:

Genosse Stalin hat, nachdem er Generalsekretär, eine unermessliche Macht . . . in seinen Händen . . . konzentriert! Nicht . . . vorsichtig genug Gebrauch gemacht.

Ander[er]seits Trotzki--schon sein Kampf gegen das ZK . . . wegen Plankommision und. . . nicht nur hervorragende Fähigkeiten. Persönlich . . . ist er der fähigste Mann, aber. . . ein Übermaß an Selbstbewußtsein.

Diese zwei Eigenschaften beider hervorragender Führer können . . . unbeabsichtigt . . . zur Spaltung führen (147).

Despite these careful considerations, it is the ensuing power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, not Lenin, that ultimately decides his successor.

Lenin leans toward choosing Trotsky and asks him to represent him during his illness. The latter declines the invitation because of his belief that the Party does not represent the proletariat democratically. Stalin accuses Trotsky of not supporting Lenin. Later, Stalin receives information that permits him to portray Trotsky as a traitor. Berija, an historian who works in the archives and is preparing a collection of Trotsky's works and the man who will later lead Stalin's secret police, reveals the contents of a questionable letter to Stalin, that describes Lenin as a "professioneller Ausbeuter des Rückständigen in der russischen Arbeiterbewegung" (154).

Other members of the Politbüro recognize Stalin's thirst for power and realize that if Stalin assumes power after Lenin's death, it will mean the end of the Party as they know it. Zinoviev goes so far as to say: "Jossif...wird uns erdrücken" (165).⁹ Disunity results as opposing factions develop within the Politbüro. Stalin is eventually able to overcome the divisiveness by discrediting Trotsky. The ultimate betrayal occurs when Trotsky prints a letter in the newspaper. Dershinski summarizes Trotsky's accusations:

. . . Er stellt sich darin der Zentrale gegenüber. Er stellt die Partei dem Apparat gegenüber! Er stellt die Jugend den Kadern gegenüber! Er preist die Studenten als Barometer der Bürokratie! Er fordert Freiheit für Gruppierungen, das heißt für die Fraktion! (179).

Stalin denounces Trotsky's plea for democracy, characterizing Trotsky's favoritism of factions as the destruction of the Party. Finally, he convinces the majority of the Politbüro to side with him. Stalin depicts the Party's failings as the result of factions: "Die Partei war zu sehr etwas . . . wie ein System von Institutionen, mit unteren und höheren Angestellten, statt daß in ihr alle gleich sind. Dadurch wurde die richtige Linie etwas . . . entstellt" (177). Implicitly, Stalin criticizes the hierarchical power structure within the Party, a feature of socialism that also applies to the GDR. Stalin does not, however, present a solution that employs democracy, but rather one that results in his dictatorship.

Despite the play's title, Lenin's death is not played out on the stage, and it is significant that the play depicts no action. Even in the case of Markin, the audience does not witness how his development progresses. Instead, he makes periodic appearances that depict him in various stages of his evolution. Even the scenes in the Politbüro are not dramatic; the various factions merely present their arguments. It is only on the level of the *Volk* that the play emerges from the realm of argument. The scenes with the masses depict concretely the theoretical problems that the members of the Politbüro address in their discussions. Despite the secondary nature of the *Volk* in the play, it is the *Volk* that has particular significance:

Ohne die Straße blieben die ungeheuren Kämpfe der Fraktionen bloße theoretische Streite. Diese Wortschlachten, in denen die Tintenfüßer flogen in den Sitzungen des Zentralkomitees, sind aber nur zu begreifen als naher oder ferner Reflex der widersprüchlichen Interessen der Industriearbeiter und des riesigen Kartoffelsacks von Bauern.¹⁰

Braun's message lies not so much in the historical portrayal but in the images of the masses. Markin is a positive hero and symbolizes Braun's desire to mobilize the masses. Interestingly enough, however, when the actual mobilization of the masses did occur in October 1989, Braun's actions belied his original intent. Braun remained steadfast in his support of a socialist way of life.

Thematically, *Lenins Tod* grapples with the role of democracy within the socialist system. Ingrid Seyfarth views this discussion as demonstrating the importance of progress for the revolution.¹¹ This topic of progress was not open for discussion in the GDR. For Volker Braun, progress meant the resolution of contradictions. In his notes on the conception of *Lenins Tod* he wrote:

Im Sozialismus geht es nicht in der Theorie sondern in der Praxis um das Wesen des Menschen, d.h. der Massen. Für die Masse stellt sich die Frage Initiative oder Laster (genannt Arbeiten oder Genießen) aber als die politische: schöpferische mitbestimmende zu sein oder blinde Herde: gerade weil ihr großer Teil die Frage noch nicht so stellt. Erst die Aufhebung des gesellschaftlichen Widerspruchs durch die Massen hebt den privaten auf, das ist einunddieselbe, aber widersprüchliche Geschichte. So wird die Initiative das Sichaussleben, die Arbeit der Genuß.¹²

Vital to the eradication of the contradiction between theory and practice is discussion by the people. But the plays' suppression in the GDR did not allow discussions to take place.

Trotsky's treason overshadowed any positive message that the play depicted. Historically, for both the Soviet Union and the GDR, Trotsky is not a positive hero. However, both critics and

political functionaries overlooked an important aspect of Trotsky's personality, one that also relates directly to Volker Braun's own personal philosophy. Trotsky's treason arose out of his loyalty to ideology--he remained true to the idea(l) of a world revolution. This makes him a positive hero for Braun. Braun was an idealist, one who did not surrender the vision of a socialist utopia even after the protests of 1989; indeed, Braun's feelings did not significantly change following the unification of Germany. By making Trotsky a focal point, Braun emphasizes the ideal--both of revolution and of the communist utopia. Trotsky saw the revolution as incomplete, because it was limited to the Soviet Union. In depicting this period of Soviet development, Braun makes a statement about history. Firstly, he depicts a positive side of Trotsky, trying to rehabilitate him for the history books. Secondly, the play speaks to Stalin's tyranny, a topic that was taboo in the GDR in 1970.

Beginning with the title, we note that Braun's play recalls Büchner's *Dantons Tod*. In a television interview Braun remarked: "als ich *Lenins Tod* schrieb, schielte ich zu ihm [Büchner]." ¹³ In both plays, the "hero" is about to die. Both of these heroes live in the realm of words--there is no action depicted on the stage--the revolutions are already complete. Both Braun and Büchner stage the problems, particularly economic, that began to surface after the revolution. Danton is sentenced to death: the hero becomes a sacrifice. It is Danton's fault that the revolution did not result in the promised ideals. Lenin is dying and remains a *Volk*-hero even after his death: the name chosen for Markin's son, *der neue Mensch*, is Wolodja, a nickname for Wladimir. Both of these plays, then, depict hegemony and hierarchical power struggles.

The French Revolution is an important focal point for Braun. In the essay "Büchners Briefe" Braun viewed the French Revolution as a precursor to the October Revolution in Russia.

Such elements are present in Büchner's play, particularly in a statement made by Simon, a representative of the *Volk*: "das Einzelne muß sich dem Allgemeinen . . ." ¹⁴ Here we notice a shift in emphasis from the individual to society, a movement fulfilled later in the October Revolution. Interesting for our purposes, however, is that Braun places a different emphasis in his play than Büchner did. In *Danton's Tod*, the audience encounters Danton in the very first scene, the *Volk* appears only in the second scene. Although Lenin also participates in Braun's first scene, Braun introduces the masses immediately and focuses audience attention on their plight. In *Danton's Tod*, Büchner portrayed the *Volk* as the source of revolution. Braun chose to portray the *Volk* in order to make his message believable to his audience. The chaotic status of the Politbüro recalls Danton remarks about the governance of France: "Ich lasse Alles in einer schrecklichen Verwirrung." ¹⁵

Both plays end with the death of the hero. Braun's play does, however, concentrate more on the future of the Soviet political landscape. The success of the October Revolution depended on Lenin's vision and action. Because Lenin's death is immanent, the search for a successor becomes significant. At this point, Braun also relies on the audience's knowledge of history, because, although Stalin was a taboo topic in the GDR, the atrocities that occurred under his rule were widely known.

Other parallels between Braun's work and that of Büchner manifest themselves in the use of historical facts. While Büchner also infused his drama with fictional elements, the use of fiction was an impossibility for Braun:

Ich hatte mir ja jede Erfindung an den historischen Figuren verbieten müssen, um nicht sofort den Vorwurf der Geschichtsklitterung einzuheimsen. Büchner konnte im DANTON die Julie sich vergiften und Lucile

wahnsinnig werden lassen--Erfindungen, die dem Stück Schönheit und Kraft geben. Das konnte man mit der Krupskaja nicht machen. Ich würde heute rücksichtsvoller verfahren--gegenüber der Kunst. Ich würde mehr auf die grotesken und wahnwitzigen, also menschlichen Punkte kommen und den Ablauf sprengen, um den Abgrund der alten und der kommenden Geschichte hineinzubringen. Es fehlt die Komödie in der Tragödie: der härtere Blick. Jetzt setzt nur der EISENWAGEN das Ganze dem heutigen, härteren Blick aus.¹⁶

Here Braun comments on (in his opinion) the inadequate criticism within the play. The *Eisenwagen* refers to the prose poem "Der Eisenwagen" that Braun chose as an introduction to the delayed publication of both plays.¹⁷ In this poem a tank serves as a metaphor for socialism, through which the speaker denounces his inability to maneuver the vehicle:

ich lenke, aber der Wagen fährt nicht dorthin, wohin
ich ihn lenke, er fährt hin, wohin ihn andre lenken.
Wer, wohin. Ich ahnte für Augenblicke, daß ein andrer
Kampf beginnen würde, aber kein Schimmer, wer die
Gegner waren.¹⁸

Clearly, this passage characterizes the conflict that existed between ideology and practical application both in the Soviet Union and in the GDR.¹⁹ Braun, as the driver, seeks to steer this vehicle along the straight path of socialism. Outside interference (from the Party), diverts the vehicle from its course. The implication of the unknown identity of the opposition insinuates the possibility that Braun's foes are not easily recognizable. The Party, which professed to espouse socialist ideals, acted instead to hinder social progress. The addition of this prose poem sharpens

Braun's original critique. It identifies the contradictions between theory and practice and links them to GDR experience. The *Eisenwagen* is also a symbol of war. Braun thereby not only emphasizes the lack of maneuverability, but expresses a criticism about the terrorism linked to the symbol. By placing this prose piece as an introduction to the two plays, Braun focuses the readers' attention on the violence attached to the symbol. Whereas the original revolution in 1917 was necessarily violent, Braun comments that the intent in the 1980s is still on violence. This serves to cover up and ignore the "real" problems of real existing socialism.

Both *Lenins Tod* and *T.* actually focus on Trotsky's life and his role within the communist party in the Soviet Union. Braun's decision to present the story of a "traitor" is in and of itself an affront to GDR cultural policy. Indeed, cultural theorists dictated that East German writers portray positive heroes. But if we look more closely at Trotsky's words, it is apparent that he remained true to Marxist ideology. His alleged treachery consists only of his refusal to support Stalin's program. Because of his loyalty to the intent of Marxist-Leninist theory, Trotsky is not really a negative hero. Braun remarked that he felt compelled to write the plays, "weil dieses kolosale Unrecht, was sich da auf eine Figur häufte, mich so innerlich empörte."²⁰ In writing these plays Braun focused not only on the tragedy of the figure Trotsky, but he also highlighted the contradictions of the socialist system as it existed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. One cannot deny that he hoped that this critical portrayal of the roots of socialism would force his audience to contemplate the possibility of similar problems in their own society.

Braun placed the most poignant criticism in both of these plays in a scene in *T.*, that calls the role of art in socialism into question. In responding to the question whether tragedies will exist

in socialist theater, Trotsky formulates a critique of the role of theater in general. He posits that theater can no longer depict action:

Es ist nicht mehr ein Drama von Feinden; die da unversöhnlich kämpfen, haben die besten Absichten: sie tuns nicht für sich sondern für die Gesellschaft. Sie geben nur verschiedene Order in der nämlichen Not. Wie die shakespeareschen Helden mit Schwertern und Spießen, noch wilder kämpfen sie mit Reden und Pamphleten. Und das ist die Tragik: wenn die Dramaturgie noch zu unbeholfen ist, rational die Aktionen zu finden--es ist noch kein Spiel sondern Intrige, es gibt nichts zu lernen daraus. Das ist die Trgödie, wenn der Unterlegene sieht, er ist das, was er für die andern ist in der Geschichte, der Falschmünzer, der Verschwörer: er muß aber so handeln, will er seinem Wissen von menschlichem Tun treu bleiben (213-214).

This excerpt precisely describes Volker Braun's own agenda. Rather than depict action, he wrote two plays based on words and intrigue. Trotsky then comments that "die Rezensenten [werden] einen 'negativen Helden' erfinden" (214). Braun has indeed invented his negative hero, in order to remain true to his convictions about human nature.

Here, at this early juncture, we see Braun at odds with cultural dogma. It is not only his depiction of a negative hero that causes him problems, but also the manner of depictions. Braun did not follow the appointed scheme of literary forebears. For the play on Trotsky, Braun turned to history as his guide. As he states in notes accompanying the play: "Vorwürfe der Geschichtsklitterei, falls sie jemandem einfielen, wären der Zwecke des Theaters

wegen an der falschen Adresse. Übrigens ist das Stück im Vergleich zu den Geschichtsbüchern peinlich genau.”²¹ This emphasis on historical verity displeased the censors. In *Lenins Tod* Braun turned to Büchner as a model, also an inappropriate forebear.

The surface theme of these plays is the hierarchical power structure that developed in the Soviet Union under Stalin’s rule. Braun turned to Lenin’s own writings to find the social-political basis of his arguments, that it is not the Party, but the people that can make socialism a reality: “Die Befähigung von Millionen zu bewußtem Handel *für alle*. Das ändert die Stellung des einzelnen in der Organisation der Produktion und des Staates” (EG 69).²² At this point in his literary career, we find Braun willing to write for the *Schublade* in order to express his desired opinions. This is the first early example of Braun’s self-imposed literary exile. The thematic component of both plays, the problems of hierarchical power structures, will remain an underlying theme throughout Braun’s *oeuvre*. In the next chapter we turn our attention to the problems Braun found in the GDR within the production sphere.

Notes

¹ Braun made these comments during our interview in November 1990. In a 1992 interview Braun also remarked: “Davon [von Trotsky] konnte natürlich nicht geredet werden, weil es sowjetische Interessen berührt und sich meiner absolute Ausschaltung zur Folge gehabt hätte.” Braun quoted in *Börsenblatt* 18, 3 Mar. 1992: 23.

² Braun provided this account to me during our interview in November 1990. Michael Stone comments on the reasons for the play’s suppression: “Ganz klar, daß es Anfang der 70er Jahre nicht hätte gezeigt werden können. Da war Trotzki in der

kommunistischen Geschichtsschreibung noch nicht existent und das politische Anliegen der Sowjetunion war die Erhaltung, nicht die Erneuerung der gesellschaftlichen Struktur in den sozialistischen Staaten." See Stone, "Machtkampf im Kreml. *Lenins Tod* von Volker Braun im Ost-Berliner Ensemble uraufgeführt," *Der Tagesspiegel* 6 Oct. 1988: 4.

³ Joachim Walther, "Volker Braun," *Meinetwegen Schmetterlinge. Gespräche mit Schriftstellern* (Berlin: Buchverlag der Morgen, 1973) 101.

⁴ Peter Nöldeken claims that the GDR performed many of Braun's works in 1988 in order to demonstrate that it was complying with *glasnost*. See Nöldeken, "Staubtrockene Theaterlektion über den Stalinismus. Volker Brauns Stück *Lenins Tod* kommt nun viele Jahre zu spät auf die Bühne in Ost Berlin," *Westfälische Rundschau* 4 Oct. 1988. Braun also corroborated this assertion during our November 1990 interview.

⁵ Braun, "T.," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge 3* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990) 190. All references are to this edition and included parenthetically.

⁶ "Lenins Tod", *Texte in zeitlicher Folge 3* 114. All references are to this edition and will be included parenthetically.

⁷ Jay Rosellini attributed the businessman's irrational actions to feelings of guilt because he was making a profit in a difficult economic time. See Rosellini, *Volker Braun* 57.

⁸ Lenin: "Ja, es war mein Fehler, daß ich praktisch allein die Verbindung zwischen dem Politbüro und dem Rat aufrechterhielt! Jetzt greift beides nicht mehr ineinander. Alles wird aus dem Rat ins Politbüro geschleppt. Und wir werfen den andern Wirrwarr vor, Stumpfsinn, Dummheit. Moskau--4700 verantwortliche Kommunisten; und dieses bürokratische Ungetüm, dieser Haufen, wer leitet da und wer wird geleitet?" (121-122).

⁹ Braun of course knows that Sinowjew will be purged by Stalin in a show trial.

¹⁰ Quoted in Peter Ullrich, “*Lenins Tod*. Uraufführung im Berliner Ensemble,” *Theater der Zeit* 12 (1988): 32.

¹¹ Ingrid Seyfarth, “Das Prinzip Lenin. *Lenins Tod* von Volker Braun am Berliner Ensemble, *Der Brester Frieden* von Michael Schatrow am Gorki Theater Berlin,” *Sonntag* 23 Oct. 1988: 7.

¹² Braun, “Aus der Konzeption zu ‘Lenins Tod’,” *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 3 258-259.

¹³ *Lieb’ Georg*, dir. Konrad Hermann, DEFA, 1988.

¹⁴ Georg Büchner, *Dantons Tod, Werke und Briefe* (München: Hanser, 1980) 31.

¹⁵ Büchner 63.

¹⁶ Quoted in Ullrich 32.

¹⁷ Braun wrote “Der Eisenwagen” nearly two decades after composing the play. It was first published in the poetry collection *Langsamer knirschender Morgen* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1987).

¹⁸ “Material VIII: Der Eisenwagen,” *Langsamer knirschender Morgen* 50. In the play Lenin speaks a similar passage: “Ich sitze im Wagen und lenke ihn, doch der Wagen fährt nicht dorthin, wohin ich lenke, er fährt hin, wohin ihn andere lenken--andre, die illegal handeln, die von gottweißwoher kommen. Spekulanten und Gauner” (122).

¹⁹ Christine Cosentino also draws the parallel between the tank and GDR socialism: “Hier geht es um DDR-und Weltgeschichte, vorrangig aber um die weltanschaulichen Krise eines DDR-Marxisten, der sich als Weltbürger zu begreifen beginnt.” See Cosentino, “‘Anonyme, eiserne Gestalt’: Dialektik und Fortschritt in Volker Brauns ‘Der Eisenwagen’,” *Germanic Notes* 1-2 (1988): 7.

²⁰ Quoted from our interview from November 1990.

²¹ Braun, *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 3 261.

²² Braun’s emphasis.

CHAPTER THREE

“DAS SIND DOCH ALLES PROVOKATEURE”: THE WORKER PLAYS

Braun chose a traditional framework for the four dramas that depict the life of the worker and the inadequate working conditions within the socialist system in the GDR. He essentially adhered to the tenets of socialist realism and his heroes, although they depict some negative traits, are for the most part positive, despite the fact that the work places portrayed are not. He follows the typical literary role models--Goethe and Brecht, although he does look to Shakespeare as well as to Büchner, continuing the affinity begun in *Lenins Tod*. The relatively programmatic nature of Braun's writings are at this point necessary. Although he addresses the failings of his society directly and highlights the inconsistencies inherent in the system, the criticisms that he openly expresses are naive and obvious.

The four plays to be discussed here, *Die Kipper*, *Hinze und Kunze*, *Tinka*, and *Schmitten*, outwardly portray the various problems of industry in socialist society.¹ In fact, these plays supersede the typical factory model because they do not portray a harmonious work place. Conflicts are depicted on two levels, both in the place of employment and in private spheres. A dialectical relationship also exists between these two levels: problems in the private sphere invariably affect the work atmosphere. These theatrical works therefore focus on the conflict between the individual and society.

Brecht's influence is outwardly apparent in these early dramatic works. Rather than merely adopting Brecht's principles, however, Braun chose to confront Brecht's ideas directly. Seeking to extend Brecht's thesis written during the struggle to establish a socialist way of life, Braun, in his own treatise, proposed ways in which Brecht's dramaturgy could be viable for socialist theater. In Braun's view, Brecht's dramatic theories focused on a portrayal of contradictions that derived from the antagonisms inherent in class society. Braun replaced class distinctions with "new" inconsistencies that he found inherent in his socialist society:

Die Helden [bei Brecht] sind Feinde. Sie haben unversöhnliche Interessen. Der Kampf ist tödlich. Die einen müssen verschwinden, damit die andern leben können. Es gibt nur diese Lösung. Sie wird dem Publikum demonstriert. Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit. . . . [Die neue Dramaturgie] stellt nicht dar aus der Sicht einer Klasse. Die Helden sind Freunde. Sie haben entsprechend ihrer politischen und sozialen Stellung, unterschiedliche Interessen. Der Kampf muß nicht tödlich sein. Alle sollen menschlicher leben. Es gibt keine "Lösung." Sie muß dem Publikum mit überlassen werden. Es bedarf umfassenden Wissens über den Bau der Gesellschaft (EG 19-20).

For his contemporary portrayals, Braun placed socialist life on center stage, drawing audience attention to the dichotomy between theory and practice. Whereas the antagonisms in Brecht's plays arose out of class conflict, Braun situated his portrayal of ambiguities in the antagonisms between society's leaders and its citizens:

Der aufwühlendste Widerspruch zwischen den Leuten, die in die sozialistischen Revolutionen verwickelt sind,

ist der neuartige zwischen den politisch *Führenden* (die bewußt die Umgestaltung der Gesellschaft organisieren oder bewußt oder unbewußt hemmen) und den *Ge-führten* (die bewußt oder unbewußt die Pläne realisieren oder kritisieren) [EG 19-20].²

This point of view corroborates the criticism of hierarchical power structures that Braun incorporated in both *T.* and *Lenins Tod*. We can argue that Braun's theatrical works at this time thereby reflected his own political-ideological program.

In keeping with the Brechtian tradition, Braun endorsed the theater as a vehicle to promote change. In adhering to Brecht's theories, he simultaneously critiqued Schiller's essay, "Die Schaubühne als moralische Anstalt betrachtet":

Diese *Gerichtsbarkeit der Bühne* beginnt altmodisch zu werden. Die Bühne hat nicht mehr Urteile zu sprechen, sondern Veränderungen vorzubereiten. Sie hat nicht mehr Moral abzuliefern, sondern Moralisieren auszutreiben. Sie hat nicht mehr Ergriffenheit zu lehren, sondern Ergreifen der Möglichkeiten (EG 46).³

Braun envisioned a theater with broadened horizons and expanded goals: a theater that would forsake its function as a mirror of society in order to make social criticism possible. In each of the four worker plays Braun critiqued the role of the individual in industry, implicitly criticizing the socialized construction of industrial relationships.⁴

Three forms of intertextual reference predominate in the plays to be discussed here: the dependence on Brechtian distancing techniques (*Verfremdungseffekte*), the reception of Büchner and Shakespeare, and the reliance on images of *den neuen*

Menschen.⁵ Although expressionism per se had no place in the development of heritage in the GDR, *der neue Mensch* was an important concept for understanding the evolution of the socialist personality. As early as 1948, Party leaders had recognized that in order to create a new society, one that was based on anti-fascist humanism, improvements had to come from within society. Cultural policy stipulated the need for the education of the people to “neuen Menschen”; those who created culture, such as the writers were to play a major role in raising consciousness.⁶ Additional literary references in these works can be found in the relationship between Braun’s protagonists and well-known literary figures (Paul Bauch -- Karl Moor; Hinze -- Faust; Kunze -- Mephistopheles; Tinka -- Hamlet; and Schmitten -- Woyzeck), a technique that made the intertextual bonds readily apparent to any audience. Delayed publication and performance contributed to Braun’s employment of the intratextual technique of revision. Each play required numerous modifications before it successfully reached the public sphere. On a deeper level, however, the astute reader will note that each successive protagonist displays affinities with preceding ones. Thus, the thematic connection of the plays within production becomes further solidified within the individual protagonists. After close examination, we will find that Braun revised and refined the characteristics of the protagonist within the successive progression of the plays.

Die Kipper

Braun wrote his first dramatic work, *Die Kipper*, between 1962 and 1965. The original version, *Der totale Mensch*, was neither published nor performed; a second, *Kipper Paul Bauch* was first published in *Forum* (18/1966), the newspaper of the Free German Youth (FDJ), but never performed. Indeed, its publication

prompted so much controversy, that the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Rudolf Bahro, was forced to relinquish his post. After an additional revision the play was published in *Sinn und Form* (1/1972) and performed in March 1972 at the Leipziger Schauspielhaus.⁷

A prologue (*Vorspruch*) introduces the play, urging a comparison with Brecht:

Dieses Stück zeigt ein Jahr im Leben des ungelernten Arbeiters Paul Bauch, der die Möglichkeiten, die ihm die Gesellschaft bot, schwach genutzt hatte. Die Zeit ist nach der großen Vergesellschaftung der Maschinen, als die dünnen Zeitungen sich füllten mit den Ansprüchen der Menschen auf Entfaltung ihrer Organe. Paul Bauch entdeckt, daß er außer dem Arm, den er für die Produktion benötigt, noch einen zweiten hat, außerdem zwei Beine und, eigentlich, einen Kopf. Ohne die Arbeit zu wechseln, auch ohne sie zu verändern, verwendet er plötzlich seinen ganzen Körper auf sie. Das lenkt das Interesse der Leitung auf ihn, die neue, wenn auch unvollkommene, Methoden entwickelt. Er verbreitet eine Art Sport, die Neigung zu eigener Leistung, bleibt aber abgeschlagen zurück, als er nach ersten Gewinnen blind scheint für einige Zusammenhänge außerhalb seiner Haut. Dieser harte Vorgang, notdürftig beschönigt, wird vorgeführt als Versuch einiger Haltungen, als eine Probe für andre Kämpfe der neuen Zeit.⁸

This prologue details both Bauch's initial success as well as his ultimate failure. Because the audience is already aware of the play's outcome, it can focus its attention on the conflict between the individual and society. This opposition takes the form of an

egoist's dissatisfaction with the current methods of production. Paul Bauch thinks only of himself and personal gain and cannot comprehend the effect his actions will have on society.

At first, Bauch sees only futility in his work, which requires that he use one arm to move a lever: "dastehn und drei Hebel hoch, feste, so! Strafarbeit für Hilfsschüler zur Erklärung einer uralten Erfindung: des Hebbels" (113). For Bauch, the essence of life should be "schön", the justification he uses for his inability to remain at one job site very long. Instead of abandoning this position, however, he names himself leader of the brigade and announces his plan: "Jetzt beginnt--das schöne Leben! Alles ist gut. Die neue Zeit beginnt für uns! Alles wird schön!" (117).

Ultimately, Bauch's quest for power is granted by the company hierarchy. Dissatisfied that productivity levels do not correspond to the prescribed quota resulting in the inability to fulfill the corresponding economic plan, company officials nominate Bauch as brigadier, merely because he demonstrated the courage to voice his opinion. He alleges that low productivity stems from boredom and a lack of demands: "Das ist das langweiligste Land der Erde.--Das ist der dümmste Betriebsleiter der Erde. Reicht das?--Euch müßte man absetzen. Euch fällt ja nichts ein! Ihr verlangt ja nichts! Überflüssig" (126). Bauch immediately introduces changes, believing that the work must be satisfying to the laborers in order for them to toil more productively.

As the first modification, Bauch raises the production quota to 20,000 cubic meters. The workers, certain that this is an impossible goal, balk at the suggestion. But Bauch describes it as a type of sport; the fun of competition spurs their success. Ultimately, Bauch's plan backfires when the Party Secretary orders a new quota set at 20,000 cubic meters. Because he is

unable to grasp economic concepts, Bauch cannot comprehend the importance of goals and planning. He prefers to allow the workers' caprice to set production levels:

BAUCH: Wir fahren 21, wenn alles drin ist. Oder 18, wenn wir keine Lust haben. Der Plan engt doch die Leute ein--20 000, wenn vielleicht 24 möglich sind!

HERBST: Ohne Plan geht es nicht. Es muß doch ein Ziel sein, das man errechnet, daß man weiß, wofür man was tut!

BAUCH: Ein Plan.--Den muß man selber wollen! (150-151).

In an effort to increase productivity further, Bauch neglects safety issues, ordering the workers to start dumping before the trains have come to a complete stop. At this point, Bauch's friend Kont is injured, Bauch is relieved of his duties as brigadier and sent to jail. After his release, he recognizes that there is nothing more he can do with this brigade and decides to leave.

Bauch's initial success grew out of his understanding of the essence of labor: workers must produce for themselves; regulations handed down from authorities only prompt indifference. Bauch's willingness to seize opportunity qualifies him as *ein neuer Mensch*: "der neue Mensch, von dem immer die Rede ist, kommt nicht aus neuen Verhältnissen sondern aus den alten--indem er sie ändert" (164). Bauch attempted to change old ideas of production.

Eventually the company managers realize that Bauch was not responsible for the accident. But Bauch, unable to comprehend what mistakes he made, becomes resigned. A company custodian (*Werkhüter*) finds him depressed, a changed man:

WERKHÜTER: Was den [Bauch] betrifft: die Kippe ist schuld, nicht er. Sagt Gäbler. Er soll nicht mehr auf Kippe. Er soll sich qualifizieren.

BAUCH: Qualifizieren. Für die E-Lok? Oder was? -- Das wird dasselbe auf höherer Stufe, das ist Kleinkram. Da weiß ich schon vorher, daß mir das nicht gefällt, was erst kommt.--Was bin ich dann? Die Mühe, und es reicht für nicht lange. Überall irgendwas, wir lassen uns nur treiben. Ich mach, was gesagt wird (180).

Bauch rejects future training because he recognizes that his new qualifications will have no effect on the organization of authority in production. He addresses the quintessential difference between management and workers, that management makes decisions that affect production without considering the consequences. This is a problem inherent in all hierarchical work structures, but one that nevertheless contradicts the GDR's self-definition as the workers' and farmers' state. This scene concludes with Bauch's vision of the future: technology, cybernetics, will take over the menial tasks of the laborers.

Before Braun's play was actually performed it provoked much criticism. Paul Verner argued in 1966, for example, that the play did not depict socialist reality in the GDR.⁹ In 1967, Wilfried Adling took particular exception to Braun's emphasis on the actions of one individual, arguing that Bauch's plan to change the quota and working conditions would subject new technological advancement to the whim of voluntary actions.¹⁰ Adling also took issue with Braun's perception of socialist life, commenting: "Nicht Brauns Charakterisierungskraft und Sprachbeherrschung, nicht sein dramatisches Talent stehen in Frage, wohl aber sein Menschenbild und sein produktives Verhältnis zu unserem sozialistischen Leben."¹¹

As his first play, this dramatic text does not speak with a strong authorial voice, but contains a wealth of literary references instead. This multiplicity of voices indicates indecision on Braun's part. The most obvious reference is the search for "dem neuen Menschen," reminiscent of plays from the Expressionist period. While various critics have noted similarities to Schiller, Büchner, Brecht, and Heiner Müller, I will concentrate on Schiller and Brecht as representative samples of Braun's intertextuality.¹²

Braun himself has equated the character of Bauch with Schiller's Karl Moor: "Der Kipper Bauch erscheint mir wie eine Kreuzung aus dem Räuber Moor und dem Marquis Posa--einer Kreuzung, wie wir sie tatsächlich an mancher Straßenkreuzung der Großbaustellen antrafen in einer Gesellschaft, die viel auf ihre Fahnen geschrieben hat, aber streckenweise durch Sand mußte" (EG 132). Heinz Czechowski has also argued that Schiller's *Die Räuber* served as a literary model for *Die Kipper*, positing, that Braun adapted Schiller's motif in order to make the context and tradition of his message clear to the audience.¹³ Although some similarities do exist, I find that viewing Paul Bauch as a modern day Karl Moor is overstated. Particularly when viewing the diverse sociological backgrounds of the protagonists, we find that their individual motives for action do not correlate. A certain commonality is however apparent in the driving force for their behavior, for in both plays activism emerges from the protagonist's desire to change his own being and to a larger extent the world. Because Karl Moor believed that his father had disowned him, he rejected bourgeois life and became a bandit. Later, Karl underwent a positive change of heart when he learned that his brother Franz was responsible for his banishment. Bauch's behavior is at first less extreme, because he still remained within the workers' milieu. Bauch's motive for action grew out of his life's experience: he associated production with a series of repetitive movements. Idealism, the hope for a better future, was

the impetus behind the initiative that prompted his promotion. This same idealism however, ultimately contributed to his downfall, because Bauch could not reconcile his ideals with reality. Common to both plays are protagonists who act out of their own self-interest. Braun goes beyond Schiller's drama, however, to the extent that Bauch's actions, although contributing to his own personal gain, produced a positive effect on society. Although Bauch himself could not see beyond his own personal advantage, he did successfully show the authorities that the institution of change would not harm society. Bauch's decision to leave the brigade as the play concludes indicates that Braun was unable to resolve the conflict on stage. At this point, Bauch no longer serves as a positive hero. Braun's intent, however, was not to convince his audience to quit, but rather to show the positive side of Bauch, the individual willing to take risks. His ultimate defeat resulted less from his own fault, than through the fault of society. The existing production system was unable to accommodate a man like Bauch. The play is therefore a critique of society's "system" and not of the enterprising individual. In true Brechtian tradition, Braun only presented the problem--he did not offer a solution on stage. Rather, it remains up to the audience to seek solutions to the problems in industry, to find room for other Paul Bauchs.

On the surface, we see the correlation between Braun and Brecht in the use of distancing effects. Braun's portrayal of Bauch, however, also recalls an early Brecht protagonist, Baal. In keeping with Braun's own goal of bringing Brechtian theater into the realm of socialism, Günther Deicke names the play "ein[en] sozialistisch aufgemutzte[n] Baal."¹⁴ The relationship between the two plays derives from the various portrayals of anarchy. Wilfried Adling posits that, while Brecht's *Baal* served as a polemic against the ideal of the great individual, decrying the social anarchy that Baal exhibited, Braun's play fixated on the anarchy.¹⁵ The anarchy remains, inasmuch as Bauch is unable to work within the

collective. In Adling's opinion, Braun's adaptation grew out of a misunderstanding of Brecht, because he was unable to rectify the anarchy inherent in his character.¹⁶ Yet, it is precisely this aspect of Braun's hero, his unwillingness or inability to conform, that makes him so interesting for our purposes. Whereas Brecht decried anarchy, Braun's play makes it evident that the tendency to anarchy that Baal first demonstrated, has not yet been overcome. Within the figure of Bauch, however, the anarchy question becomes clouded. In the end, Bauch is incapable of reconciling his individual self to the collective; he loses his anarchic qualities when he despairs.

Braun discounts the similarity with Brecht,¹⁷ explaining that his understanding of anarchy contradicts the assumptions of the critics: "Gegen die sanktionierte Anarchie einer schlechten Planung setzte [Bauch] die Anarchie gegenüber dem Plan."¹⁸ Rather than portraying Bauch as the initiator of anarchy, Braun's intention was to show Bauch's attempt to make anarchy productive for society. Bauch's lack of insight led to his defeat. The play's conclusion, which shows Bauch leaving the collective, must be viewed as positive in relationship to the development of the character. The decision to leave functions as a release for Bauch from the constraints of the collective. Bauch was ahead of his time: his ideas on production had pushed him forward and simultaneously held him back. His departure is also not entirely negative for the collective. Instead, part of his spirit remains with the workers: "Was er zurückläßt sind Menschen, die sich ihrer selbst bewußt geworden sind *durch* Bauchs Beispiel. Bauch und die Brigade haben in einem dialektischen Widerspiel voneinander gelernt."¹⁹

Braun's social critique lies in his view of production. This reproach is expressed strongly at the outset of the play when Bauch's friend, Joe Hilpert, comments that all work sites are the

same; the work requires manual labor and long hours: “wir . . . suchten den Ort, an dem es nur schön ist--es gibt ihn nicht. Ein Anfang gleicht dem andern wie . . . Dreck Dreck ist, es ist nirgends anders” (113). The character Joe speaks with Volker Braun’s voice. Recalling his own experience as an excavator, Braun sets the story of Paul Bauch as a metaphor for the problems with the socialist production system as it was set up in the 1950s and 1960s. In his first narrative, “Der Schlamm” (1959), Braun also characterized problems inherent in work brigades.²⁰ Like Bauch’s friend Joe, the protagonist Hans Kast speaks of the monotony in his work:

Die Schippe in den nassen Dreck gewuchtet, rausgerissen, die Arme und der Leib drehten sich leicht, der Schlamm wurde nach hinten geglitscht zur nächsten Schaufel, auf einem Häppchen Holz wurde herumgeschlagen, daß dieser Dreck endlich von der Schippe flog. Die Gummistiefel sanken in die Suppe, die Beine waren angenagelt. Erst wenn das Wasser in die Schäfte lief, wurde die Ferse hochgerissen und mit beiden Händen der Stiefel herausgezogen. Wenn es nicht ging, packte ein anderer mit an. Wieder Schaufel rein, hoch, hintergeglitscht. Rein, hoch, hinter, abgeklopft.

Die Schaufel wollte nicht in den Schlamm, und der Schlamm wollte nicht von der Schaufel. Hier wurde jede Norm zum Witz.²¹

Although the futility of their work is similar, Bauch’s extensive work experiences rob him of Kast’s youthful optimism. Because of Bauch’s maturity, we can classify him as an adult Hans Kast. Braun’s view of production is most critically expressed when the company manager states: “Der Kapitalismus, das weiß man, hemmt viele Produktivkräfte--dieser Tagebau hat nie einen

Kapitalisten gesehn, wir hemmen uns selber, das ist neu...” (123-124). In the voice of the company manager, Braun expresses the complaint that he experienced firsthand in industry, namely, that the socialist system did not allow for better productivity.

The idealism that Braun built into the character Bauch is also reminiscent of the enthusiasm and idealism of his early lyrical texts. Bauch echoes the optimism of the speaker of poems such as “Anspruch” (“Hier wird Neuland gegraben und Neuhimmel angeschnitten--/ Hier ist der Staat für Anfänger, Halbfabrikat auf Lebenszeit.”),²² but, showing a maturity not present in the poem, his optimism is no longer boundless: he has worked with many brigades and found that conditions are always similar. Problems in production are endemic to the socialist system. Bauch tries to initiate change, but when he fails he gives up. At this point the character appears to be a negative example. Braun’s aim, however, was to highlight the positive, how even one individual can help to improve society.

Hinze und Kunze

In Braun’s second play, *Hinze und Kunze*, written and revised from 1967 to 1977, the intertextual relationship to a forebear becomes increasingly less evident with each successive revision. The play serves our analysis well because of the dialogue that existed between the first version, *Hans Faust*, and Goethe’s *Faust*.

Hinze und Kunze centers on the relationship of Hinze, a worker, and Kunze, a Party functionary. The focus on two central figures lends credibility to the socialist concept of the collective, that was not apparent in *Die Kipper*. Braun presents Hinze as an

agitator, reminiscent of the active role of Paul Bauch, and his activism serves to reiterate the criticisms from *Die Kipper*. Despite the focus on two central characters, they are not portrayed as equals. Herein we note incipient criticism of hierarchical structures, reinforcing the message of *T.* and *Lenins Tod*.

The opening scene sets the tone for the relationship between the two protagonists. Immediately following World War II, Johann Hinze, noting the scarcity of technology and supplies, sees no viable reason to work. Kunze, on the other hand, sees hope in picking up the pieces (*Enttrümmerung*). Here, *Enttrümmerung* carries a double meaning: it can be interpreted both as cleaning up after the war and as removing the vestiges of capitalist systems. Hinze, on the contrary, sees the need for reforms. Because he is in dire need of Hinze's help, Kunze promises changes. The two men come to an agreement, which Kunze explains will entail:

Dich
Vergessen und an alle
Möglichen denken und nicht mehr aufhörn
Bis alles getan ist.²³

With a handshake, Hinze and Kunze seal their pact.

For this opening scene, Braun looks to the desperate situation that existed in the Eastern part of Germany after World War II. The land and factories were destroyed; the people had nothing to eat. It was a time of hopelessness and confusion for the people:

SCHMIDTCHEN: Ich habe mich fürs Vaterland
geopfert. Der zweite Frieden jetzt, mit der roten Fahne
auf den nüchternen Magen: ich traue ihm nicht. Die
Fabrik noch im Eimer, der Rest wird demontiert, aber

für Rußland, das uns aufbaun hilft, weils hier gesiegt hat . . . (175).

This critique is biting in that it relegates the GDR to the role of a puppet-state for the Soviet Union, emphasizing the importance of the Soviet Union compared with the needs of war torn Eastern Germany.

Hinze turns into an exceptional model worker: his desire for reform spurs him not only to follow Kunze's wishes, but also to excel. Hinze's actions recall those of Paul Bauch, when he as an individual excavation worker manages singlehandedly to surpass the norm. Kunze, as the representative of the Party, appears indecisive. His first reaction to Hinze's feat is to laud and reward him; later, noting dissention toward Hinze among the other workers, Kunze views Hinze's zealotry as a mistake: "Wühlen/ Ohne zu denken! Das ist Sabotage Wir müssen von vorn beginnen" (185). This ambivalence, which the audience sees from without, is coupled with derision from within. The worker figure, Schmidtchen, ridicules the structure of production, asserting that *Volkseigentum* does not really belong to the people:

SCHMIDTCHEN: Hier habe ich vor dem Krieg gearbeitet. Da haben wir um drei Pfennige gestreikt. Jetzt ist der Betrieb volkseigen, und ich verdiene keinen Pfennig mehr. . . was verdient ihr [Partei-funktionäre]? Mehr als ich. Ist eure Zeit mehr wert als meine, es ist eine Zeit, die neue Zeit. Jeder soll das Gleiche kriegen . . . (186).

While at this point, the view of the Party remains negative, Hinze, as a single worker, demonstrates that the individual can excel in society. His continuous successes result in his increasing importance. Eventually, his speeches appear in the newspaper. But,

like Paul Bauch, he is incapable of comprehending the consequences of his actions. Because of conflicting directives, workers continuously redo and undo work already completed. Chaos reigns and the imposed increase in production levels provokes a workers' strike.

Unprepared to cope with a strike, the will of the individual must give way to that of the Party. Kunze's solution to the strike is the use of force. As tanks approach the striking workers, the audience is immediately reminded of the real workers' uprising on 17 June 1953. The strike squelched, Kunze turns to Hinze anew, asking him to return to work, to repair the damage that his use of force created. At this point, Hinze is more evolved than Paul Bauch: rather than quitting like Bauch did, Hinze, having finally detected the hierarchical power structure, refuses to help Kunze unless he shares in the power: "Das reicht mir nicht, dir nachlaufen/ Wie ein Hund" (207).

Hinze's success in work is only possible through personal sacrifice. At the outset, Hinze informs his wife, Marlies, that he must leave and instructs her to await his return. Three years pass before he encounters her again. Marlies has undergone a transformation--she is stronger and emancipated. At the time Hinze left her, she was pregnant. Rather than devote herself to a child and a missing husband, she opted to dedicate herself to work:

Es ist kein Kind gekommen, weiß ich mehr.
Hier, der Tag ist hier
Arbeit von früh bis früh, wenn ich will (192).

As Marlies develops into a model worker, she loses interest in Hinze. In a scene which foreshadows events in *Schmitten*, she teams up with Kunze to persuade other workers to learn new skills so that they can work on the next project.²⁴ Marlies continues to

sacrifice her family to her dedication to *Aufbau* and undergoes a second abortion.²⁵ At this point, Hinze is distraught and cannot comprehend what has happened with his life. At the end he proclaims: “Ich muß von vorn beginnen” (222) and leaves together with Kunze. Kunze offers him his hand, but Hinze shoves his hands in his pockets, a signal that he refuses to enter into a new pact with Kunze, because he does not want to make the same mistake again. This digresses from the terms of the pact in the play’s second version, in which Hinze and Kunze vowed to remain together as long as they are dissatisfied. Hinze’s refusal to once again shake hands with Kunze signals the dissolution of their pact.

Braun is more programmatic in this play than in *Die Kipper*, and his picture of socialism is more solidified. Here he presents two characters who, unlike the individualist Paul Bauch, join to work for the good of the collective. The transfer of interest from the individual to the collective echoes a similar tendency from Braun’s early poetry when he changed from “I” to “we” in *Wir und nicht sie* (1970). In the figure of Hinze, Braun combined the utopian idealism and enthusiasm of Hans Kast, Paul Bauch, and the speakers in *Provokation für mich* with the insight that *Aufbau* is the duty of society. This leads to teamwork with Kunze, but teamwork is deceptive, because Kunze always maintains a leadership role. Thus, Braun pointed to the discrepancies between a leader and one who is led. In the opening scenes, Hinze thinks about the future and is even willing to leave his wife for the sake of *Aufbau*. Yet, his enthusiasm and spontaneity lead to conflicts, because he does too much. Braun portrays Kunze as a Party puppet. His actions in the beginning are often rash, as he struggles to come to terms with his power.

An analysis of the three versions of the play demonstrates the existence of a dialogue. While, each play is a different reception of the Faust myth, Goethe’s influence becomes less apparent with

each revision. The title of the first version, *Hans Faust*, immediately leads to comparisons with Goethe's *Faust*, the most obvious of which is the characterization of Hans Faust (Hinze) as Faust, Kunze as Mephistopheles, and Marlies as Gretchen. The individual, Hans Faust, becomes a representative of society. In this way Braun is able to correlate the stages of social development within the GDR with the various phases of development in Goethe's individual.²⁶ Braun therefore employs the historical Faust as the backdrop for his creation of a basic socialist version of the *Faust*-material.

In the second (1975) version of *Hinze und Kunze*, the direct reference to *Faust* by name is removed. The dependence on Goethe's work is still obvious to the audience through a prologue that is both metrically and thematically reminiscent of Goethe, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Sie sehen hier den gewagten Fall
Zweier gewöhnlicher Leute, die sich in all
Den Härten der langsamen Revolution
Verbinden, als sei das üblich schon.
*Hinze, Kunze.*²⁷

In this case we see Braun employing not only Goethe's themes, but he also reverts to 19th century rhetorical measures, composing the prologue in *Knittelvers*. Additionally, Braun uses the prologue to tell the story of the play, combining 19th century rhetoric with Brecht's distancing techniques. In numerous scenes Braun replays elements of Goethe's original: the Faust-figure seals a pact with the Mephistopheles-figure, who comes from the "Hölle" (166), a descriptor for the concentration camp; a scene where apprentices carry dynamite recalls "Auerbachs Keller"; when Hinze reports for his studies, Goethe's "Schülerszene" is implied.²⁸

Although the ties to Goethe's *Faust* become increasingly blurred with each revision, we can argue that Braun sets Goethe's *Faust* within a socialist context. Braun most glaringly breaks with the Classical tradition in the final version in two instances. As did Goethe's original, Braun also discusses the "Gretchenfrage." During a confrontation with the workers, Marlies accuses Hinze of ignoring democracy:

MARLIES: Du hältst scheints nicht sehr viel von Demokratie....

HINZE: Bin ich nicht da und sorg für meine Leute?

MARLIES: Du sorgst für sie--wie schön. Und brauchst du sie?

HINZE: Die Gretchenfrage. Ja, ich brauch sie.

Aber ich fang bei mir an, das muß jeder.

Ein Kollektiv warn wir schon immer:

Eins von Nichtsen.

Ha, zufrieden wollt ich werden. Ich kann zufrieden sein, weil ich mich nicht zufrieden geben muß (195-6).

When Marlies implies that Hinze needs the workers but does not ask them for their help or input, she brings the biggest contradiction of GDR society to light. Going a step further than Paul Bauch, who only wanted work to be "schön", Hinze now speaks of "zufrieden sein". As Hinze became more successful, his position in society also changed: he began to assume positions of power [although Kunze always remained above him]. Through the relationship between Kunze and Hinze [and later Hinze and other workers], Braun shows that the relationship between the Party and the workers is not democratically organized. The token equality between Hinze and Kunze represents an end to the class struggle. For Braun, "Diese letzte, proletarische Grundversion ist das Ende der Faust-Tragödien."²⁹ In as much as Braun's drama omits the need for divine intervention and portrays Hinze and Kunze

(worker and Party) as equals, the class structure keeping the Faust myth alive is thereby dissolved.

The conclusion of the final version, in which Hinze refuses to continue the pact by not accepting Kunze's outstretched hand, represents the ultimate break with the *Faust* tradition and negates the optimism of the earlier versions. In the first version, Hans Faust, in keeping with Goethe's model, dies. This means that the status quo remains--no change occurs in the power relationship between the people and the Party. In the second version, the pact continues when Hinze vows to begin again. This indicates that Hinze has not yet recognized the flaws in the system; he is willing to make the same mistakes again. Karl Heinz Schmidt, referring to the 1973 production in Karl-Marx-Stadt, reported that Braun wanted to portray objectively the contradictions of the production system. This was the reason for the open ending, for Hinze beginning anew, yet, Braun did not present the audience with any viable solution for conquering these contradictions.³⁰ Hinze's willingness to sacrifice his personal life for the sake of *Aufbau* thereby makes him a positive hero for the audience. Braun, however, rejects this positive illusion through the portrayal of inconsistencies within the system. When Hinze refuses Kunze's handshake in the final version, he is actually rejecting the imposition of the Party structure on the people.

Braun would later sharpen the criticism of hierarchical structures in the poems in *Training des aufrechten Gangs* (1979) and the play *Großer Frieden* (1976). In the poem, "Die Stufen", Braun addressed the topic of oppression and openly characterized his socialist society as one based on inequality:

Aber der Boden, eigen schon und fremd noch
Ist abgestuft wie eine Himmelsleiter
Oder Kellertreppe, Mensch und Mensch

Einen Kopf kürzer oder länger, wie sein Amt ihn
Hebt oder staucht. Sein Amt ist seine Arbeit
Die eine reißt den Plan auf das Papier
Die andre frißt und mach sich keinen Kopf drum:
Die eine hat ihn . . .³¹

Braun continued this criticism in the poem “Machu Picchu”:

. . . Wie gewöhnlich
Kein Diskutieren an der Basis, nur
Berichte aufwärts . . .³²

Using the analogy of a military chain of command during war, Braun presented the Party leaders of the GDR as self-serving officials who paid no attention to the actual people of the GDR (*Basis*).

The most significant difference between Goethe’s Classical play and Volker Braun’s revision is that Goethe’s Faust is an individual, whereas Braun’s Hinze functions as a member of the collective, striving to work with other members for the good of the community. Here, the meaning of Braun’s statement “Literatur muß ans Ende gehen” becomes clear. By attempting to write the final version of Faust, Braun wanted to continue the story where Goethe’s version ends. Societal contradictions, however, prove so daunting that a utopian (Goetheian?) ideal could not be achieved. In this instance, Braun had gone beyond his forbear, Goethe, insofar as his appropriation of Goethe’s material demonstrated a distinct socialist perspective. In other words, Braun followed the advice he had offered in “Die Goethepächter”: he replaced Goethe’s emphasis on the individual with an emphasis on the importance of the collective.³³ This lends the play a more contemporary actuality. The critical aspect of the play lies in Hinze’s final rejection of Kunze’s plan; this is Braun’s suggestion

that there are different possibilities for socialism. This critique of socialism as it existed in the GDR presumably was reason for the controversy surrounding the drama. Braun saw the problem as inherent in the work itself:

Die Schwierigkeiten des *Hinze und Kunze* hingen damit zusammen, daß die Umkehrung zunächst nicht konsequent genug durchgeführt wurde. Es ist ja keine Umkehrung nur in dramaturgischer, sondern in gesellschaftlicher Hinsicht, sie bedarf der alten Handlungsmomente nicht, oder wenn, dann nur als Zitat, als heitere Erinnerung (EG 124).

Yet, Braun concretely pointed out the inefficiencies in the socialist production system. Unlike Paul Bauch, Hinze wanted to change society. But while Bauch ignored the economics of his proposed changes, both Hinze and Kunze lost sight of the human costs: the people became objects of their society, sacrificing their lives (or their children) for the sake of socialism.

Tinka

As we examine these plays we note that Volker Braun himself undergoes a progressive development. Beginning with the individualist Paul Bauch, Braun then turned to the idea of the collective symbolized by Hinze and Kunze. Braun, however, noted that there were weaknesses in his character portrayals:

Meine elende Schwäche ist den Helden meiner bisherigen Stücke beinahe zum Charakter geworden. Der Kipper Bauch, der mit seinen Ansprachen an Dreck und Himmel aufbricht in die Illusion der schönen Ar-

beit, und schlimm auf den Boden geholt wird. Der Maurer Hinze, der auf dem Trümmerberg "gleich alles ändern" will, und der Schlosser (und Funktionär) Kunze, der ihm mit bitterem Spott alles zu nichts macht, damit er wieder "gut verzweifelt" ist und brauchbar. Das sind alles Provokateure, also doch sehr bedenkliche Leute. Immerhin, daß ich mit meiner Misere noch spielerisch umgeh, beruhigt mich etwas. Aber ich werde jetzt sehr roh mit mir umgehen müssen (EG 42).

Braun does indeed create a stronger character in the protagonist from *Tinka*. This third worker play depicts not only the work place, but expands to include portrayals of social relationships.

The play begins with the foreman's death, caused, according to the technical manager, Brenner, by his inability to accept the fact that the proposed plan for automation was inappropriate. The protagonist, Tinka, arrives to learn that her training as an expert in automation was in vain. Governing authorities had cancelled the plan to implement new technologies. Through the Party Secretary, Ludwig, Braun expresses his criticism of the system: "Zwei Schritte vor, einen zurück gehts seit dem Oktober, wir vollziehn selbst das nach, was Lenin kritisierte, um seiner Kritik auch bei uns rechtzugeben, damit er aktuell bleibt."³⁴ The reference to Lenin demonstrates that Braun had not abandoned the critiques he began in *T.* and *Lenins Tod*. Here, the audience should contemplate to what extent progress had occurred since the October Revolution.

Although Tinka is aware that the decision was reached by higher authorities, she argues that said authorities do not understand the work process. As in *Hinze und Kunze*, Braun addresses the problem of hierarchy: in *Tinka*, however, his criticisms are

more direct. In *Hinze und Kunze* Braun merely portrayed hierarchical structures without commentary. The audience had to deduce that these structures were the cause of their problems. Echoing the sentiments of Paul Bauch, Tinka proposes to dissolve the leadership since workers and management are supposed to be equal:

Was heißt auch gleiches Interesse. Da müßten wir gleichstehn.

Ludwig lächelt.

Als Arbeiter und Leiter. Denn die Betriebe gehören zwar allen-- . . . aber nicht alle können gleich drin bestimmen . . . Den Drehern muß mehr dran liegen als den Direktoren, diese Verhältnisse zu ändern. Denk ich zum Beispiel. Sie haben ein größres Interesse . . . Lös die Leitung auf (162-163).³⁵

In this scene, Tinka articulates the disparities in power. The directors, the authorities above, are those who decide the future of production. But they do this without consulting the workers whose lives the decisions affect. This attitude mirrors that which Marlies referred to as the Gretchen-question in *Hinze und Kunze*. Tinka carries this one step further, demanding a meeting between the authorities and the workers, going so far as to assemble the workers in the new work bay for a meeting with the foreman, Dunkert.

The authorities interpret Tinka's actions as interference and she is removed from her position. Unable to reconcile her beliefs with management's actions, Tinka accepts a position at another factory. There, she discovers a new type of work atmosphere: the factory, which is about to institute a cooperative program with the Soviet Union, overcomes cultural differences and an air of cooperation ensues.

The struggle between Tinka and various authorities also affects her personal life. At the start of the play she is involved with Brenner, the technical manager at the factory. Braun portrays Tinka as uncomprehending and unwilling to accept the change in plan. She thinks about the good of the workers and the good of the factory. Brenner, on the other hand, appears to Tinka as receptive to the change in plans. In actuality, Brenner only acquiesces for the moment, in hopes that the plan for automation will be put in force at a later date. Tinka interprets Brenner's passivity as indifference. Unbeknownst to Tinka, however, Brenner takes initiative and with Ludwig's help, writes a letter in Party jargon to the appropriate ministry, encouraging officials to implement the new technology.³⁶ Their differing viewpoints force Tinka and Brenner apart. Brenner sacrifices his relationship with Tinka and decides to marry Karin. When Tinka appears at the eve-of-the-wedding party, she creates a scene, forcing Brenner to admit his love for her. After Karin leaves the celebration, Tinka accuses Brenner of cowardice--he cannot trust himself enough to believe that Tinka loves him. The play ends tragically: Brenner murders Tinka by hitting her over the head with a beer bottle. In a footnote, Braun indicates that this conclusion should only be staged if other alternatives cannot be worked out and offers two substitute endings:

1. Brenner nimmt, nach Tinkas letztem Wort, mit verzerrem Gesicht ihre Hand, zieht die Erstarrte in die Mitte (an die Hochzeitstafel), sitzen eisig nebeneinander. Die Feier geht fort.

2. Brenner will mit der Bierflasche zuschlagen, Hempel reißt ihn zurück. Tinka wird gewaltsam aus dem Hof geschafft, Karin, noch immer kreischend, zurück-

gebracht, Brenner hält sie benommen. Die Feier geht fort.³⁷

These alternative endings were never performed. The ultimate conflict of individual versus society remains unresolved and Tinka's question: "Was machen wir aus uns, um was zu machen?" (148) remains unanswered. The play's tragic ending is symbolic for GDR society in general. Since society was not able to overcome its contradictions, the tragic conclusion was the one which was performed in both East and West. In an interesting parallel, Braun begins and ends his play with the death of characters unable to come to terms with the contradictions in their society.

The premise of the play is based on an historical event. As Urs Allemann has pointed out, the basis for the play was the SED's decision in 1971 to repeal its program for automation in 80 large companies.³⁸ We can assume that this is the reason that the performance of *Tinka* (written 1972/73) in Karl-Marx-Stadt was beset with problems. The original debut in Magdeburg was also stopped. Then in 1975, the Deutsches Theater in Berlin had to interrupt its plans. During rehearsals, the play was removed from the schedule for the Deutsches Theater. Braun has acknowledged that the play posed some problems that had not been resolved, but which could have been eliminated before the performance by working with the theater collective. In his notes, Braun recorded how he was informed of the decision to cancel the performance:

Aber, liebe Kollegen, in unserm Fall bestimmen nicht wir, was hier wird: denn wir sind zwar bereit zu reden und Kompromisse zu machen, doch das können wir nicht mehr, nachdem die Leitung des Hauses ihr Mißtrauen ausgesprochen hat. Ich muß das präzisieren: mit Oberspielleiter Schönemann und Chefdramaturg Stolper war noch ein Übereinkommen greifbar, aber der

Intendant hat mir am 6. Februar--und, wie er bestätigte, als seine einzelne Meinung--mitgeteilt, daß die Probleme, die er sieht, nicht in unserm Arbeitsprozeß geklärt werden können und er als Einzelleiter die Weiterführung der Proben nicht verantwortet. Es ist also jedes Wort in der Sache überflüssig.³⁹

The conflict between Braun and the theater mirrors the problems that he depicted in *Tinka*. This real-life experience also mimics a literary scene Braun had written earlier. The theater manager's attitude and reasons for cancelling production recalls a similar episode in the Kast narrative, "Die Bühne," in which the protagonist, Kast, had problems achieving the performance of his own play. In a confrontation with the theater manager (*Intendant*), Kast is asked if he is aware of current events (Prague Spring, 1968); Kast's affirmation prompts the manager's demand for changes:

. . . "sonst wird das nicht herauskommen." "Aber" sagte ich [Kast], "das liegt ein Jahr da. Wir haben jeden Satz besprochen."--"Sie werden verstehen" sagte er [der Intendant], "wir müssen das tun! Wir müssen alles weglassen was auch nur entfernt--was an Ereignisse erinnert, die . . . Wir wissen nicht, wer vor uns sitzt im Zuschauerraum!" . . . Der Intendant las eine Liste herunter, die er auf einen Zettel gekritzelt hatte, einiges betraf nur Sätze, das meiste die Hindernisse und Härten bei den Taten der Figuren. Wir sollten in ihr "Leben" eingreifen. (Aber mir war, als sollten wir ihnen die Arme abhacken.) Er stand wieder auf: "Sie müssen es den Schauspielern als Ihren Vorschlag mitteilen!"--"Nein. Dann möchte ich schon, daß wir es mit ihnen besprechen, daß wir sie hinzuziehen, wenn es um ihre Rollen geht."--"Schweigen Sie, Genosse" rief der In-

tendant, in heftigster Erregung, "ich habe keine Angst, daß man mir . . . daß man mich--Ich diskutiere hier nicht. In meinem Haus bestimme ich!"⁴⁰

On the day before *Tinka's* scheduled debut in Karl-Marx-Stadt the theater caught fire. The performance finally occurred later in a smaller theater in Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1976.

Although Braun depicts two levels in the play, social and industrial, the actual focus is not so much the relationship between Brenner and Tinka as the decision to delay automation itself, a decision that Braun implicitly portrays as necessary and correct. The play thereby concentrates on the characters' efforts to come to terms with the decision, particularly the problem of utilizing previous investments such as the new work bay and the workers' training. The problem then becomes the question of underachievement and the lack of demands placed on the workers.⁴¹ This is precisely what Tinka cannot comprehend and it is the reason for her repeated insistence that the workers advance in their training. Her inability to reconcile herself with things as they are, coupled with her unwillingness to understand Brenner's actions, make her death inevitable. Her attempt at self-definition was paired with her relationship to Brenner. His assessment of her behavior: "Sie ist politisch unreif" (176), calls Tinka's own view of herself into question. Braun designed the tragic ending to provoke contemplation: "Durch ihren Tod lebt Tinka eigentlich erst weiter. Denn der extreme, dramatisch zugespitzte Schluß verunsichert den Zuschauer, und er kann nicht schon wieder beruhigt nach Hause gehen."⁴²

While the unexpected ending clearly illustrates Braun's didactic intentions, a prologue also reveals his desire to write a didactic work:

Das gute Ende, nehmen wirs nur vorweg:
Das zeigt nicht das Spiel, aber es ist sein Zweck.⁴³

Although Braun had proposed two alternative endings, the tragic ending was necessary to depict the contradictions in GDR society realistically. A positive, *good* conclusion would not serve to educate the audience. Braun's epilogue, in which Tinka steps out of her role and addresses the audience directly, further highlights his didactic goal:

Auf Wunsch unserer klugen Intendanz
Sehn Sie mich noch mal heil und ganz
Denn ich selber glaub: meine Sache muß
Nicht immer enden mit diesem Schluß
... So kommt es, daß neben dem allgemeinen Sieg
Ich Schöne, Sie sahns, am Boden lieg.
Sie sahn den Kampf und seinen Preis.
Und was Sie nun wissen, macht mich nicht wieder heiß.
Am Ende ahnt man, was man beginnen muß
Fangen Sie an! bei mir ist Schluß.⁴⁴

For the most part, Braun depicts societal paralysis and resistance to progress. This epilogue indicates that Braun could not resolve the contradictions on stage. Death interrupts Tinka's search for a solution. In Brechtian fashion, Braun presents contradictions to his audience, but does not offer a viable solution. He urges his audience to think about the inconsistencies portrayed on the stage and contemplate possible solutions after they leave the theater.

The social level of the play is important because it underscores the extent to which Party decisions affected GDR citizens personally. Male-female relationships within the socialist system form an interesting subplot. Christine Cosentino, for example, saw the conflict between individual and society as

representative of the conflict between women and patriarchal society, or as she put it: "die Wirkung der neuen gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Frau auf den Mann."⁴⁵ Tinka's strong character and willingness to express her opinions pose a threat to male-dominated society. Indeed, Tinka's willingness to act on her beliefs only makes her more threatening. Ludwig blames Tinka's strength on the movement toward women's emancipation. Tinka's studies have allowed her to advance too far: "Das ist die Emanzipation: sie macht sich von sich selbst frei. Die Frauen bauen sich nach dem Bild des Manns um, statt was aus sich zu machen" (151). But ambivalent emotions plague Tinka: she has problems reconciling her position of authority in the factory with her personal life.

Rather than conducting a dialogue with a literary forebear, Braun engages in a dialogue with himself, filling this play with intratextual coding. The plot portrayal in *Tinka* is similar to that of the narrative *Unvollendete Geschichte* (1975), which relates the story of Karin, the daughter of dedicated Party members, and Frank, a young man, who previously had problems with the police. Frank is falsely accused of planning to leave the GDR (*Republikflucht*), and Karin's family attempts to end their relationship. In both works, Braun presented the schism between the political and the personal as it manifested itself in the GDR quotidian. Society's demands stipulate that Tinka and Brenner cannot be happy together. Because they cannot reconcile their utopian ideals and theories with reality, they are destined to fail. This social basis of *Tinka* may be seen as one reason for Braun's interest in the material for *Unvollendete Geschichte*.

There is also a strong connection between *Tinka* and *Die Kipper*. In *Tinka*, Braun continues his preoccupation with working relationships and the conflict between the individual and society. Tinka is a stronger character than Paul Bauch. Bauch, an egoist, only wanted to solve his problem (boredom and feelings of

uselessness), while Tinka was a member of the collective and wanted to work for the good of society. In *Tinka*, Braun confronts his audience with a society that is more technologically advanced than that of Paul Bauch's time. Bauch could only imagine efficient production with the aid of cybernetics, but he realized that it was not yet time for such an advanced technology. Tinka actually studied to aid in the implementation of automation. Karl Heinz Schmidt argued that in *Tinka* Braun was able to revise his themes from earlier works making them more productive.⁴⁶ Indeed, Braun incorporates elements of *Hinze und Kunze* as well as *Die Kipper* into *Tinka*. The problems of the couple, Tinka and Brenner, is a further manifestation of the conflict between Marlies and Hinze portrayed in the earlier work. In this instance, however, Braun shows us another side of society--the problems that arise when a man and a woman cannot come to terms with the contradiction between theory and practice.

The East German scholars Eva and Hans Kaufmann proposed that Braun turned to an unusual forebear (for GDR literature) as his source for his character portrayals, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They note similarities in both the plot and character configurations: the main character's return from studies at a time when a new leader is replacing an old one; the play within a play produced through disguise (*Verkleidung*), which Tinka employed to confront the company managers with their inconsistencies; the protagonist's banishment and unexpected return; a foolish-philosophical conversation (Tinka at the eve-of-the-wedding party, Hamlet in the cemetery); as well as similarities between minor characters [Helga as Horatio figure; Windelmann and Kahlfeld as Rosenkranz and Guildenstern].⁴⁷ The reference to Shakespeare is not unusual. In a speech in Klagenfurt (1973) Braun referred to the possibility of Shakespeare's realism for the socialist stage: "das Neue beim Shakespeare [ist] gleichsam über eine ästhetische Brücke mit Altem verbunden, die alte Konvention mit einem

neuen Realismus" (EG 133). As was the case with Braun's adaptations of Brecht and Goethe, a pure adaptation of Shakespeare could not portray GDR societal conflicts because Shakespeare's theatrical work portrayed conflicts inherent in a society based on class antagonisms. In other words, Braun used the *Hamlet*-story to portray similar conflicts from a socialist perspective. Although the use of Shakespeare might at first seem radical for the GDR understanding of heritage, we need to keep Shakespeare's place in the history of German literature in mind. Particularly during the *Sturm und Drang* period, Shakespeare's dramaturgy proved important for the development of German drama, especially Goethe's *Gotz*.

Schmitten

Just as the other worker plays show similarities to each other, so is the final worker play, *Schmitten* (1978), closely related to *Tinka*. Jutta Schmitten, the protagonist, plays an oppositional character, an egoist much like Paul Bauch. Whereas Tinka was willing to study to keep up with technological improvements in production, Jutta Schmitten, willing to persuade her co-workers to agree to training, refuses to promote herself, claiming: "Dazu bin ich zu dumm."⁴⁸ While the other worker plays were rather straightforward in their structure and portrayals, Braun's dramaturgy here becomes more interesting. Throughout the play, Braun interweaves dream-like sequences with the real action of the play; these unreal scenes function as foreshadowings for events yet to occur.

Jutta Schmitten is an uneducated woman, who achieved the status of *Meister* because of her rapport with her co-workers and because of a romantic relationship with her boss. Jutta is intel-

lectually underdeveloped and unable to view herself as an agent. In one scene, Jutta agrees to star in a company commercial encouraging other workers to sign their contracts for their further education. She allows the *Kaderleiterin* to treat her as an object: "Jutta! du hast kein Bewußtsein, Jutta. Bewußtsein, das ist, wenn man bewußt lebt, das ist das Glück" (218). The authorities merely use her to promote their own aims and do not even consider her feelings. Ironically, although Jutta is used as a "model," she has not yet committed herself to continue her training. Other scenes reinforce this initial image: an article in *Neues Deutschland* addresses Jutta's lack of desire to improve herself, but she is unable to recognize herself within the context of the story.

The conflict between the individual and society, between private life and the work place, is most pointedly portrayed in this short drama. In *Unwirkliche Szene*, Kolb, the technical director and Jutta's lover, attempts to persuade her to go through training. Jutta counters that he, as the father of her as yet unborn child, also has responsibilities to society: "Du mußt auch etwas leisten. Auf dem privaten Sektor" (221). His refusal to accept responsibility prompts Jutta to seek revenge and the dream-like sequence culminates in Kolb's castration.

In actuality, Kolb is only interested in Jutta sexually and is ashamed to appear with her in public. He refuses to allow her to accompany him to a banquet in his honor, but appears intoxicated on her doorstep at the conclusion of the festivities. Jutta is an individual who can only realize her potential in sexual acts. In a justification of the prophesy of *Unwirkliche Szene*, Jutta and two friends coerce Kolb to perform sexually. Dissatisfied with his performance, they castrate him. Jay Rosellini sees the castration not only as a brutal outburst of fury, but also as a political ritual. The women demand sexual performance from the man who de-

mands that they qualify in their careers.⁴⁹ In the concluding scene, Jutta is in prison demanding her right to an education:

SCHMITTEN: . . . ich will was lern.

Und wenn schon Knast, dann Schule.

SCHLIEBERIN: Sagst du Schule.

Jetzt hast du Urlaub. Jetzt laß fünfe grad sein.

SCHMITTEN: Ich habe ein Recht auf Bildung laut
Verfassung (243).

In the end, Jutta opts for education, the very alternative that she initially refused. The change in attitude stems from her freedom from sexual bonds achieved through Kolb's castration. Her sexual relationship with her boss led her to believe that she was only valuable in bed.

The connections between *Tinka* and *Schmitten* constitute an interesting problem of Braun's dramaturgy at the time. He began *Schmitten* in 1968, but was unable to portray the conflict between the individual and society adequately and chose to write *Tinka* instead. In his *Arbeitsnotizen* from 2 October 1977 Braun expressed the difficulty he had in composing the two plays:

ich habe zu TINKA ein so gespanntes verhältnis, weil das ein anderes stück ist, als ich machen wollte. woran ich zunächst schrieb, war eine einfache, dumpfe, brutale geschichte. eine junge frau, ungelernt und meisterin, versagt bei der qualifizierung und verliert die achtung der kollegen, und des mannes, und ihn selbst, und sich selbst . . . unter verhältnissen ziemlicher gleichheit wird die individuelle ungleichheit zum riesenproblem.⁵⁰

The similarities between the two texts range from the role of the female protagonist to the relationship between these protagonists and the main male characters. In both plays the relationship proves to be the downfall of the women. But while Tinka's relationship ended tragically, Jutta's act of aggression actually released her from her bonds. Jutta's initial desire to do only what would benefit her mirrors Paul Bauch's egoism. For both of these characters, society played a secondary role. In *Hinze und Kunze* and *Tinka* the protagonists put their own personal advancement aside, striving for innovations which would improve society. Jutta was unwilling to place society ahead of herself. In the end, however, Jutta's decision to educate herself would prove beneficial to both her and to society. *Schmittens* is therefore the most powerful of all of the worker plays, because it is the only play that leaves the audience with the possibility that the conflict between the individual and society could be resolved.

Although not outwardly apparent, Braun did indeed choose an unusual model for the characterization of Jutta Schmittens. In his *Arbeitsnotizen* he confirmed that he turned to Büchner's *Woyzeck* for inspiration:

war WOYZECK die tragödie der materiellen armut, so spielen sich nun die unauffälligen tragödien der geistigen armut ab. es ist mir unerklärlich, wie ich diesen großen, groben stoff aus dem auge verlieren konnte. er war auch "an der reihe." . . . aber ich habe das alte stück zugunsten des neuen ausgepowert . . .⁵¹

Braun's interest in Büchner dates back to *Lenins Tod*. And, while writing the essay "Büchner's Briefe", Braun commented on the need to update the *Woyzeck*-story: "da ist ein anderer *Woyzeck* zu schreiben, ein bitterer, nicht die Tragödie der Armut: die Tragödie der Unfähigkeit. Ein härteres Elend, das nicht mehr mitleidige

Blicke will, aber womöglich helfende Hände" (VF 88). Whereas Woyzeck's misery grew out of his social circumstance--poverty, Jutta's despair is tied to her own inabilities and lack of desire and direction. Both Woyzeck and Jutta (at least initially) allow others to dictate their lives. In refusing to act for herself, Jutta allows the *Kaderleiterin* to determine what is important. Almost as if speaking to a child, the *Kaderleiterin* remarks: "Du weißt, was für dich gut ist." Even her lover, Kolb, does not know how to deal with her; he believes she is dumb and compares her to an animal: "Im Grund ein armes Tier" (230). In Büchner's drama, both the Hauptmann and the Doktor treat Woyzeck as an object. The Hauptmann thinks Woyzeck is dumb: "Er ist dumm, ganz abscheulich dumm."⁵² Because of poverty, Woyzeck must undergo various degradations--anything to make money to support Marie and his son. In this way, he allows the Doktor to determine the direction of his life. The Doktor observes Woyzeck's behavior clinically and apathetically, at times comparing it to that of an animal: "Er hat auf die Straß geißt, an die Wand geißt wie ein Hund."⁵³

Both plays examine social conditions and the role of the individual in society. Büchner's Woyzeck (following the historical case) is portrayed as mentally disturbed. Jutta Schmitten is merely dumb. In both plays, the character portraits illustrate the conflict between the individual and society as it is represented through class distinctions. For the GDR audience this point is particularly striking, because the basis of socialism is the removal of class distinctions. Braun thus implies to his audience that society has not significantly progressed since Büchner's time. As Peter Reichel suggested, Braun thereby questioned the basic principles of his socialist society: "Braun attackiert massiv ein Grundprinzip der sozialistischen Gesellschaft . . . , nämlich 'jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seiner Leistung'."⁵⁴ *Woyzeck* ends tragically with the murder of Marie. *Schmitten* also reaches a violent peak with the castration scene. Here, however, Braun

shows how he can make Büchner's message viable for the GDR. Jutta's fate is not negative. Although she must serve a prison sentence for her crime, she also takes this opportunity to improve herself. In this way, Jutta Schmitten is *not* a negative hero, but one who gives the audience hope for future possibilities. Peter Ullrich views Jutta as a prototype, who demonstrates how the individual can serve society on his/her own terms, without outside pressure to conform.⁵⁵ If we accept this interpretation then we must conclude that Braun is not criticizing socialism per se, but the manner in which authorities in the GDR attempted to bring about the fulfillment of the socialist revolution. In this regard, Peter Reichel sees Jutta as a character who bypasses socialism, striving immediately for the ultimate goal of communism: "Die Schmitten aber bleibt hinter der Realität zurück. Und indem sie zurückbleibt, macht sie den größten Schritt nach vorn: Sie landet direkt im Kommunismus! Sie verweigert sich dem Heute, weil sie heute schon so leben will, wie sie erst morgen leben kann."⁵⁶ Herein lies the positive message of the play. It is indicative of the utopian ideals that Braun himself carried at this time.

All four worker plays touch upon the conflict between the individual and society. Implicitly they also address the relationship of the people to authority and examine how Party decisions dramatically affected the individuals. Although these plays share a common theme, they do not share a common voice. Braun's literary frame of reference travels from Brecht to Goethe to Shakespeare to Büchner, while simultaneously engaging in a dialogue with his own texts. This multiplicity of references indicates Braun's indecision and represents his search for a means of expression. The original emphasis on Brecht and Goethe demonstrates initial compliance with the dictates of cultural policy. The use of Shakespeare and Büchner indicates a desire to go beyond the constraints of GDR policy. These various voices also represent the beginning of Braun's journey through literature.

At this point, the journey merely constitutes a search for an adequate means of expression.

The plays are bound thematically and demonstrate an overall positive approach by Braun. He has not yet given up hope for the evolution of society. In fact, he depicts social progress symbolically through the protagonists, who are merely a progressive evolution of Paul Bauch. Important for Braun is that his characters learn to become agents and follow their abilities:

Sie bleiben immer weniger Objekte der Geschichte, sie werden immer mehr ihr Subjekt, indem sie unaufhörlich die Frage nach ihrer Macht stellen: das ist im Sozialismus die Frage nach der Verfügungsgewalt, nach der Möglichkeit jedes einzelnen, seine Produktivität zu entwickeln und einzubringen (EG 136).

Despite the positive development that occurs in these plays, Braun has not yet found **his** voice, a searching that continues in the historical plays. In the next chapter, we find that Braun becomes more philosophical as he turns to history for both his message and his voice. Here, we will note the beginnings of Braun's exile.

Notes

¹ Braun wrote one other play, *Freunde* (1965), that depicts the story of Mink, a young construction worker and his adjustments to a new job. Unable to establish any solid relationships, he decides not to continue with the crew to the next work site. Despite the production theme, the play does not add to the discussion of Braun's use of literary reference and will therefore not be discussed here.

² Braun's emphasis.

³ Braun's emphasis.

⁴ Manufacturing processes as theme and a positive affirmation of socialism dominated GDR theatrical productions in the 1950s and 1960s. Braun's tendency toward criticism, however, did not necessarily comply with these positive ideals.

⁵ For a discussion of the importance of *der neue Mensch* for GDR theater see Ulrich Profitlich, "'Beim Menschen geht der Umbau langsamer.' Der 'neue Mensch' im Drama der DDR," *Dramatik der DDR* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1987) 297-326.

⁶ See for example Anton Ackermann in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972).

⁷ For a discussion of the controversy see Heinz Klunker, *Zeitstücke und Zeitgenossen. Gegenwartstheater in der DDR* (München: dtv, 1972) 97.

⁸ Volker Braun, *Die Kipper, Texte in zeitlicher Folge 1* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1989) 111. Further references are to this edition and noted parenthetically in the text. Some concluding remarks were omitted from this prologue. They read as follows: "Paul Bauch hat, unter wirklichem Namen, gelebt in der Gegend von Hoyerswerda. Er wurde, in den sechziger Jahren, Bergingenieur im mitteldeutschen Revier. Seinen Ton benutzend, hieß das Stück zuerst: *Der totale Mensch*." Braun, *Texte in zeitlicher Folge 1* 186. The reason for this omission is not clear. One possible justification would be the mention of the original title, which encompasses Bauch's ideal of using the entire body, hand, feet, and brain to accomplish the assigned tasks.

⁹ Quoted in Peter Sindermann, "Klarer Kopf und heißes Herz," *Theater der Zeit* 8 (1966): 9.

¹⁰ Wilfried Adling, "Gestaltung--Wirklichkeit--literarisches Vorbild. Volker Brauns 'Kipper Paul Bauch'," *Theater der Zeit* 22.2 (1967): 14.

¹¹ Adling 16.

¹² Hans-Dietrich Sander focuses on the intertextuality within the confines of the GDR, maintaining that the play also undertakes a reception of GDR drama, likening Bauch to Peter Hacks' *Mortiz Tassow*, Heiner Müller's *Barka (Bau)* and Lange's *Marski*. Hans-Dieter Sander, "Die ungezwungenen Anpassungen Volker Brauns," *Deutschland Archiv* 12 (1972): 1309.

¹³ Heinz Czechowski, "Volker Braun, 'Die Kipper'--Sprache, Stil, Struktur," *Weimarer Beiträge* 19.7 (1973): 135.

¹⁴ Günther Deicke, "Auftritt einer neueren Generation," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 20.2 (1972): 22.

¹⁵ Adling 16. Heinz Czechowski, on the other hand, praises the exemplary nature of the play which he believes derives from Braun's understanding of Brecht: "Was Volker Braun von Brecht gelernt hat: die dialektische Handlungen gesellschaftlich bedingter Verhaltensweisen, ihre Vermittlung als unstatische, prozeßhaft und mithin aufhebbar." Czechowski 131-2.

¹⁶ Adling 16.

¹⁷ Braun, "Offener Brief," *Theater der Zeit* 22.8 (1967): 14.

¹⁸ Braun, "Notiz," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 1 196.

¹⁹ Czechowski 146.

²⁰ Braun incorporated many scenes from "Der Schlamm" into *Die Kipper*, among them a scene in which a bar crowd tries to auction a motorcycle, debate among the brigades as to whether they should vie for the title of socialist brigade, and talk among the workers that they should train for other jobs, in order to keep pace with technological advances.

²¹ Braun, "Der Schlamm," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 1 10

²² Braun, "Anspruch," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 1 51.

²³ Volker Braun, *Hinze und Kunze*, *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 2 (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990) 170. Unless otherwise noted, all references are to this edition and included parenthetically in the text.

²⁴ In this related scene Schmitten stars in a company commercial in order to persuade her co-workers to pursue additional training. Ironically, Schmitten herself refuses further education.

²⁵ “Kind, warum/ Mußt du jetzt kommen. Laß dir doch Zeit./ Wir haben noch viel Zeit für uns, verstehst du. [Schweigt.] Was denke ich. Wär die Welt mir leicht/ Ohne die Last hier. Ich will dich haben” (210).

²⁶ Siegfried Hoefert, “Die Faust-Problematik in Volker Brauns *Hinze und Kunze*: Zur Erbeaneignung in der DDR,” *Zur Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft der DDR*, ed. Gerd Labrousse (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978) 154.

²⁷ Volker Braun, *Die Kipper, Hinze und Kunze, Tinka. Drei Stücke*, mit einem Nachwort von Rolf Rohmer (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1975) 75-76. The remainder of the prologue reads: “Zwei Arbeiter, beide nicht sehr beschlagen / In den gesellschaftlichen Fragen. / Hinze, ein Mann ohne besondere Aussichten. / Kunze, zu grob, um etwas auszurichten / Allerdings mit Beziehungen zur Macht / Von denen er ausgiebig Gebrauch macht. / *Kunze lacht*. Betrachten Sie jeden als Individuum / Und sehn Sie sich nicht nach der Historie um! / Jeder so einer, der allein wenig kann. / Aber zusammen stellen sie was an-- / Im Gegensatz zu diesem Kollegen: *Propeller*. Der nichts macht als sich aufzuregen. *Propeller machts*. Hinze, der sich ‘zur Verfügung stellt’ / Wird ein lokal bekannter Held / Denn er fühlt hinter sich eine Kraft / Mit der er Wunderbares schafft. / Und er nimmt, ohne viel zu fragen / Auf sich alle Genüsse und Plagen. / Worauf er, in seinem Gleichgewicht gestört / Nur noch blind auf Kunze hört-- / Bis ihm auf einmal vor sich selber graut! / Ich sehe, die Materie ist Ihnen vertraut. / All das würde noch nicht tragisch sein /

Wären die beiden mit sich allein. /Aber erstens hat Hinze eine Frau *Marlies*. Mit der er nahm es nicht genau / Und genau die macht ihm noch zu schaffen / Und wir sehen sein Herz bald

klaffen. / Weil sie nicht weniger will als er: / Leben, und zwar menschlicher. / Zweitens sind da diese vielen *Leute*.

Die nach und nach größere Rollen spielen: / Das ist es, worum es uns geht / Was sich aber nicht von selbst versteht. / Weshalb Schreckliches nicht verschwiegen sei . . . / Und drittens sind auch Sie dabei / Mit denen wir dies Spiel jetzt machen. / Wir werden sehn, ob Sie zuletzt noch lachen." The prologue is not included in the revised version, where the character Propeller becomes Schmidtchen. With the reference to familiar material, Braun makes the audience aware of the work's relationship to Goethe.

²⁸ Sigfried Hoefert also notes similarities with the "Hexenküche" and "Kerkerszene". See Hoefert 155-157.

²⁹ Volker Braun, "Notate (zu Hans Faust)," *Forum* 16 (1968). Quoted in Klaus L. Berghahn, "Den Faust-Mythos zu Ende bringen: von Volker Brauns *Hans Faust* zu *Hinze und Kunze*," *Literarische Tradition heute. Deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur in ihrem Verhältnis zur Tradition*, eds. Gerd Labrousse und Gerhard P. Knapp (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988) 300.

³⁰ Karl Heinz Schmidt, "Zur Dramaturgie des Volker Braun," *Sinn und Form* 2 (1978): 442.

³¹ Braun, *Training des aufrechten Gangs* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1979) 17.

³² *Training des aufrechten Gangs* 32.

³³ Hoefert describes *Hinze und Kunze* as "ein Beispiel sozialistischer Erbeaneignung." Hoefert 160.

³⁴ Braun, *Tinka, Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 136. All references are to this edition and indicated parenthetically.

³⁵ This quote is reminiscent of Bauch's criticisms when he states: "Euch müßte man absetzen."

³⁶ Ludwig asserts that a letter in Party idiom will delude the functionaries into thinking that the ideas expressed in the letter are actually their own: "Es muß so sein, als hätten sies selbst diktiert!"

Du mußt das schreiben--als sähst du schon ein, was sie schon wollen" (143).

³⁷ Braun, "Anmerkung," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 197.

³⁸ Urs Allemann, "Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit. Volker Brauns sozialistisches Trauerspiel *Tinka* in Karl-Marx-Stadt uraufgeführt," *Theater heute* 17.10 (1976): 33.

³⁹ Braun, "Erklärung nach dem Abbruch der *Tinka*-Proben am 7. Februar 1975," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 200.

⁴⁰ See "Die Bühne," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 3 27-28. Surprisingly enough, Braun's experience with *Tinka* occurred after he wrote the scene in the *Kast* narrative.

⁴¹ A radio broadcast described the play as representing "[die] Unterforderung der Werktätigen, wie sie heute im 'real existierenden Sozialismus' (und nicht nur dort) massenhaft auftritt--am Fließband wie im Büro, als Routinearbeit von Ingenieuren wie auch Funktionären." Andreas Roßmann, "Neue Literatur aus der DDR. Volker Brauns *Stücke*," Deutschlandfunk. Original broadcast 2 April 1984.

⁴² Quoted in Peter von Becker, "Volker Braun 'Training des aufrechten Gangs'," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 26 April 1977.

⁴³ Braun, "Prolog," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 199.

⁴⁴ Printed in the GDR edition of the play. Reprinted here in Ulrich Profitlich, "Volker Braun: *Tinka*," *Deutsche Dramen: Interpretationen zu Werken von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart. Band 2: Von Hauptmann bis Botho Strauss*, ed. Harro Müller-Michaels (Königstein: Athenäum, 1981) 198.

⁴⁵ Christine Cosentino, "Frau und Staatsbürger in Volker Brauns Schauspiel 'Tinka'," *Women and German Studies: An Interdisciplinary and Comparative Approach* (Miami University (Ohio), 1977) 114.

⁴⁶ Schmidt 444.

⁴⁷ Eva und Hans Kaufmann, *Erwartung und Angebot. Studien zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Literatur und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1976) 141.

⁴⁸ Volker Braun, *Schmittens*, *Text in zeitlicher Folge* 4 211. All references are to this edition and included parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁹ Rosellini *Volker Braun* 131.

⁵⁰ Braun, "Arbeitsnotizen," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 244.

⁵¹ Braun, "Arbeitsnotizen," 244.

⁵² Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, *Werke und Briefe* 165.

⁵³ Büchner, *Woyzeck* 167.

⁵⁴ Peter Reichel, "'Ausgepowert?' Zu Volker Brauns *Schmittens* und zur Autorenposition," *Theater der Zeit* 37.4 (1982): 64.

⁵⁵ Peter Ullrich, "*Schmittens* von Volker Braun," *Theater der Zeit* 41.9 (1986): 46. Ullrich notes that this is true not only of Jutta Schmittens but of Kolb, the *Kaderleiterin*, and the old and new *Werkleiter*.

⁵⁶ Peter Reichel, "Anmerkungen zur DDR-Dramatik seit 1980. Teil I. Funktionsproblematik und Gegenwartssujet," *Weimarer Beiträge* 29.8 (1983): 1414.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVOLUTIONS AND THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

Through his portrayals of inefficiencies in the workplace, Braun touched on the problems of hierarchy in the GDR. Within the work environment there existed a certain power structure, in which management and Party officials dictated the course of action to the workers. These worker plays were pleas to Braun's audience to recognize the inconsistencies and contradictions and work for reform. Although the conflict between the individual and society remained constant in all four plays, the manner of presentation varied. Braun's literary journey, his experimentation with intertextual models, was driven by his search for an adequate means of expression. In the next series of plays, Braun added the element of history to his intertextual techniques. Not satisfied merely to employ other authors' voices as a means of expressing his own ideas, Braun turned to historical events, examining factual instances of authority. However, Braun did not totally abandon literary models, turning to such traditional examples as Hölderlin and Schiller for influence. In order to make his message more general, he located the plays outside of the borders of the GDR. Focusing on the general trends in the establishment of hierarchical power structures, he examines why revolutions have not been successful.

In the three plays I will discuss here, *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat* (1975), *Großer Frieden* (1976), and *Dmitri* (1980),

Braun examined situations outside of the borders of the GDR. Yet, all of the situations in the plays illustrate the historical existence of power structures similar to those found in the GDR. The geographic and temporal distancing in the works signals that Braun could not adequately resolve the discrepancy between theory and practice within a GDR context. The plays' remoteness indicates that Braun was beginning to distance himself both from his audience and from GDR reality. This signals that Braun was taking the first step toward a self-imposed exile.

Coupled with this new approach to literature came a fresh historical perspective. The suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 forced Braun to reevaluate his approach to literature. As his perceptions of history altered he penned the essay "Letzte Auskunft", in which he described his new vision for the relationship between historical and current events:

Es ist notwendig, daß wir uns gegenüber der Geschichte völlig aufrichtig verhalten, nichts verschweigen, jeden Irrtum zugeben, sobald er erkannt ist, uns dem vollen Umfang der Ereignisse stellen, wenn auch der Schutt unsrer Eitelkeit sie zu bedecken droht. Wenn wir nicht mit der Geschichte leben, wird sie gegen uns leben. Statt die Geschichte im nachhinein zu korrigieren, wollen wir die Mühe verwenden, die Zukunft zu korrigieren.

Wer nicht wagt, über alles die volle Wahrheit zu sagen, hat kein Recht, Genosse zu sein. Denn seine Feigheit zeigte nur sein Mißtrauen gegenüber der Geschichte, das heißt gegenüber dem Volk (EG 65).

This new historical perspective, which called for the audience to contemplate history actively, assumed a dynamic, didactic relationship between the past and the present. Believing that people

could learn from history, Braun promoted the active intellectual engagement of the people as the necessary step for learning from history and avoiding the repetition of past mistakes.

It was in this frame of mind that Braun approached the life of Che Guevara, ancient Chinese history, and Polish-Russian power struggles. Although at first glance these three topics seem far removed from each other, there are some commonalities that unite them. Guevara's fight for communism was well-known throughout the world. We can assume that Braun equated Guevara's goals with his own and with the ideals behind the practice in the GDR. The Great Peace was an early experiment in socialist practices. The power struggle between Poland and Russia once again brings the topic closer to GDR reality, examining the history of two Warsaw Pact partners.

Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat

Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat was Volker Braun's first published and performed drama that stepped outside the realm of the GDR. Moreover, the play's innovative technique, that of a reverse chronology, marked Braun's experimentation with theatrical procedures.¹ The play was originally scheduled for performance at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin in 1977. Intervention from the Cuban Embassy resulted in the play's removal from the schedule, possibly because of the portrayal of contradictions.² The first performance ultimately occurred in Mannheim (1978), making it Braun's first play that did not have its opening performance in the GDR. The GDR debut did not occur until 1984 in Leipzig.

Instead of focusing on specific concerns of the GDR, Braun grappled with socialist ideology, examining the concept of revolution. Using Che Guevara's life as a parabel, Braun sought to illustrate the extent to which society had followed the goals of the revolution. This focus on a single political figure as well as the analysis of revolution ties this play to both *T.* and *Lenins Tod*. Braun implicitly criticized the GDR and other East Bloc nations for not having successfully implemented revolutionary practices into everyday life. The transfer of the action away from the GDR to Bolivia signals an interest in the Third World, an arena where future revolutions could possibly achieve success.³

Rather than tell Guevara's story in a straightforward fashion, Braun initiates two innovative techniques: interludes and reverse chronology. The play opens with an interlude that introduces two characters Bumholdt, an archeologist, and Bedray,⁴ a philosopher, who have no connection to the Guevara "story". Both of these men seek an ideal civilization. Bedray, who speaks in slogans garnered from Marx and Brecht, looks upward, signalling that the ideal civilization has not yet come into existence. Bumholdt believes the ideal civilization can be found in the ruins of the ancient Incan civilization (*der Sonnenstaat*):

Der Sonnenstaat . . . Keine Sklaven, keine Schulden,
keine Unterschiede . . . Nachdem der Inka . . . am staat-
lichen Feiertag selbst . . . die Hand an den Spaten
gelegt . . . hatte, wurde in gemeinschaftlicher Fron-
arbeit erst das Land der Sonne, dann . . . die Äcker der
Armen und Kranken, der Witwen . . . und Waisen so-
wie der Armee . . . bestellt. Sodann war es jedem ge-
stattet . . . sein eigenes Feld . . . Und zum Schluß der
freiwillige Einsatz in den Kartoffeln des Inkas.⁵

In the metaphor of the lost Incan civilization, Braun describes his vision of the ideal socialist society.

Braun intersperses Bumholdt and Bedray's escapades with the plot, and these characters make two subsequent appearances. In the next interlude, Bumholdt, completely consumed by his search for any remains of the Incan civilization, begins to behave primitively. He decapitates Bedray, placing his head in his camera bag. Bedray however retains the ability to speak. In the final interlude Bumholdt's excavation is so deep that only his head is visible. Driven by hunger, Bumholdt shoots Bedray and consumes his body. Bumholdt appears driven by the very history which he is trying to unearth. Before he devours Bedray, he reflects on the cannibalism rampant in ancient times. Bedray's only action consists of climbing ever higher. Throughout his quest, he continues to speak, addressing his philosophical musings at Bumholdt. His efforts at education are for not--Bumholdt is unable to hear Bedray's message and sinks deeper and deeper.

Bumholdt's primitive actions do not coincide with his ideal for the civilization he seeks to uncover. This ancient civilization should serve as a positive metaphor for *Ursozialismus*. As the plot of the interludes moves forward in time, Bumholdt's behavior regresses. This is indicative of Braun's message: despite the advancement of time, members of society still fall prey to primitive behavior. Additionally, as the interludes progress in time, the chronology of the play moves in reverse. In this way, Braun can investigate the various stages of revolution, offering an understanding of historical events.

In the opening interlude, the stage is decorated as a grave. As Bumholdt and Bedray begin their searches for their ideals, Guevara's body falls to the stage. Thus the audience begins its encounter with Guevara's death--a signal that the revolution had

failed. In the following scene the audience is privy to the start of the reverse chronology of Guevara's mission and death. While on his deathbed, Guevara must listen as the ranger Prado tells how he was shot and captured. The ranger then shoots Guevara, and the colonel, Selnich, attempts to dispose of the body:

Verstecke ihn.

Verbergen hastig den Leichnam.

Sie werden ihn hier finden.

Wühlen den Leichnam hervor.

Willst du ein Golgatha, zu dem sie pilgern.

Verbrenne ihn.

Zünden den Leichnam an.

Christus der Agitator

Geschlachtet, und sein gut beweinter Tod

siegt übers mächtigste der Reiche, Rom.

Soll er hier auferstehn. Laß ihn verschwinden.

Vergraben in fieberhafter Eile den Leichnam (128).

The comparison to Christ depicts Guevara as a figure of authority, one with many followers. The reference to pilgrims and Golgatha, Christ's place of death, alludes to Guevara's messianic role. Guevara's enemies, those who hold positions of power, fear that he will be heralded as a hero. But, the strategic placement of Guevara's death at the outset of the play enables Braun to focus both the remainder of the play as well as audience attention on the failings of the revolution. If the audience can learn from these mistakes, then the play will fulfill its didactic function.

As audience, we are already privy to the consequences of Guevara's actions. The play's reverse chronology thereby permits us to concentrate on Guevara's theories instead of focusing on his life. Throughout, we learn of Guevara's passion for and intense

belief in his cause.⁶ Although Guevara's end is near, he constantly stresses the importance of the fight:

Die Art des Kampfes aber macht es möglich
Daß wir als Menschen uns bewähren wirklich
Und wir zu Guerilleros werden
Der höchsten Stufe, die der Mensch erreicht
Nicht fühlend seinen Körper, nur die Waffe
Die er ist des Volks. Ihr seid das Vorbild
Der Kern der Frucht, die in dem Kampf wächst, die
Elite ihr, die herrlichsten der Kämpfer (131).

Here, Guevara appears utopian. His guerillas, on the other hand, recognize the futility of their struggle: "Weitergehen/ Das ist Selbstmord" (132-3). Undaunted by this futility and recognizing the importance of the masses to the success of the revolution, the guerillas overrun a farmer's hut and take villagers hostage. Fully aware that the revolutionaries need the help of the people ("Ohne das Volk, dann können wir nicht siegen" [137].), Pablito suggests that Guevara speak to them, hoping that they will join the cause. They are unable to convince the farmers and must flee, because one of the children has escaped to inform the authorities and collect the bounty.

Braun continues the early references to Guevara as a Messiah with mention of "der neue Mensch." Confronted with a posse, Guevara speaks arrogantly of the guerillas' legend:

... Die Legende
Der Guerilleros schlägt wie Schlamm hoch, wir sind
Schon Supermenschen, unbesiegbar (151).

Guevara holds fast to this ideal, speaking at length on the subject when one of his men, Miguel, refuses to participate in an ambush of a group of soldiers:

Ein neuer Mensch, beginnend mit dem Ende
Weil er getötet werden muß, er weiß es
Es ist nicht nur wahrscheinlich, es ist sicher
Der neue Mensch noch kann nicht alt werden
. . . Er will
Lieber siegen als überleben, müde
Des Unrechts, das er sieht und das er tut
Das Unrecht mordend, und das Blut erstickt ihn (154).

In the image of “des neuen Menschen”, Guevara describes his own life, for Guevara serves as the epitomy of the warrior for the underdog. Despite his belief in the ideal, however, Guevara already recognizes that his own death is inevitable.

Guevara’s bases his life on action. In a scene with Monje, the Bolivian Party Secretary, Guevara argues the advantages of action over diplomacy:

Ich höre immer handeln. Wer denn handelt.
Das ist das Warten auf Godot, Genosse.
Uns euch in die Hand geben. Daß ihr uns
Erdrückt. Ihr wollt nur mit dem Hirn arbeiten
Daß möglichst wenig Sachschaden entsteht.
Ihr habt die Revolution verlegt
In den Plüsch der Diplomatie und
Akkreditiert die Repression als Partner
Beim Narrentanz auf den Genick der Massen (160).

Guevara fears that diplomacy signals the sacrifice of the will of the people. Using Guevara’s voice, Braun (echoing Trotsky) contends

that the (world) revolution is not yet complete because repression has not been completely eliminated. Functionaries merely serve to impede the success of the revolution with their diplomacy. Here the historical example of Guevara facilitates Braun's critique of the socialist system in the GDR: the Bolivian party official represents political functionaries in the GDR. In this way, Braun showed that the governing power structure had lost sight of the revolution.

The play's final scene depicts the impetus for Guevara's mission. In a conversation with Fidel Castro in Cuba, shortly before his departure, Guevara expounds on the need for a fight (*Kampf*) to overcome capitalism.⁷

Willst du ein Finanzwesen haben oder ein
Neues menschliches Wesen. Nämlich wie
Die Produktion wichtig ist das Bewußtsein
Das sie produziert. Den Sozialismus
Kannst du nicht mit den morschen Waffen bauen
Die der Kapitalismus liegenläßt.
Etwas Neues suchen. Die neue Ordnung
Oder nur das verbesserte Modell
Der alten, wie
Die Revolution muß alle die Strukturen
Wenn sie jetzt dauern soll, infragestellen
Um brüderlich zu sein (169).

The play's conclusion thereby supplies the original motivation for Guevara's revolution, namely that (bourgeois) social structures must be overcome before a humanitarian society could be established. Because the audience knows that this fight ultimately resulted in Guevara's death, it must confront the failings of the socialist system. Braun's choice of a reverse chronology facilitates the depiction of the futility of Guevara's struggle: "Die Fabel ist

die rückläufige Häufung der Beweise für die 'Notwendigkeit' der berühmten und berüchtigten Aktion Guevaras, aber dergestalt, daß alle Szenen zunehmend die Unmöglichkeit, den Irrsinn seines Kampfes zeigen . . ."⁸ In essence, Guevara's battle is futile because of the conflict that exists between loyalty to the idea of revolution and heroism and the practical implementation of these ideals.⁹ Indeed, Guevara's death prohibits him from assuming the role of positive hero. Of course, the audience is aware that Guevara was the hero of the Cuban revolution. Braun leaves the reason for Guevara's failure in Bolivia unresolved.

As was the case with earlier dramas, the Guevara story underwent numerous revisions. The 1990 rendering discussed here differs significantly from the original version. Continuing an affinity for Hölderlin established in early poetic works, Braun forged a connection between his Guevara material and Hölderlin's works in the poem "Material IV: Guevara," to which he appended five lines from a Hölderlin poem:

Die Völker schwiegen, schlummerten, da sahe
Das Schicksal, daß sie nicht entschliefen und es kam
Der unerbittliche, der furchtbare
Sohn der Natur, der alte Geist der Unruh.
Der regte sich, wie Feuer
(Hölderlin).¹⁰

Braun held to this affinity in the earliest version of the play and included a reference to Hölderlin's *Empedokles*. Hölderlin's interest in Empedokles derived from the latter's teaching about the interdependence of the elements. Braun took the concept of interdependence and employed it to accentuate the relationship between past and present.¹¹ The original reference to Empedokles reads as follows:

Guevara: Ich seh nur eine Welt, die blutig ist.
Die stirbt oder erblüht mit einem Leib.
Die ein Vulkan ist vor er ausbricht, ich
Seh in den Krater. Kämpfen nicht mehr, kann ich
Doch sterben, fallend in das Loch, tot
Ein Beispiel strahlen unter den Völkern: ich
Empedokles der das Signal gibt. Ihr
Macht ihr mir Beine für den letzten Schritt
Daß die ihn sehen, die das Äußerste
Brauchen, eh sie das erste wagen: leben.¹²

Empedokles' death was a signal to the people to abandon their mundane lives. In Braun's adaptation of Hölderlin's portrayal of Empedokles' impending death, Guevara's struggle and death becomes a Marxist interpretation and realization of Empedokles' teachings.¹³ Braun's choice of Hölderlin's Empedokles as a representative figure of the past, permitted him to appropriate values or ideologies from the past and actualize them for his present day.¹⁴

The reasons for Braun's deletion of the Hölderlin references in later versions of the play are not directly known. I propose that Braun's veiled reference to Hölderlin, who was admired in the GDR as a great German poet, facilitated the publication of the work. In the original text, the allusion to the hole refers to Guevara's body falling into its grave in the opening scene of the play. Despite the omission of Empedokles' name in the later version, the reference, albeit masked, remains in the terms *Loch* and *Krater*. The direct reference became unnecessary, because, with the passage of time, Braun expressed his reformist tendencies more explicitly.

Ultimately, Braun's goal was to introduce a criticism of revolution. Guevara's fate served as a lesson to Braun's audience,

warning against the repetition of past mistakes. This corresponded to Braun's earlier examination of the evils of power in the plays about early Soviet history. It echoes similar thoughts on revolution in "Büchners Briefe": "Ich studierte die Geschichte der Oktoberrevolution und watete durch das Blut der 30er Jahre" (VF 90). Braun saw the October Revolution as the ultimate socialist revolution. Guevara's revolution continued this tradition, attempting a similar type of socialist revolution in another country. In exploiting Guevara as a model, Braun warned against the tragedy (death) revolutions caused. Here we are once again reminded of his vision for the future in "Letzte Auskunft," a better future through the avoidance of past mistakes.

Despite his call to action, Guevara remains an idealist, and his idealism is reminiscent of Trotsky's loyalty to Marxist theory. The inability of both characters to transform theory into practice thus led to their downfall. Braun's treatment thereby illustrated that belief was not enough: action that supports and sustains the belief was also necessary for social progress. Guevara's failure resulted from the interconnection between his actions and his ideals. This idealism disregarded any difficulties related to implementing ideology into practice. This is reminiscent of GDR functionaries who continuously stressed the importance of Marxist doctrine, despite the obvious problems inherent in GDR society.¹⁵

In this play then, we note that Braun's interest lay in finding concrete examples for the problems in GDR society. While Guevara became a sacrifice to his idealism, Braun's play does not offer any solutions. Although he was able to identify at least one reason for the revolution's failure, he merely presented this reason to his audience, who was forced to draw some sort of constructive conclusion on its own. In this instance, the use of history as well as the literary reference to Hölderlin demonstrate a Braun still searching for an adequate means of expression.

Großer Frieden

Braun relied solely on historical sources for his depiction of ancient Chinese society. *Großer Frieden* (1976) is a second example of his interest in historical topics at a great temporal and geographic distance from GDR reality. In this play, Braun continued the criticisms of hierarchical power structures that he introduced in *T.* and *Lenins Tod*. Hierarchy as theme is even apparent in the stage directions, which underline the importance of power structures for the action of the play:

Die Bühne terrassenförmig, die Höhe der Spielorte zeigt die soziale Stellung der Figuren. Die Stufen sehr hoch: Aufstieg und Abstieg mühsam und riskant. In den Kriegswirren (3, 4) die Stufen aus den Fugen. Zu Beginn des "Großen Friedens" (5, 6)-die Bühne plan; während des Aufbaus der neuen Ordnung restauriert sich die Terrasse.¹⁶

From the outset, Braun presents his audience with clues that explain the relevance of ancient Chinese history for the GDR. At the beginning of the "Great Peace" when the stage is level, Braun introduces a metaphor for the status of the GDR at the end of World War II. According to Braun, the GDR, as a satellite of the Soviet Union, inherited the classless society of socialism. During *Aufbau*, the development and solidification of socialist ideology in everyday life, old bourgeois power structures crept into the system. In the narrative, "Die Tribüne" (1974), Braun depicted the evils of hierarchy on GDR soil. In this story, the Kast character attained a leadership role, that of Party Secretary, in which he serves as an intermediary between the workers and factory managers. While the narrative concretely presents the definitive rift between the

workers and the leaders, Braun was unable to “solve” this contradiction within the context of the story.

As the play begins, the time is the last year of King Hu Hai’s rule. For the second day in succession soldiers are collecting millet from a farmer (Gau Dsu) as a tribute to the king. Moments later, more soldiers appear to amass millet for Dschau (*Statthalter*). Finally, more soldiers appear, but the farmer has no millet: so these soldiers take Gau’s wife as a tribute to Wei. The scene is one of disarray within the governing system: as Hu Hai struggles to retain his reign, Dschau and Wei fight for control. These power struggles form the focal point of early scenes: the poet Tschu Jün visits the king and persuades him to step down; later, mainly because of the farmer Gau Dsu’s encouragement, Dschau, Wei, and Tschu Jün fight among each other in a quest for power.

After the defeat of Dschau and Wei, Gau Dsu and Tschu Jün finally reach an accord that brings about the start of “the Great Peace”. The philosophical basis of the Great Peace, which is grounded in Chinese philosophy from the third and fourth century before Christ, stipulates that all are equal within society. Gau Dsu’s adherence to this ethos is rather utopian (and here we note shades of Volker Braun himself) and problems naturally arise. Food is scarce, prompting the conflict between Gau Dsu and Tschu Jün to resume. Gradually, differences among the people become manifest, and privilege is once again an integral part of society.

The play climaxes with the scene that depicts the philosopher Wang, one of the originators of the Great Peace philosophy, as a member of the working class: his job entails stepping on a treadmill so that water continuously flows into the canals. In an effort to increase agricultural production, the rulers introduce terraced farming. The treadmill represents an industrial advance-

ment, that makes this type of farming possible. This terraced scenery, however, also serves as a metaphor for the levels of difference among members of society. Therein, according to Wang, lies the error of their ways: “die Stufen hier. Das ist das Übel” (237). The laws for the Great Peace that Wang drafted were purely theoretical. Wang, now in the role of worker, realizes that the equality that society achieved in theory, was more elusive in reality. The idea that the land was there to serve all members of society was clear. The practicality that someone was forced to perform menial tasks in order to maintain the land’s productivity resulted in a hierarchy where guards were necessary to enforce the workers’ compliance. Wang sees these guards as occupying a position above his own--a point that Braun enforces through the use of steps.

As in the play *Die Kipper* and the narrative “Der Schlamm”, Braun represents the workers’ despair through the tedium of menial labor. Wang’s frustration reminds us of Paul Bauch’s dissatisfaction with his own job, which required the use of only one arm. Braun incorporates other elements of Paul Bauch into his Gau character. Both protagonists stemmed from lower social classes but were able to rise to leadership positions. Unable to see beyond their own actions, they abused their authority positions. Unqualified to understand the intricacies of economics, they were unable to overcome the inconsistencies inherent in their environments. In both cases the “revolution” was unsuccessful.

Gau Dsu desires to be increasingly powerful and, as a result of another conflict with Tschu Jün, he is crowned Kaiser. His initial bliss reverts to fear after a nightmarish experience, in which he envisions himself carried down the terrace to appear before the *Bezirksgott*. The scene depicts Gau Dsu’s day of reckoning, as the apparition informs him that he has betrayed the laws of the Great Peace. In ignoring the needs of the people and working only for his

own gain, Gau Dsu defeated the purpose of the revolution. His only recourse is to return to his status as a worker, promising: "Ich werde arbeiten, bis ich umfalle" (252).

As the play concludes, Gau Dsu learns of unrest among the farmers prompted by "Steuern, Zwangsarbeit, Verarmung" (255). Gau Dsu cannot understand that the farmers are dissatisfied; Tschu Jün explains to him, that instead of being the people's advocate, the government has become the enemy of the people: "Sie sind nicht uns, wir sind ihnen feind" (257). Gau Dsu will not accept Tschu Jün's insolence and strangles him. Undaunted by these setbacks, Gau Dsu vows to begin anew: "Das Leben ist nicht mehr wert als sein Zweck" (260). After the curtain closes, Wang, who had died during the action of the play, reappears:

Die neuen Zeiten, von den alten wund
Sind neu genug erst, wenn wir aufrecht stehn.
Die Plage dauert und kann uns vergehn.
In unsern Händen halten wir den Grund (260).

Braun allows Wang to speak these words of hope, leaving the audience with the impression that a successful revolution is still possible in the future.

It is in this final scene that the play's relevance for a GDR audience becomes apparent. The hierarchy embodied in the terraces symbolizes the power structure of GDR society. The farmers, representing the common people of the GDR, are relegated to menial positions and do not share in the wealth and the power of the government officials. Braun's message was clear: the mistakes of history are repeating themselves. In depicting this historical period on the stage, Braun presented the audience with concrete reasons for society's current problems. But he also offered hope, that through the correction of these errors, a just and humane

society with equality for all could develop. Since he himself was unable to change the system, he brought the problems directly to the people. The glaring similarities with GDR society forced the audience to reflect on its own situation and press for a better future.

In this series of 11 scenes Braun traced the intricacies of revolution. As the farmer Gau succeeded in the overthrow of the king, it appeared that the working class had attained its goal of emancipation. But as the temptations and rewards of authority became manifest, old social structures reasserted their oppressive authority. Braun therefore showed that the revolution did not succeed in eradicating the greed of human nature. Whereas I argue that the problems in the play mirror those of the GDR, some critics do not accept this interpretation. They argue instead, that the play's importance derives from the history portrayed on the stage. Christoph Funke, for example, claimed that Braun made no direct parallels to the present: "Braun will nicht heutigen Alltag verfremdend abbilden sondern auf den Reichtum historischer Beziehungen aufmerksam machen, die uns von Nutzen sein können."¹⁷ Similarly, Klaus Jarmatz has argued that Braun's aims for this play were not to present the audience with historical movements and conditions, but to bring insight into historical determination.¹⁸ In this regard, the historical aspects of the play assume an important role. Jost Hermand has already shown that Braun's fable corresponds closely to actual events in Chinese history and asserts that the play's philosophical arguments are linked to such ancient Chinese philosophers as Meng-tzu, Han-tzu und Li-chi.¹⁹

Although the temporal distance of the play could blur the significance for GDR reality, Braun viewed his use of ancient history as justified:

Es gibt Augenblicke alter Geschichte, die uns mehr zu sagen haben als ganze Strecken neuerer Zeit. . . . Jene frühe Revolution im Staat Tschin, 2000 Jahre zurück, wurde von ungeheurer Hoffnung getragen, einer Hoffnung auf Gleichheit nicht nur des Besitzes, sondern der "Arbeit"; was etwa meinen konnte: gleicher gesellschaftlicher Rang, Verfügungsgewalt für alle. Solche ungeheuerliche Zwecke setzt sich das nüchterne Europa erst unter der roten Fahne: und zwar im Ernst.²⁰

Braun argued that his play sought to make it apparent, that the struggle for social equality was not a new fight, but was also present in ancient civilizations; it is precisely the fact that this "older" revolution was not successful that made it relevant for the GDR. The GDR based its concept of socialism on the same principles that led to this revolution in Tschin. But the play could not resolve the inherent conflicts: "Am Ende des Stücks kein Ende der Kämpfe."²¹ Because this fight had not been carried to its conclusion, the play thus served as a warning to GDR society against complacency. The relative ease with which the new regime in Asia slipped into old power structures could (and in fact did) occur in the GDR.

Dmitri

In *Dmitri* (1980) Braun united several threads from his earlier theatrical works. Of all of his plays to date, this one adhered most closely to the appropriation of Classical forebears that cultural politicians advocated, for it not only relates a historical moment, but also addresses Friedrich Schiller's fragment *Demetrius*. Within this text, Braun continues his preoccupation with Russian history and the theme of tyranny begun in *T.* and *Lenins Tod*. Be-

cause Braun also focuses on the manner in which the protagonist grapples with authority, *Dmitri* is also closely tied to the themes of *Guevara* and *Großer Frieden*.

Like many of Braun's other works, *Dmitri* was beset with problems. The play premiered in Karlsruhe in 1982; the first GDR performance occurred in Schwerin in 1984, when the theater first presented Schiller's *Demetrius*-fragment followed by Braun's drama. Braun was not permitted to travel to the Federal Republic to witness the premiere of *Dmitri*, to which Michael Skasa observed: "Zu heiß geworden ist das Stück.... [Brauns] Oberen sind wütend, daß der *Dmitri* überhaupt veröffentlicht wird."²² Because the Solidarity movement was gaining momentum in Poland, the play's portrayal of a power conflict between Poland and Russia also hinted at more contemporary events that made GDR functionaries uncomfortable.

The play's premise focuses on the desire of Polish representatives to elevate Poland to a position of power. They construe a plan, in which the ultimate goal is to place Dmitri, a Polish peasant, on the Russian throne. In winning the war against Russia, Poland would remove itself from its status as a satellite state within the Russian Empire. Mnischek's declaration to parliament quotes Schiller's *Demetrius*, indicating the desire of Poland to be free:

HIER IST NICHT MOSKAU NICHT DESPOTEN-
FURCHT
SCHNÜRT HIER DIE FREIE SEELE ZU HIER DARF
DIE WAHRHEIT WANDELN MIT ERHABENEM
HAUPT
ICH WILLS NICHT HOFFEN EDLE HERRN DASS
HIER

ZU KRAKAU AUF DEM REICHSTAG SELBST DER
POLEN
DER CZAR VON MOSKAU FEILE SKLAVEN
HABE.²³

As soon as the members of parliament convince Dmitri that he is actually the heir to the Russian throne, Dmitri agrees to war with Russia. Yet, the Poles invented the story about Dmitri; most Russians believed that Dmitri had been killed 14 years earlier. Soon, however, word of Dmitri's survival spreads throughout the land, gaining validity. As three starving farmers argue about the existence of two czars, Boris and Dmitri, they conclude that the one who is a good czar should ascend to the throne. In an attempt to quell the imminent Russian uprising, Boris sends the archbishop of Moscow to persuade Marfa, Demetrius' mother, to announce that her son is dead, thereby unmasking Dmitri as an imposter. Marfa, however, has her own agenda, hoping that the false Dmitri will enable her to return to her palaces from exile: "Und wenn er nicht das Kind meines Leibes ist, dann ist er das Kind meiner Rache" (172).²⁴

Dmitri's quest is successful. When word arrives that Dmitri has reached the city, the Muscovites rush to see him, abandoning Boris. Dmitri easily wins the battle against the Godunows. Slowly, however, Dmitri begins to realize that he attained the throne through theft, and is therefore not the true czar. Marfa also recognizes immediately that he is not her son when he visits her:

Ich wußte, daß er es nicht ist. Als ich den Donner hörte, verblaßte schon sein Gesicht, als ich über die Schlachtfelder reiste, sah ich ihn davongehn, Jahr um Jahr zurück in seine kleine blutige Gestalt und in sein Grab fallen. Es handelt sich um einen gewöhnlichen Krieg.

Was habe ich damit zu tun. Ich bin gefangen. Dmitri,
was stellen sie mit uns an (188).

Continuing in his role, Dmitri assumes all the duties of a czar. As he opens a session of the assembly, he asks that all councillors sit at the table with him. Unaccustomed to such informality they hesitate, but Dmitri insists, declaring “Ich bin . . . ein anderer Zar” (190). This leads the audience to believe that Dmitri will be a just ruler. Dmitri’s actions contradict his intentions, however, when he demands money to form an army.²⁵

It is at this time that Marina, Mnischek’s daughter, arrives in Moscow. Both she and Mnischek had planned that she would become Dmitri’s wife. This marriage creates unrest among the people. They see Dmitri as a traitor because he chooses to marry a Polish woman instead of a Russian. The Russians demand that Dmitri demonstrate his loyalty by murdering Marina. Instead he cuts Marina’s face with a knife, making her look Chinese and affording her the opportunity to escape. Schuiski then enters with Marfa, instructing her to deny Dmitri. Dmitri orders her to speak not as his mother, but as the mother of the people:

DMITRI: . . . Sprich nicht als meine Mutter. Sprich als
Zarin. Als Mutter deines Volks. Bin ich der Zar des
Volks! . . . nicht um mich gehts sondern um das Volk.
Entscheide für dein Volk.

MARFA *verblüfft*: Was hat das Volk damit zu tun?

DMITRI: Wie es gut ist für das Volk, das Volk! (213).

Despite his treachery, Dmitri wanted to be a just ruler. But Marfa, who had only accepted Dmitri in order to gain her own freedom, cannot comprehend his compassion for the people. Her silence equals a denunciation and assemblymen murder Dmitri. Schiuski then takes possession of the throne.

After the curtain falls, Braun lets an unnamed Polish man have the final word:

Ich mach ihnen ni den Demetrius. Ich will kein Demetrius sin. Ich hab genuch von Politik im Betrieb und der Zeitung. Den Fehler mache ich ni und zieh mir mit der Aktivität Konsequenzen aufs Haupt. Ich bin genuch gestraft. Soll sich um die Posten reißen wer will, ich spiel ni mit. Da bleibch Zuschauer, was mei Recht is (219).

While this anonymous man does not wish to succumb to the same temptations of power as Dmitri, he actually acts within the capacity of a free man. He makes the decision about how he will act himself instead of letting others decide for him. Here in this final moment, Braun once again refers to the *neuer Mensch* theme from the worker plays, a new “man” who takes responsibility for his future. This ending leaves the play open to the future. Although the anonymous man remains passive, taking on the role of an observer, the possibility remains that other observers can begin the fight anew. This is the point at which the audience can make its own interpretation. The audience, as observers, now has the possibility to enter the struggle.

The *neuer Mensch* theme is also apparent in the figure of Dmitri, particularly in his attempt to become a different type of ruler: “Woher nehme ich das Recht? Ich nehme das Recht von den Lebenden. Vom Volk. Die Interessen des Volks sind Unsere Politik. Wir schützen das Volk, und das Volk schützt Uns. Wir haben den Auftrag des Volks!” (203). Despite this apparent interest in the will of the people, the audience only sees them as starving masses, under Boris’s as well as Dmitri’s rule. We can posit then, that Braun’s play remains in a theoretical realm. In the

figure of the false Dmitri, Braun theorizes about the evils of power and tyranny. Yet the play offers no viable alternatives to the status quo. With references to the Bolsheviks, Braun only reinforces the fact that these tendencies have not been overcome.

In a technique similar to that employed in *Guevara*, Braun uses interludes and more recent historical references to break the illusion of the theater. In an intermezzo, Braun introduces Russia at the time of the Bolshevik revolution. This portrayal of the Bolsheviks draws the audience's attention to the Russian Revolution, forcing a comparison between Dmitri and the leaders of the October Revolution. 1917 serves as a historical turning point for Braun, the point at which the socialist revolution began. The year also serves as a common point of reference and of historical importance for the people of the GDR, providing an obvious link between distant and more recent history. Thus, Braun demonstrated in a more contemporary power conflict that the needs of the people vs. the will of the tyrants was still a struggle. This material was of particular interest to Braun because the false Dmitri presented the hierarchical power structures with a challenge.²⁶ He constructed Dmitri, who wanted to make people out of slaves, to challenge the principles of legitimation in czarist society: "Ich . . . will eine haltung einnehmen/ gewinnen, die sich dem gesehenen produktiv entgegensetzt. eine haltung zur geschichte, die den heutigen tag meint, an dem ich, in sehr anderen verläufen, beschäftigt bin."²⁷ The final scene with the unnamed Polish man brings the audience into the present day, forcing it to infer similarities between the past and the present. The reference to the Bolsheviks allowed Braun to disguise his critique of the Soviet Union rather cleverly. Furthermore, in setting his critique further back in time, Braun was able to present the same criticisms in the play *Dmitri* that are the focal point of *T.* and *Lenins Tod*, both of which had not been published by the time *Dmitri* had been published and performed.

In looking to Schiller, Braun once again journeyed into the history of German literature. While Braun's piece contains numerous quotations from Schiller's fragment, it is, however, his use of historical reference points that parallels the techniques Schiller employed in his fragment, and proves interesting for our purposes. When Schiller wrote his *Demetrius* in 1805, the experiences of the French Revolution were foremost in his mind. Demetrius's initial desire to be a humane ruler are grounded in the fight for freedom symbolized by the French Revolution. Schiller's Demetrius turns despotic, when he learns that his apparent birthright was merely a lie, and he falls prey to the same hegemonic tendencies as other rulers before him. Braun's historical frame of reference is the Russian October Revolution, a point that he makes clear to his audience in the interlude. In the works of both playwrights the intricate relationship between the common people and authority comes into the forefront. Despite the affinity to Schiller's work, Braun's more contemporary revolutionary focal point is more realistic for his audience and allows him essentially to compose a continuation of Schiller's fragment. Christoph Schroth, the director of the dual performance in Schwerin commented on the importance of using literary heritage in this way:

Wir beschäftigen uns also nicht mit dem Erbe aus Pflichterfüllung, sondern weil es gerade heute darum geht, das humanistische Erbe wieder lebendig zu machen, um der allseitigen Entwicklung der sozialistischen Persönlichkeit willen im Interesse unserer gegenwärtigen Ziele und Aufgaben.²⁸

Schiller's fragment thus serves merely as the framework for Braun's play. Braun thereby took the Classical heritage and made it productive for his own purposes by using this heritage to reinforce his call for a humanistic society. Andreas Roßmann asserted

that Braun ignored Schiller's psychological investigation, opting instead for an interpretation that authority is determined socially.²⁹ This is particularly poignant in the opening scenes, in which Schiller's Demetrius undertakes a leading role in his ascent to the throne, whereas Braun's Dmitri allows the Polish parliament to dictate his actions.³⁰ Rather than completing Schiller's work, however, Braun created a complete dramatic work that took Schiller's concept and placed it into a socialist perspective. Braun concentrated therefore on the political actions within the story, eliminating much of the personal intrigue, which he regarded as unnecessary: "die bloß privaten anlässe der handlung, die gekränktheit des unbelohnten mörders, der ehrgeiz der braut, drücken nicht die geschichtliche möglichkeit aus."³¹ In this regard, *Dmitri* is a more abstract drama than the other works discussed thus far. Schiller served only as a basis, a vehicle for Braun's message. In true Brechtian fashion, Braun wanted his audience to learn from this drama. In his notes Braun wrote: "ich, der unter dem namen zuschauer mit diesem stumpfen unproduktive gang konfrontiert wird (von theaterleuten, die vielleicht nicht wissen, was sie machen!), will eine haltung einnehmen/ gewinnen, die sich dem gesehenen produktiv entgegensetzt."³²

In each of these plays Braun utilized history to investigate the intricacies of revolution. He turned to historical instances of revolution in order to find the cause of stagnation in his society. In each case, Braun wanted his audience to learn from past, historical mistakes: "Geschichtsbewußtsein ist Selbstbewußtsein" (EG 139). At this point, Braun was still very utopian in his beliefs: not only did he believe that a communist society could be attained, he was also confident, that his plays would provoke his audience to take action.

In *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat*, he wished to portray the reasons for Guevara's failed revolution in Bolivia. In *Großer*

Frieden, Braun travelled further back in time, portraying the historical nature of a “socialist” revolution. Finally with *Dmitri*, Braun showed that the bent to tyrannical behavior lies not within the individual, but is inherent in the social system. All of these plays present lessons for Braun’s audience. On stage he depicts historical failings, so that his audience may find present day solutions.

Braun consistently blended more contemporary references into these past events. But rather than interpreting these plays as capitulations to the inevitability of history, Braun sought to provide the audience with hope for the future and insight into the social contradictions. Here Braun saw a connection between writers and historians: “Sie können deren [der Leser] Vertrauen nur gewinnen, wenn die Literatur das Leben der Leute als Geschichtsprozeß zeigt und die Historiker den Geschichtsprozeß zeigen als das Leben der Leute” (EG 140). Braun’s attempt to educate his audience through his dramaturgy emulates Brecht’s *Lehrstück*. Christine Cosentino has remarked: “Braun, in der Nachfolge Brechts, stellt Denkansprüche an den Leser.”³³ Thus, by using history to bring the problems and contradictions of GDR socialism to light, Braun attempted to illustrate the didactic nature of history.

Braun’s use of historical examples in these three plays removed him a step from GDR reality. Instead of portraying the GDR on the stage, he distanced himself and worked only with metaphors and parallels. Braun thereby removed himself from the activist role he so desired. At this point, Braun also began to separate himself from his audience. His intellectual role required an educated audience. Yet, despite their temporal distance from GDR reality, these three dramas did continue the provocations of Braun’s worker plays. As in the worker plays, we find an individual in conflict with society. Furthermore, the heroes in the

historical plays rose from the ranks of the common people. Like Paul Bauch, Hinze, and Tinka, these historical figures confronted tyranny in an effort to incite change. A major social contradiction, namely the hierarchy inherent in all structures of authority, prevented the success of the revolution; reality interfered with ideology.

We can conclude that, in the historical plays, Braun examined revolutions and their leaders, and unmasked the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the respective power structures. Though not as explicit as in *Großer Frieden*, both *Dmitri* and *Guevara* addressed the problem of the existence of hierarchical power structures which oppressed certain strata of society throughout history. Braun's investigation of the historical existence of such power structures served to instruct his audience that the contradictions of hierarchy were not unique to GDR society. The distancing that Braun introduced, however, demonstrated that he was beginning to deal with problems more abstractly. As Braun found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with the contradictions inherent in his society, he began to appropriate history and literature more abstractly. This abstraction indicates that a rift was forming between Braun's ideals and GDR reality. Literature and history began to act more as a vehicle for Braun's escape than as a possibility to reach out to his audience. In the plays to be discussed in the following chapter, Braun turned his attention to examinations of hierarchical contradictions within German traditions. Although the emphasis on "German" indicates that Braun addresses topics closer to the GDR's own heritage, these plays, in fact, continue Braun's trend toward abstraction.

¹ *Schmitt* (1978) and *Simplex Deutsch* (1978-79) are often grouped with *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat* because they too contain elements of innovative dramatic techniques.

² Henning Rischbieter, "Revolutions-Romantik. Volker Brauns 'Guevara' uraufgeführt," *Theater heute* 19.1 (1978): 8

³ Braun also addresses the topic of the Third World in *Transit Europa* (1985-86) and in the poem "Das innerste Afrika".

⁴ Georg Hensel claims that the figure of the philosopher Bedray is Braun's attack on the French writer Régis Debray, a former follower of Guevara. See Hensel, "Flucht in die Revolution. *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat* von Volker Braun," *FAZ* 12 Dec. 1977.

⁵ Volker Braun, *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat, Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 5 (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1990) 118. All references are to this edition and noted parenthetically.

⁶ This passion is also evident among Guevara's followers, most notably in Tania, his lover. She portrays an undying dedication to Guevara's mission: "Meinen Namen legt ich ab im Namen der Revolution" (144-5).

⁷ In earlier versions Castro's character was named simply "Freund."

⁸ Braun, "Die Fabel," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 5 175.

⁹ Herbert A. Arnold, "The Third World in the Work of Volker Braun and Heiner Müller," *Seminar* 28.2 (1992): 149.

¹⁰ *Training des aufrechten Gangs* 55.

¹¹ Christine Cosentino, "Volker Brauns Roter Empedokles: *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat*," *Monatshefte* 71.1 (1979): 43.

¹² Quoted from the original manuscript in Klaus Schuhmann, "Anmerkungen zu Volker Brauns *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat*," Volker Braun, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (München: text und kritik, 1977) 31-32.

¹³ Cosentino 43.

¹⁴ T. M. Holmes sees another link between Braun and Hölderlin in the symbolism of light. Holmes, "Blinded by the Light: Volker Braun's *Guevara oder Der Sonnenstaat*," *Volker Braun*, ed. Rolf Jucker 76-78.

¹⁵ The inefficiency of Party functionaries was also a topic of Braun's narrative *Das ungezwungene Leben Kasts*.

¹⁶ Volker Braun, *Großer Frieden, Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 5 182. All references are to this edition and noted parenthetically.

¹⁷ See Funke, "Vom Alltag nach der Revolution," *Der Morgen* 25 April 1979. Quoted in Karl-Heinz Schmidt, ed. *Großer Frieden von Volker Braun. Eine Dokumentation der Aufführung des Berliner Ensembles 1979* (Berlin: Verband der Theater-schaffenden der DDR, 1979) 190.

¹⁸ Klaus Jarmatz, "Erkundungen, Erfahrungen, Erwartungen (II)," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 31.4 (1983): 130.

¹⁹ Jost Hermand, "Von Grund auf anders. Volker Brauns *Großer Frieden*," *Drama und Theater im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Walter Hinck*, eds. Hans Dietrich Irmscher und Werner Keller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 421. The historical facts underlying the plot are documented in *Großer Frieden von Volker Braun* 15-26.

²⁰ Volker Braun, "Warum wähle ich diesen alten Stoff? Flüchte ich aus der Gegenwart?" *Großer Frieden von Volker Braun* 13.

²¹ Volker Braun, "Der Grundvorgang des Stückes," *Großer Frieden von Volker Braun* 14.

²² Michael Skasa, "Schnitzeljagd auf ostdeutsche Art. Volker Brauns *Simplex Deutsch* in Karlsruhe erstaufgeführt," *Süd-deutsche Zeitung* 26 Nov. 1982: 15.

²³ Volker Braun, "Dmitri," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 6 (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1991) 159-160. All references are to this edition and included parenthetically in the text.

²⁴ A stage direction notes: "Sie halte sich an Schillers Marfa-Monolog, der natürlich stumm noch größer ist" (172).

²⁵ "Ich werde das Geld in ein Heer stecken. Ein Heer aus Polen" (192).

²⁶ See Braun, "Notate zu *Dmitri* (1)," *Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater Schwerin 1984*. Demetrius/ Dmitri, ed. Martin Linzer (Berlin: Verband der Theaterschaffenden der DDR, 1985) 37-38.

²⁷ See Braun, "Notate zu *Dmitri* (1)" 44.

²⁸ Christoph Schroth, "Territorium--Theater--Publikum," *Mecklenburgisches Staatstheater Schwerin 1984* 22.

²⁹ Andreas Roßmann, "Lehrpfad, Baustelle, Leerlauf. Stücke von Volker Braun in West und Ost," *Deutschland Archiv* 4 (1983): 347.

³⁰ For further discussion of this scene see Ilse Winter, "*Dmitri* versus *Demetrius*: Zu Volker Brauns kritischer Adaption von Friedrich Schiller," *The German Quarterly* 60 (1987): 57-58.

³¹ Braun, "Arbeitsnotizen," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 6 227.

³² Braun, "Arbeitsnotizen" 229.

³³ Christine Cosentino. "Der 'un-ruhige' Held: Utopie und Stagnation in Volker Brauns Stück *Großer Frieden*," *Neophilologus* 2 (1982): 259.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM SOCIALISM TO THE NIBELUNGS: GERMAN TRADITIONS AND BRAUN'S DESPAIR

Focusing again on literary appropriation, Braun turned his attention to hierarchical power structures that he perceived in the German tradition. In *Simplex Deutsch* and *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor*, he draws his portrayals from various moments in German history. The temporal distance situates the plays in a place remote from GDR experience, continuing the abstraction he began in the historical plays. As a result of Braun's tendency toward generalization, his ideology has expanded to incorporate a more global perspective. Building on what he learned in his historical plays, he expanded his criticism of the GDR quotidian to encompass problems that he perceived as present throughout the world. This turn toward a global perspective functioned to distance him even further from his GDR audience. Yet, at this point, Braun had not abandoned his vision of the future--he remained idealistic in his abstraction.

Simplex Deutsch

Although *Simplex Deutsch* (1978-79) has some structural similarities to *Schmittchen* and its innovativeness also ties it to *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat*, its lack of cohesiveness makes it uncharacteristic of a Braun drama. At first glance, the reader is un-

certain as to the proper placement of this play. Because it concentrates on "German" traditions, I view it as an examination of German "historical" events; yet, much of it is fictional, although well-known historical figures do appear. The play proves interesting for our purposes, however, less for its message, than for its confusion. This play signals a change in Volker Braun's approach to his topic as well as a change in his ideology. The lack of cohesiveness indicates that Braun was no longer comfortable with the strictures placed upon writers. To a certain extent we can claim that he had abandoned the heritage principles of the GDR at this point. Although the text displays a strong affinity to Brechtian theater, it does not indicate a strong dependence on any one forebear. As I have stated earlier, Braun had been searching for a means of expression, the frustration involved in this search becomes outwardly apparent in the abstraction of this play.

In giving his play *Simplex Deutsch* the subtitle "Szenen über die Unmündigkeit", Braun posits that this drama depicts historical and literary events reflecting moments of immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*), that is, society's inability to react and behave in an enlightened manner. In his essay "Was ist Aufklärung?" Immanuel Kant defined enlightenment as:

der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschliebung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen.¹

Kant's premise as the basis for his theatrical message highlights Braun's journey into abstract idealism. Ulrike Meyer has argued that Braun intended to emphasize the concept of maturity:

das Stück sei entstanden durch die Diskrepanz zwischen Ideologie und Wirklichkeit in der DDR. Beim Schreiben habe [Braun] sich auch von der Frage leiten lassen, ob der Mensch die Fähigkeit besitze, existentielle Wendepunkte des Lebens nicht nur zu erkennen; wichtig sei, diese Augenblicke der Erkenntnis authentisch zu nutzen, d.h. als mündiger Mensch in einer mündigen Gesellschaft handeln zu können.²

Adopting a structure similar to that in *Schmittchen*, Braun forgoes a unified plot, and organizes the play as a series of scenes that demonstrate that society's expectations dictate people's behavior. Each of the scenes examines people's relationship to authority from various perspectives. Braun's notes from 10 August 1978 explicate the play's structure:

. . . wenn ich die durchgehende bühnenfigur aufgeben zugunsten einer synthetischen, aus geschichtssegmenten, geschichtswidersprüchen, muß die "gesamtfigur," die aus den szenen hervortritt, züge der sich entwickelnden menschheit tragen. . . . es handelt sich nicht um die ewige wiederkehr des gleichen, es kann auch anders kommen. auch der finstere moment ist ambivalent. die kleinen friedlichen leute, die ihren interessen nachgehen, sind hysterisiert, imstande, kollektive greuel zu begehen, sie sind aber auch imstande, kollektive aufbautaten zu begehen. . . . das grimmige vorzeigen des wahnsinns, der mich noch umgibt, bleibt moralisiererei, wenn nicht die andere möglichkeit

durchscheint, nicht als erlösung, nicht als utopie sondern innewohnende substanz der geschichte.³

Through a montage of scenes whose titles borrow from literary texts, Braun examines society's confrontation with authority. But rather than following historical events directly as he did in the plays discussed in the previous chapter, Braun presents here both historical and literary characters in a historical situation in which they have the opportunity to make a decision.

The play follows neither a historical chronology, nor a cohesive structure. Narration and dialogue intermingle throughout the play. The overall purpose of this montage is to present the individual character's decision making process and the factors that influence the decision. The audience should thereby observe to what degree the individual characters portray maturity in the Kantian sense. Braun's title *Simplex Deutsch* draws on Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus Teutsch*, and Braun has accurately described his desire to portray a typology on the stage:

Simplex Deutsch

typ des offenen, naiven, "gutwilligen" verhaltens
charakterlose figur, durch die die verhältnisse plastisch
werden
sieht (und begeht schließlich) grausamkeiten, ohne sie
als solche wahrzunehmen
sammelt nicht soziale erfahrungen: bleibt immer das
gedankenlose, rohe kind
zuletzt ein blutiger, zerstückelter hanswurst, der sich
totlacht: die Tränen des Vaterlands.⁴

This description clearly indicates the level of immaturity and indecisiveness that Braun wanted to portray.

In many instances, Braun's characters act only on their own behalf; indeed, Braun's goal is to highlight the senselessness of their decisions. One such example is the opening scene, an essay entitled "SÄCHSISCHER SIMPLIZIUS." In April 1945 two German soldiers, Schmidt and Sigusch, received orders to accompany the Hauptmann's wife to safety. When Schmidt recognizes the senselessness of fighting and opts to withdraw from battle, Sigusch tries to convince him otherwise. In the ensuing dispute, Schmidt shoots the woman. As SS soldiers appear, both men relate the same story, that the other is a deserter. The SS decide to shoot them both, but Schmidt and Sigusch draw their weapons first. Later, as the Russians approach, Schmidt regains his sense of duty and opens fire on the Russians. The Russians kill first Sigusch and then Schmidt as the war comes to an end. Schmidt demonstrates an inability to make a decision. When he decides to quit fighting he has the opportunity to change the course of his personal history. In the confrontation with the SS soldiers Schmidt must kill or be killed. In this instance he still acts according to his own best interests. Once confronted by Russian soldiers, however, the sense that society had instilled takes over; Schmidt follows orders and loses his life in the process. Ironically, the war was coming to an end, and had Schmidt stood by his decision not to fight, he probably would have survived.

Similarly in "KOMMENTAR I: HEIMATKUNDE," Braun depicts the Germans as an indecisive people, ready to follow any orders and quick to change allegiances. A series of leaders interact with a group of farmers; these farmers adjust their behavior according to the wishes of each successive leader. This turncoat mentality prompts a Red Army soldier to comment that these farmers are their own worst enemy:

Ihr selber

Seid eure Feinde. Ihr verlaßt eure Sache.

Euch kann nicht geholfen werden
In eurer Haut, in der der Feind steckt
Mit Zähnen und Klauen. Selber ihr
Müßt erschlagen werden.⁵

Like Schmidt, these farmers demonstrate an inability to remain true to their decisions.

In addition, Braun addresses stereotypes that are portrayed as typically German. In “POLENBLUT” he attacks the stereotype of the German hatred of foreigners. Although the setting is a school classroom in which the words “TÜRKEN RAUS” are written on a blackboard, Braun treats the historical example of Poland, which was overrun by Hitler’s Germany. In the scene, villagers murder a bridal couple because it was a mixed marriage between a German and a Pole:

So feiern wir [die Dorfbewohner] mit dem
ausländischen Feind
Der die [Braut] schändet und Deutschland meint.
Ein gesundes Volk läßt sich nicht unterkriegen
So werden wir die kranke Welt besiegen (98).

The couple’s murder indicates that the villagers cannot overcome the stereotype of hatred. This mixture of past and present confronts the audience with attitudes that have not changed much throughout history.

In “TROMMELN IN DER NACHT, 6” Braun composes a sixth scene to complement the five acts of Brecht’s play.⁶ Here Brecht’s Kragler, a German soldier returning from the front and a sympathizer with the revolutionary movement, must confront guards who believe he is one of the revolutionaries. A prostitute, Auguste, calls for the death of Rosa Luxemburg: “Die rote Rosa.

TÖTET ROSA. Die Flamme der Arbeiter” (103). In order to save his own life, Kragler becomes a counterrevolutionary and kills Rosa Luxemburg. The guards then regard him as a hero. As in the first scene, Braun confronts the audience with a character who has the opportunity to make a choice. Instead of following his revolutionary convictions, however, Kragler forgoes his ideals and acts only to save himself.

Kragler returns in the play with his wife, Anna, and Anna’s daughter Ulrike in “ULRIKE KRAGLER.” Here both Kragler and Anna, portrayed as capitalists, have attained a high standard of living, one which disgusts Ulrike. During the evening meal, scenes from the Vietnam War flicker on the evening news. Ulrike, unable to rectify the schism that exists between the capitalist life she and her parents enjoy and the numerous deaths that occur in the war for the furtherment of capitalism, shoots and kills her parents, whom she views as symbols of the problem. In her jail cell, Ulrike kills herself. Her actions invoke the biography of the West German terrorist Ulrike Meinhof, and thus serve as a brief negative commentary on the terrorism rampant in West Germany in the 1970s. Once again, Braun portrays Kragler as a man who adopts the ideology that best serves his own interests. He contrasts starkly with Ulrike, who cannot justify her own high standard of living in an exploitative world.

Braun only directly addresses the GDR in two scenes. In the first, “BEBEL oder DAS NEUE LEBEN/ MUSS ANDERS WERDEN. EINE KOMÖDIE,” he depicts the personal sacrifice GDR citizens must make for the good of the socialist system. Bebel is the foreman of a *Volkseigener Betrieb* (VEB), who proposes a three shift system to increase production. Revisiting the topic of the individual in conflict with society, Braun introduces a newly married couple, who is prevented from consummating its marriage because of the work schedule set forth by Bebel: Lisa must work

the nightshift while her husband toils during the day. Their role within the socialist production system interferes with their private sphere, and their private life eventually dissolves:

Soll ich dir sagen, was privat ist. Nämlich
Die Nacht ist mein privater Sektor, den
Laß ich mir nicht enteignen vom Betrieb (115).

Bebel plays the role of the staunch Party advocate, refusing to allow the couple to change shifts, because that means deviating from the established rules. Bebel's solution to the bride's problem is to make love to her himself. When Mrs. Bebel learns of her husband's indiscretions, she does not play the woman scorned, but rather, she views Bebel's actions positively, stating that he has finally found something that distracts him from his work. When Bebel and Lisa are called before the factory leadership, Bebel must choose between the woman and socialism:

Gesehen haben wir genug.
Im Dunkeln.
In der Halle.
Als wärst du verheiratet mit ihr.
Der Halle. Die du demoralisierst.
Der Frau.
Der Halle. Die deine Entlassung
Fordert und ihre.
Oder du entläßt sie.
Die Frau oder der Sozialismus, Bebel.
Die Frage ist dir neu (124).

Clearly, Braun makes references to the text, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* by the real August Bebel. Bebel chooses socialism, relieving Lisa, who is portrayed as having no freedom of choice in this situation, of her duties. Ultimately, Bebel's decision proves

beneficial to both parties: Lisa is finally able to spend her nights with her husband, and Bebel, who at first wants to leave his work, receives a promotion to the Minister's office in Berlin, because his actions corresponded to the will of the Party. Throughout this entire comedic interlude, the will of the individual remains secondary to the desires of the Party. The ridiculousness of the scene forces the audience to confront the Party's influence over their everyday lives.

In "DIE ENKEL FECHTENS BESSER AUS oder DER DISKRETE CHARME DER ARBEITERKLASSE" the audience encounters Bebel's son, who challenges the socialist system and displays less devotion to its ideology than his father. The Party advocate in this instance is Bebel's wife. After he presents her with a copy of *DIE FRAU UND DER SOZIALISMUS* for their anniversary, she becomes increasingly emancipated. She learns about Party doctrine, studies to become a lawyer, and earns a position as *Staatsanwalt*, leaving no time for her husband. Bebel's wife represents society; his tortured relationship with her represents the conflict between the individual and society. He resorts to violent measures to attain sexual relations with his wife: he disguises himself, breaks into his own house, and abuses her. Although he is arrested and locked up, he has achieved his personal goal: his wife is now pregnant. Here the individual's needs won out over the desire of society.

In the play's concluding scene, "BEFREIUNG," Bebel and Kragler make a final appearance as old men. It is the end of World War II and the two confront each other, as they dig themselves out of a rubble pit: a communist (Bebel) and a Fascist (Kragler). Bebel, unwilling to continue his pursuit of communist ideals, hangs himself. He is ordered, however, to continue the struggle and begin again. This indicates that society has not yet attained the

communist ideal and promotes Braun's contention that society's salvation lies with communism.

Braun contradicts this utopian vision with "AUFTRITT GODOT" in which he depicts the absurdity of society's patience for the arrival of utopia. Similar to the technique used in "Trommeln in der Nacht 6", Braun continues the skepticism of Beckett's existentialist play (originally suppressed in the GDR): Pozzo and Lucky are gone, but E(stragon) and W(ladimir) wait by a "Beckett-Bäumchen."⁷ A figure, G(odot), appears, but E and W don't recognize him. The anticipation has worn off and W maintains: "Wir warten auf nichts" (128). As G reveals his identity E and W remain disinterested:

G laut und fröhlich: Aha, Sie glauben mir nicht. Verständlich. Nur zu verständlich. Ich bin gekommen. Damit war nicht zu rechnen. Lenken Sie Ihren leuchtenden Blick hierher meine Freunde.
E schaut zu dem Blatt. W geht zur rechten Kulisse und setzt seine Suche fort.
Hier, diese Maske, das ist der echte Godot. Ihr Erlöser! Die Rettung. Ich nenne Jesus, Che Guevara, Jimi Hendrix, Buddha, na und soweit. Wie sie wollen. Die Züge der Zeit! (128).

Ultimately, G removes his mask and becomes B (Beckett). E and W have waited so long, that they no longer remember what they were waiting for. Whereas Beckett's original play was an existential examination of existence in "a state of radical unknowingness,"⁸ in Braun's scene, their wait is a metaphor for GDR society awaiting the arrival of the communist utopia. The mere fact that E and W no longer recognize G remarks on the stagnation of GDR society. Society has remained in its present form for so long that the communist ideal has become nothing

more than rhetoric. G's (as literary figure) transformation into B (as creator of this literary figure) underscores this rhetoric and renders it powerless. The absurdity of Beckett's original becomes the basis for Braun's parody. Because Beckett was unknown to GDR audiences, this scene indicates a marked rift in Braun's previous heritage appropriations. Clearly, his inability to come to terms with the societal stagnation he endured forced him not only to leave the confines of the GDR (within a literary context), but also to go beyond any reference point of experience for GDR audiences. While Beckett's original did contain at least an element of hope, as Graver expressed it: "Godot has become a concept--an idea of promise and expectation--of that for which people aware of the absence of coherent meaning in their lives wait in the hope that it will restore significance to their existence"⁹ Braun's version presents only complete despair. This resignation clearly makes Braun's allusions to Beckett inappropriate to the GDR's understanding of cultural heritage.

Braun's objective throughout *Simplex Deutsch* was to create a dialogue with his audience. In his notes from 16 January 1980 he posited that the entire structure of the play serves to shatter the illusion of reality:

im Simplex sind viele mittel der epischen form verwendet. montage; verzicht auf dialog (Sächsischer Simplex), fast durchweg aber auf konversationsdialog; demonstrierendes spiel (Heimatkunde, im grunde jede szene); erzählung (oder selbsterzählung: Die enkel fechtens besser aus) statt imitation von vorgängen; lehrstück und absurdes theater; kommentar, optische oder ideelle vision . . . alles dient einem zweck: die illusion der realität zu vermeiden zugunsten der kommunikation mit dem publikum, dem eigentlich interessanten theatervorgang. oder sehr anders gesagt: es

dient der freiheit (beim schreiben, darstellen und zuschauen), soziale gegensätze zu objektivieren.¹⁰

As we have already seen in earlier works, Braun presented his audience with contradictory situations but offered no solutions. Indeed, to the extent that all of the scenes in this play have a negative undertone that questions the reality of societal advancement throughout “German” history, Braun assumed that the audience would recognize that the characters made the wrong choices. This is definitely not a theatrical work that revolves around entertainment. Rather, following the premise of Brecht’s *Lehrstück*, it becomes the duty of the audience to analyze the decision making process of the characters in question and propose alternatives, a fact which the critic Peter Ullrich saw as the only positive aspect to the entire play.¹¹ Insofar as Braun confronted the audience with pieces of “German” history, he thereby forced it to come to terms with its past, paving the way (at least in theory) for that same audience to advance itself in socialism.

Returning to the concept of enlightenment, it represented more for Volker Braun than merely a period of development; it is also a thought process. In his own interpretation of Lessing, Braun asserted that Lessing would want us to stop trying to change and start interpreting the meaning of the social changes already in effect. It is precisely this principle that Braun followed in *Simplex Deutsch*:

Aufklärung, wie tut sie uns not, und anders als ich dachte! Als vergesellschafteter sozialer Erkenntnisprozeß, in dem öffentlich die Lösungen für eine Praxis debattiert werden, die uns aus unseren Verhältnissen reißt! Die Welt ist erkennbar, aber nicht weiter in den Denkgleisen von heute, die auf dem Schotter unsrer Strukturen ruhen(VF 78).

Braun's decision to relate various moments of German history indicated his desire to portray a "German" historical tradition on the stage. Just as Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus Teutsch* focused on the effects of the Thirty Years' War on society at that time, Braun investigated the traditions that shaped the society in which he lived. Grimmelshausen's protagonist suffers a series of setbacks because of the war, and ultimately retreats from the secular world, opting for a hermit's life, where he can devote himself to god. The setbacks that Braun's characters endure stem from their bad decision making. While we do not encounter figures who retreat from the world, we do see a godlike devotion to socialism (in Bebel's wife, for example). More significantly, however, we can detect that by recalling Grimmelshausen, Braun himself is retreating from his world, thereby taking a further step toward his psychological exile.

The various "German" historical moments that Braun includes indicate that his play was an attempt at a broader interpretation of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, that examined the roles of authority and hierarchical structures as the root of German problems. Patricia Herminghouse saw this authority as a relic of fascist tendencies.¹² Braun tried to demonstrate that the problems in his own society arose from a German mentality. Until society could come to terms with its relationship to authority, the contradictions that Braun portrayed would remain. The only chance to change the course of history was through individual action. Braun's characters, however, did not act according to what was just. They acted either according to society's expectations (Bebel) or their own egotism (Ulrike Kragler).

An interesting aside to Braun's development is that he emphasized a "German" tradition. This indicates that he no longer perceived West Germany, its people and traditions, as the "other".

Rather, both West and East Germans belonged to the same German race and must overcome similar problems. This is an important moment for Braun's development because it indicates that he has matured to such a point where the betterment of society in general was his goal. Although he had not abandoned his opinion that the socialist way of life was the correct path, he illustrated here, that the GDR could not progress if it continued to view itself in isolation. The abstractness and at times absurdity of Braun's message, however, indicates that he had lost touch with his audience. In his attempt to overcome his own disenchantment, in his search for answers in other literary possibilities, Braun began to draw away from his audience's sphere of experience. Interestingly enough, however, Braun returned to epic theater, to the lessons of Brechtian dramaturgy. Unfortunately, Braun did not demonstrate a unified theme in this play. While the purpose of this piece was to demonstrate that the hierarchical system was endemic to the German tradition, the audience could gain no sense of how these separate pieces could be harmonized into a unified whole. Thus, there was no indication that the piece could be productive for GDR society.

The play is, however, indicative of Braun's state of mind. In the late 1970s, Braun began to question his role in society and the proper way to present his message to his audience. In traveling from Grimmelshausen to Brecht to Beckett, searching for a means to reach his audience, Braun presented images that conflicted with his own utopian vision. The lack of continuity within the play therefore signals a *Spaltung* within Volker Braun.

Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor

Although Braun incorporates a montage of scenes in *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor* (1983-84), he unites the scenes thematically with a literary background. Braun's attempt to rewrite the story of the Nibelungs from a more contemporary perspective, qualifies as an example of what Girard Genette called paratextuality, the imitative relationship between a pastiche and its model. As a pastiche, Braun's drama assimilates historical facts, mythological elements from the medieval *Nibelungenlied*, and incorporates aspects of Friedrich Hebbel's *Die Nibelungen*. Braun's use of historical facts includes the Worms setting for the Burgundian kingdom; the character Aetius, leader of the West Roman army which conquered the Burgundians in 435-436; Burgundians vanquished by the Huns, who were aids to Aetius.¹³ Along with these historical and mythical elements, Braun infuses the text with moments of contemporary history and political machinations. Braun works from a larger concept than a hodge-podge re-presentation of an old myth, that serves as a masterful example of social criticism, which the GDR critic, Peter Ullrich, applauded: "Für mich gehört dieser Inszenierung zu den wesentlichsten, die in den letzten Jahren in unserem Land auf die Bühne kamen."¹⁴

The impetus for this theatrical work resulted from Braun's participation in a workshop that examined both the medieval legend and Hebbel's adaptation. Following Hebbel's example, Braun divides the play into three segments and provides explicit instructions for the proper interpretation and execution of the drama's three plots:

Die drei Teile des Stückes sind deutlich voneinander abzuheben: mythologisches Material/ Familiendrama/

Epochenstück. Die Frauenprotokolle spielen in einem Innenraum, im Deutschen Furor erscheint der Himmel, die Natur, die Geschichte. Die selben [sic] Figuren haben in jedem Teil ein anderes Naturell. Am römischen Rhein sind die starken Burgunden noch Halbstarke; Giseler erst im dritten Teil erwachsen. Alle Handlungen sind in ihrem Alter und ihrer Gegenwartigkeit zu zeigen.¹⁵

This concluding direction grants both reader and audience insight into the historical moral of Braun's theatrics. The inclusion of both medieval and contemporary references draws attention to the repetitiveness of history. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of two diverse temporal stages with the same problems warns the audience about complacency. If, as Braun indicated, history was destined to repeat itself, then society had not progressed from its state in medieval times. Braun saw the need for three separate segments in order to present the various layers of the problem: "Die schon gedachte Dreiteilung erlaubte aber, von allem Gebrauch zu machen, sozusagen schichtweise ästhetische Möglichkeiten des Stoffs freizulegen."¹⁶ The presence of the characters in all three parts serves to reinforce the continuity and repetitiveness of historical events.

The first segment relates the story of Siegfried the dragon slayer and adopts the mythological background of the Nibelungen song. The second piece, the conflict portrayed between the two queens, Brünhild and Kriemhild, presents the change of hands of power, the transfer from matriarchy to patriarchy. Brünhild's acquiescence to both Siegfried and Gunter foreshadows the subsequent repression of women in class society. Gilbert Badia has argued that Braun's portrayal was an attempt to depict when and how women allowed themselves to be subjugated. He simultaneously stated, however, that the independence the two women

display was Braun's attempt to give the audience a vision of the women of the future.¹⁷ In this instance, Braun once again addresses the topic of women's emancipation that he first broached in *Tinka*. Braun remarked that he found this Nibelungen-material particularly interesting because "die großen Frauengestalten aktuell [sind]."¹⁸ The subjugation of women in the past had been replaced by women's attempts at emancipation. The final part portrays the destruction of the Burgundians by Attila as well as an episode of the struggle between the Romans and the Huns. The topic of genocide, the elimination of the Burgundian race, also evokes parallels with Braun's present: "Und Burgunden gegen Burgunden, Deutsche gegen Deutsche. Die Parallelen haben einen gefährlichen Reiz."¹⁹ Although Braun's division only indicates these three parts, we can sense the inclusion of an additional fourth level that depicts scenes from the present. These present day contrasts include Siegfried in the role of a worker, a slaughterhouse scene, and the devastation of Germany after World War II. In "Im Schlachthof. Schulfilm" the character S. works in a slaughterhouse. He is the hero of the workers because he was willing to increase the plan by one percent. Here we note remnants of the characters Paul Bauch and Hans Hinze. These more contemporary images serve as a contrast to the historical-mythological basis of the work. In fact, Braun precedes the entire action of the play with a contemporary picture of the tragedy of war, "die Trümmerfrauen." Braun immediately presents a critique of patriarchal social structures that have produced a society that sends its men to war. The women are left behind to clean up: "uns bleibt der Dreck vom Krieg" (173). In capital letters Braun warns his audience: "WER IN DEN KRIEG ZIEHT [sic] IN DEN UNTERGANG" (173). This is both a foreshadowing of the eradication of the Burgundian race in the play and a warning against possible repercussions from the nuclear arms race carried on by the superpowers.

An anecdote from the Middle Ages relating the myths of Siegfried and Brünhild introduces the “Siegfried” segment. Modern cacophony (“Industrie-/ Kriegslärm” [178]) accompanies the medieval plot. As Siegfried arrives on the Rhine, Gunter and his people, Hagen, Gernot, Volker, and Kriemhild are amusing themselves in the water. Siegfried demands Gunter’s land, asserting rightful ownership because of his supremacy. He also tells of his own treasure (that of the Nibelungs) which he does not wish to possess, and offers it in exchange for Gunter’s kingdom. In addition, Siegfried indicates the vulnerable region between his shoulder blades to Hagen. Finally, Siegfried declares that he wants Kriemhild as his wife. Spying a mile stone, Siegfried challenges Gunter to a toss--Siegfried, able to throw farther, wins the contest. Gunter agrees to grant Siegfried his sister’s hand in marriage, if Siegfried will help Gunter to subdue Brünhild. Hagen embraces Siegfried and places his hand in Siegfried’s vulnerable spot, prompting the reply: “Du kennst die Stelle gut” (183). The segment concludes with Kriemhild’s *Falken*-dream.

This very short section is reminiscent of various elements of the first sixteen *Aventiure* from the *Nibelungenlied*. In transposing the order of events in the *Nibelungenlied*, which begins with Kriemhild’s dream, Braun chooses to emphasize the relationship and pact between Siegfried and Gunter--this plays an important role in the second segment. The contest between Gunter and Siegfried, which never took place in the medieval version, is an assimilation of Hebbel’s drama. Similarly, the character Volker is not present in the first part of the *Nibelungenlied*, but plays an integral part in Hebbel’s play. Since the object of the workshop was a contrastive juxtaposition with Hebbel’s drama, it is indeed logical that Braun would follow the structure of his play. Gerhard Preußner has argued, however that the character Volker serves as Volker Braun’s alter ego.²⁰ Many of the slogans Volker speaks in the final scene are more reminiscent of Braun than of the

Nibelungs. Of major significance is Braun's decision to rewrite both the medieval legend and Hebbel's trilogy when he allows Siegfried to divulge his own vulnerability: in both the medieval epic and Hebbel's drama Kriemhild betrays Siegfried when she reveals the mystery of his defenselessness to Hagen.

Braun's second segment "Frauenprotokolle" opens with a scene at the Worms train station, where Gunter's people have assembled to welcome Brünhild after Gunter's victory. Here Braun, in a manner reminiscent of Hebbel, implicitly adopts the medieval legend. The reader is not privy to the events in Iceland, which resulted in Brünhild's subjugation. Upon their return, Siegfried reminds Gunter of their pact and asks for Kriemhild's hand as his reward. Brünhild cannot comprehend why Gunter agrees to marry his sister to a servant. Hagen explains that Siegfried is rich and *edel*, and as proof, Siegfried bestows his treasure on Kriemhild. The entire scene reenacts portions of the medieval legend and Hebbel's 19th-century drama in the modern setting of a train station.

The second scene stages the altercation between Brünhild and Gunter on their fated wedding night. In the first part of the scene, Brünhild refuses to succumb to Gunter unless he reveals his secret about Siegfried. Despite repeated attempts, Gunter is unable to conquer Brünhild. She becomes violent, binds Gunter with her belt, and hangs him from a nail in the wall. In the scene's second part, Gunter and Hagen request Siegfried's aid with Brünhild. Siegfried dons his magic cloak, and by tricking Brünhild into believing he is Gunter, succeeds in obtaining Brünhild's capitulation to Gunter's desires.

Later, in "der Gürtel," a scene which follows Hebbel's adaptation, Siegfried discovers that Kriemhild is wearing Brünhild's chastity belt. She claims that she found it under their bed

and from its jewels recognized it as Brünhild's. Siegfried is annoyed and ashamed, but presents Kriemhild with the chastity belt in exchange for her silence.

Kriemhild's arrogance prohibits her from keeping her promise to Siegfried. In "Streit der Königinnen" both Kriemhild and Brünhild maintain that they are the most beautiful and that their respective husbands are the strongest and richest. Brünhild, as the wife of the king, considers herself superior to Kriemhild, who is married to a mere servant of the king. Kriemhild, remembering the story of Brünhild's submission, objects and challenges Brünhild's privilege of entering Church first. Dressed in Brünhild's chastity belt, Kriemhild proceeds to the church where she continues to insult Brünhild, calling her a whore, and informing her that Siegfried is the one with whom she slept in order to consummate her marriage. As proof, Kriemhild opens her dress revealing the chastity belt. Brünhild enters a state of shock, and Kriemhild proceeds into the church. When the men arrive, Brünhild relates the incident, and orders Gunter to kill Siegfried.

In the following scene, Kriemhild experiences her second dream in which Hagen attempts to kill Siegfried. Later, in "Kriemhild's Rache," she learns of Siegfried's death. She vows revenge and disperses part of Siegfried's treasure in an attempt to purchase loyalties for an army that will fight against Gunter and his men. She informs her mother that she will marry Etzel, and that her will to avenge Siegfried's death will not end until they are all extinct. In this scene, the marriage to Etzel is portrayed as Kriemhild's wish, rather than the will of her brother Gunter. Here, we can note that Braun's play shares a similarity with Heiner Müller's *Germania Tod in Berlin* (1956/1971), a play, that also portrays various stages of German history, including a scene that revises the Nibelungen story. Gunter, Hagen, Volker, and Gernot appear dressed for battle and determined to avenge Siegfried's death at

the hands of the Huns. Here they have rewritten their own history so they will not have to confront the truth of their actions.²¹

The final segment, "Deutscher Furor," replays the battle of the Burgundians and the Huns. The first scene presents warriors and farmers arming themselves against each other. But a young person, adopting the motto of the unofficial GDR peace movement, persuades them to put down their weapons:

Höret, ihr Himmel, und Erde höre [sic]. Wohin soll man uns noch schlagen? Was sollen unsere Opfer? Wascht euch, reinigt euch, laßt ab vom Bösen. Lernet gutes tun, trachtet nach Recht, helft den Unterdrückten, führt die Sache der Witwen. Wir wollen die Schwerter zu Pflugscharen und die Spieße zu Sicheln machen. Denn es wird kein Volk wider das andre ein Schwert aufheben, und sie werden hinfort nicht mehr kriegern lernen (221-222).

In the second part of this scene Gunter, Hagen, and Siegfried are depicted as prisoners of the Romans.

Although the second segment of the play informed us that Siegfried is dead, we do not see the events surrounding his death until scene two of "Deutscher Furor." Hagen kills Siegfried by stabbing him in the stomach. Although this deviates from the original version, from Hebbel's version, and from the foreshadowing in the first segment of Braun's own play, the manner of Siegfried's murder is not important. His death, however, signifies the continuity among the works and the inevitability of historical events, if one does nothing to change the course of history. By omitting much of the intrigue which the original and Hebbel's version incorporated, Braun strips the story down to the basic

fable--foregoing literary techniques for a representation of the repetitiveness of such violent acts.

Braun moves the setting to the Worms train station, when Rüdiger and Iring, accompanied by an army, bear a message about the impending visit of Etzel and Kriemhild. This departs both from the original *Nibelungenlied* and from Hebbel's adaptation. In these versions Gunter is summoned to visit Kriemhild and Etzel by Etzel's messenger Rüdiger. The reason for the visit derives from Kriemhild's wish to have her baby baptized. In Siegfried's memory, she refers to her son as the king of the Burgundians.

In the first scene, that depicts the Burgundians' demise, Kriemhild expresses her astonishment that the Burgundians are armed and dressed for battle. Etzel and Hagen confront each other, and, as occurred in Hebbel's trilogy, Hagen decapitates Kriemhild's and Etzel's child. This provokes war between the two nations. Confusion reigns in the war scenes, but a discussion between Hagen and Volker delivers Braun's message. As the blood of the Burgundians mingles on the steps with that of the Huns, the following exchange occurs:

VOLKER: Wir sind ein Blut.

HAGEN: Ist das dein ganzer Witz.

VOLKER: Ein Treppenwitz.

HAGEN: Der Witz von der Geschichte.

VOLKER: Den will ich mir merken. Ich versteh ihn nicht. Warum er blutig ist. Ich muß das wissen (238-239).

In this dialogue Braun presents the moral of history. This historical and mythical war, a bloodbath, is a message to society of the 1980s, which was caught up in Cold War politics and nuclear proliferation. The blood of the Huns and the Burgundians

symbolizes the blood of all wars. Volker's inability to draw this conclusion reflects the persistent lack of understanding of history demonstrated by world leaders in the 20th century. Peter Ullrich has claimed that although the defeat of the Burgundians is the historical background of this third segment, the larger message deals with "Großmachtpolitik, Krieg und Vernichtung."²² Braun's messages here echo the sentiments of his compatriot Christa Wolf. Her narrative, *Kassandra* (1983), as well as the accompanying lectures on poetics, included her criticisms of the tendency toward world destruction present in political rhetoric during the 1980s. Wolf approached the topic from a feminist perspective, arguing that patriarchal dominance in political systems had created the crisis situation.²³

Braun embellishes his critique with a comment from Gunter: "Das Entsetzliche ist, daß wir wissen, daß wir das Falsche machen--und es dennoch tun" (239). Once again Braun addresses his society, beseeching it to contemplate its actions. Through his portrayal of historical repetition, Braun sought to educate his audience to the underlying reasons for the re-occurrence of war. He thus hoped to deter contemporary society from duplicating the mistakes of the past. Volker, quoting Rosa Luxemburg, remarks: "WIR MÜSSEN ANDERS DENKEN" (240). Society would never grasp the lessons of history and search for other solutions if it did not change its way of thinking. The inclusion of a Rosa Luxemburg quote ties this play to the messages Braun had presented earlier in *Simplex Deutsch*.

Volker Braun was convinced of the importance that the past can have for the present:

. . . die Gegenwart schleppt so viel Altes mit, alte Verlaufsformen, Strukturen, Denkweisen, daß die alten Vorgänge als Modell für heutige dienen können. Ein

Umstand, der zu bedauern ist, der aber Geschichte für die Kunst darstellbar macht. Nur wenn Linien vom Gestern ins Heute als brennende spürbar sind, wird ein Stoff kunstwürdig Aufregend an den alten großen Stoffen ist das Unerledigte²⁴

As in his other dramas, Braun did not offer any concrete solutions to contemporary problems here. His objective was to highlight the parallels between the past and the present. In this way, the audience should recognize unresolved conflicts from the past (“das Unerledigte”), such as society’s constant return to violence prohibiting it from progress, in hopes that this problem would be resolved.

The battle scene closes with Kriemhild imploring Etzel to destroy Hagen. The next scene, “DAS KATALAUNISCHE FELD,” tells of Attila’s death in Gallien 12 years later. It also describes the legend that the ghosts of the dead continue to fight for three days, and depicts Aetius commanding Siegfried’s ghost to the front. In the background are shouts of “Sieg Heil” (243). The inclusion of the Nazi greeting transforms the action to more recent history. Siegfried, now a worker, speaks:

WORUM GEHT ES, GENOSSEN
Im verendeten Wald
Die Götter stürzen sich aus dem Himmel
Auf ihre Gefolgschaft, MACH WAS
Im Jahr 1984
Der stationierte Tod
BRÜDER BEFEHDEN SICH UND FÄLLEN EINANDER
BEILALTER SCHWERTALTER
Mach was Kollege
EH DIE WELT ZERFÄLLT.
Industrie-/Kriegslärm (243-244)

The inclusion of the date 1984, the time at which Braun was working on the play and a possible reference to George Orwell's novel, once again recalls the present. The scene refers to Rome in the image of a superpower, to which its allies must subjugate themselves. Here Braun directly criticizes both the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as their power over NATO or Warsaw Pact countries.²⁵ The stationing of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe and the presence of SS-20s in East Bloc nations undoubtedly inspired Braun's criticism of the world political situation. As early as 1981 Braun had described the arms race as "das ureigenste Geschäft des Status quo" (VF 19). The repeated images and references to the present disturb the audience. As Brecht intended with his distancing effects, audience attention is continually diverted from the unfolding of the legend; instead, the audience is urged to reflect on the actions and their implications. The critical reception, although it acknowledged the play's political message, was not very impressed with Braun's text. Jürgen Beckelmann, while acknowledging the various tricks and important messages in the play, found it rather trite. Andreas Roßmann, reviewing the first performance in the Federal Republic in Bonn, argued that the play's plot did not viably convey the relationship between past and present. He further claimed that the myth was reduced to a mere comic strip.²⁶

In the next to the last scene Kriemhild kills Hagen. Etzel brings her the bodies of her son and her three brothers and tells her "Halte sie fest. Das ist dein Hort" (247). Kriemhild's riches have dissolved into a legacy of death. The play's conclusion completes a cycle, repeating its beginning. In the final scene "ENT-TRÜMMERUNG," a search party carries the flag of Weimar and searches through the rubble "klassischer / feudaler / bürgerlicher Schutt" (247). The three adjectives represent three distinct political stages in German history, all of which were terminated by

war. As the play concludes, a cripple orders the *Trümmerfrauen*: “Ans Werk, die Damen. Ihr dürft Hand anlegen” (248). As at the beginning, the women are once again responsible for the clean up. Ulrich Schreiber, who reviewed a production in Bonn that included Brünhild’s appearance as a “Trümmerfrau,” argued in favor of the didactic nature of Braun’s theatrical work. Brünhild’s emergence as a woman from more recent history reinforces Braun’s message that history is repetitious. Schreiber astutely recognized that her appearance should not be construed as the perpetuation of conditions, but could lead to their abolition.²⁷ Gerhard Ebert asserted that Braun’s use of “Trümmerfrauen” in the final scene cast historical events in a contemporary light: “Womit der Dichter all die vergangenen Jahrhunderte gleichsam als eine Vorzeit der Kriege assoziiert und auf die historische Chance zum Frieden verweist, die der Menschheit an der kommenden Jahrtausendwende erstmals gegeben ist.”²⁸ It was the idea of freedom that made Siegfried attractive as a hero to Friedrich Engels: “Siegfried ist der Repräsentant der deutschen Jugend . . . wir wollen hinaus in die freie Welt, wir wollen die Schranken der Bedächtigkeit umrennen und ringen um die Krone des Lebens, die Tat.”²⁹ Whereas Engels’ interpretation of Siegfried is positive; Braun’s emphasis on repetitive destruction negates Engels’ comment.

Braun’s interpretation of the medieval legend served to highlight violent moments in the German tradition. Although *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor* did not offer any solutions to the problems in society, it depicted the roots of violence and encouraged society to alter its current understanding of conflict. This corroborates Silvia Schlenstedt’s assertion that the importance of myth in socialist writing derived from its incorporation of the historical dialectic in the constellation of the present.³⁰

It is obvious that Braun wished to change society's course. In Hebbel's *Nibelungen-Trilogy* (written between 1855 and 1860), the Nibelungs were destined for extinction because, as Herbert Kaiser asserts, Gunter ranked the solidarity among men and their superiority over women higher than the protection of humanity and of justice.³¹ The inclusion of the scenes with the *Trümmerfrauen* as members of society responsible for rebuilding, signals Braun's attempt to override the reification of women found in Hebbel's play. Their disdain for war criticized patriarchal hierarchy and signaled a concern for humanity in general. Furthermore, their appearance at the conclusion may also signal not only their duty to clean up after the war, but also women's attempt to reclaim history from the patriarchy. Women can begin again approaching conflict with a different perspective and ultimately avoiding a repetition of past mistakes.

The multiple coding in Braun's version demonstrated on several levels the dangers of political machinations and the inherent tendency of history toward repetition. By parodying several instances of violence in history, Braun encouraged his audience not only to re-examine the historical events, but also to evaluate what sort of progress society had made. Until 1989, Cold War politics and the race for nuclear build-up dictated society's course. This "war mentality" indicated that society had not really progressed. It became, therefore, the duty of the audience to take action to change the course of history.

The intermingling of legend, history, and literature in *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor* epitomizes the complexity of imagery that infused Braun's later dramatic works. At the outset I asserted that Braun's play was more than a reconstruction of the medieval myth and Hebbel's adaptation. The action on the stage is continuously disrupted by images of more modern German history. The intrigue, so vital to interpretations of

both Hebbel and the medieval legend, is omitted, leaving the audience with images of brutality that, viewed in isolation, emphasize the senseless destruction of war. The added dimension of contemporary world problems constantly thrusts the audience into the present, thereby forcing it to draw parallels with history. Braun employed these paratextual references to connect remote history with contemporary reality.

If we view this play as one more way-station in Braun's search for a productive means to portray the ills of his society, we find that, as in the historical plays, he once again concentrated on abstract theoretical portrayals. Although the references to Germany indicate a desire to concentrate on problems that had particular relevance for his society, the inclusion of global problems signaled that Braun was observing his society through a broader viewscope. He situated the GDR within the global situation and recognized that the GDR, albeit directly affected by these problems, was indeed also a contributing factor to their existence. In the figure of Siegfried, Braun stated his hopes for the future: "Den [Weg] weiß ich selber. In ein freies Land./ Das will ich Kriemhild zeigen. Warum bei/ Den Knechten wohnen. Das ist euer Platz./ In der Gefolgschaft jetzt. Am Trog der Treue./ Im Kollektiv der Furcht/ Am Strick des Staats" (226). Yet, what Braun ultimately portrayed is tragic--his plot demonstrated only that history repeats itself. The problem thusly stated, Braun offered no solution, only platitudes that things must change. His only hope for the future in August 1983 depended on a radical change in society's structure: "die hoffnung braucht einen anderen gesellschaftlichen boden, um sich noch einmal und realistisch zu formulieren."³² Whether Braun's audience could actually perceive this message is questionable. In his quest to portray questions that had meaning for his audience, he only succeeded in distancing himself even further. Unable to reach his audience, his journey into literature served as his only solace.

Braun's despair grew out of the recognition, that the problems he was depicting on stage were not unique to the GDR social system, but were inherent in world social and power structures: "Angesichts der Zuspitzung der irdischen Probleme muß man aber das Erschrecken nicht mehr lehren, die Schockmethode wird stumpf, und man ist verwiesen darauf, die Widersprüche auszuhalten und nicht unbedingt nach Lösungen zu fischen: Haltungen zu ermöglichen, die in dieser ungeheuren Welt noch realistisch sind."³³ Braun's vision for a better future was utopian and therefore unachievable.

In adapting a medieval legend, Braun took a step back into German literary history, indicating that the power struggles portrayed date back further than the Thirty Years' War. The fact that problems have been around for so long lends the play an air of despair. Braun's connection to his audience's reality grew ever more tenuous, as his despair increased and his utopian vision clouded. In the plays that follow, Braun once again confronts more modern literary references. Yet, at the same time, his attitude toward exile becomes solidified.

Notes

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung? Aufsätze zur Geschichte und Philosophie*, ed. Jürgen Zehbe (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 55.

² Ulrike Meyer, "Die Großmutter und die Utopie des Verzichts. Heftige Diskussion zwischen Schülern und Volker Braun über sein Theaterstück *Simplex Deutsch*," *Der Tagesspiegel* 15 April 1990: VIII.

³ *Sonderheft zu Volker Braun Simplex Deutsch und Dmitri*, Schauspielheft 3, Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, 1982/83, 6.

⁴ See *Sonderheft* 3.

⁵ Volker Braun, *Simplex Deutsch, Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 6 110. All references are to this edition and noted parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Braun was reviewing Brecht's late theoretical writings "Bei der Durchsicht meiner ersten Stücke", which became the impetus for his composition of the additional scene.

⁷ One can argue here that Braun also takes up where Brecht left off, since Brecht never managed to complete his *Gegenentwurf* to Beckett's *Godot*.

⁸ Lawrence Graver, *Samuel Beckett Waiting for Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 23.

⁹ Graver 43.

¹⁰ *Sonderheft* 12.

¹¹ Peter Ullrich, "'Gebt ihr ein Stück, so gebt es gleich in Stücken . . .'" *Simplex Deutsch* von Volker Braun am Berliner Ensemble," *Theater der Zeit* 35.7 (1980): 63.

¹² Patricia Herminghouse, "Vergangenheit als Problem der Gegenwart: Zur Darstellung des Faschismus in der neueren DDR-Literatur," *Literatur der DDR in den siebziger Jahren*, eds. Peter Uwe Hohendahl und Patricia Herminghouse (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1983) 259-294.

¹³ These wars took place in the Burgundian kingdom, which both Hebbel and Braun incorporate into their plays.

¹⁴ Peter Ullrich, "Der Nibelungen Not. Uraufführung von Volker Brauns *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor* am Deutschen Nationaltheater Weimar," *Theater der Zeit* 42.2 (1987): 50.

¹⁵ Volker Braun, *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor, Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 8 (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1992) 174. Subsequent references to this edition will be noted parenthetically in the text.

¹⁶ "Volker Braun im Gespräch zu *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor*," *Theater der Zeit* 42.2 (1987): 53.

¹⁷ Gilbert Badia, "Über Volker Brauns Dramatik," *Die Literatur der DDR 1976-1986. Akte der Internationalen Konferenz Pisa, 1987*, eds. Anna Chiarloni, Gemma Sartori, Fabrizio Cambi (Pisa: Giardini, 1988) 349.

¹⁸ "Gespräch mit Volker Braun," *Szenische Geschichtsdarstellung. Träume über Wissen?*, eds. Michael W. Schlicht und Siegfried Quandt (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1989) [Geschichte--Grundlage und Hintergründe 2] 16.

¹⁹ "Gespräch mit Volker Braun" 16.

²⁰ Gerhard Preußner, "Mythenrecycling. Zur Westdeutschen Erstaufführung von Volker Brauns *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor* in Bonn," *tageszeitung* 5 Oct. 1989: 11.

²¹ See also Ulrich Schreiber, "Germania Tod in Bonn. Volker Brauns *Siegfried* am Rhein," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 14 Oct. 1989: 8.

²² Ullrich 50.

²³ Christa Wolf, *Kassandra* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1983) and *Voraussetzung einer Erzählung: Kassandra* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1983). For an account of Wolf's political critique in the narrative and essays see Anna K. Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 178-209.

²⁴ "Aus einem Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 8 257-258.

²⁵ Werner Schulze-Reimpell declares that this aspect of the play makes its message equally important to East and West. See Schulze-Reimpell, "Die neuen Nibelungen. Weimar brachte eine Braun-Uraufführung," *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* 4-6 Jan. 1987: 9.

²⁶ Jürgen Beckelmann, "Demontage als stilistische Führwerkerei. Volker Brauns 'Nibelungen-Report' aus Weimar in der DDR-Hauptstadt," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 15 April 1987: 17. Andreas Roßmann, "Mythentypen auf dem Comic-Strip. Volker Brauns

Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor am Schauspiel Bonn,” *FAZ* 9 Oct. 1989: 35.

²⁷ Schreiber 8. Schreiber also sees this as a reason why Braun did not incorporate Hebbel’s conclusion, which presented salvation through the man on the cross.

²⁸ Gerhard Ebert, “Die Nibelungensage in einer zeitgenössischen Sicht,” *Neues Deutschland* 7 Jan. 1987: 4.

²⁹ Friedrich Engels, “Siegfrieds Heimat,” *Engels Werke. Ergänzungsband Schriften bis 1844*, ed. Karl Marx. 2. Teil (Berlin: Dietz, 1967) 108.

³⁰ Silvia Schlenstedt, “Gedanken zur Verwendung mythologischer Motive in der sozialistischen Dichtung,” *Weimarer Beiträge* 18.8 (1972): 192.

³¹ Kaiser considered the play a *Schicksalsdrama*. Herbert Kaiser, *Friedrich Hebbel. Geschichtliche Interpretation des dramatischen Werks* (München: Fink, 1983) 117.

³² Braun, “Arbeitsnotizen,” *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 8 250.

³³ “Aus einem Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann,” 256.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIETY IN TRANSITION: FROM DESPAIR TO EXILE

Braun's examinations of history, particularly German traditions, contributed to his despair. While he had been searching for a means to explain why past revolutions had failed, he found that the cause of contradictions was indeed inherent in the social structures he investigated. As a next step, Braun tried to assimilate this material and evaluate his own society. Yet, he found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with the contradictions and abuses he detected in his society. The message contained in his literature grew increasingly utopian, signaling the extent to which Braun had lost touch with GDR reality. Instead of addressing problems concretely, Braun created unreal scenarios where his utopian visions could be realized. From 1982 to 1988, he composed and published several works that were to a large extent ideological. In the poetry collection, *Langsamer knirschender Morgen*, for instance, he couched his criticism in utopian visions.

In the plays *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* he concentrated his portrayals on a vision of the future. Continuing the broader context begun in *Simplex Deutsch* and *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor*, Braun's message applied not only to the GDR, but was also applicable to Europe as a whole. These visions of the future provided the audience with a means of escape from everyday life; once again the theater became a place of illusion. But, in keeping with his own theatrical techniques, Braun did interrupt the action with criticism against his society. Interestingly enough, Braun opted to rely once again on literary

forebears for these presentations, abandoning his investigations of history. The use of Anna Seghers in *Transit Europa* brought the literary references closer to GDR experience. With the use of Chekhov (who was canonized in Soviet literature as a classic) in *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*, Braun journeyed back in time to another literary landscape.

Transit Europa

During 1985 and 1986 Volker Braun penned the play *Transit Europa*, “Ausflug der Toten”, whose title and subtitle awaken in the reader an affinity with the works of Anna Seghers. Braun even indicates that the text was written “nach Anna Seghers”.¹ In addition to the obvious *Transit* reference, an implied recognition of society in a transitional state, Braun deftly addressed the question of exile. The play, written in turbulent times, reflects the historical situation of the GDR which in 1984 granted permission for thousands of residents to move to the West, thereby placing themselves in exile. On another level this play reveals a personal side of Volker Braun and demonstrates his attempt to come to terms with the historical situation and examine his own role in society.

In adapting Seghers’ work, Braun opens a channel for dialogue with his predecessor’s text. His implied reader, one familiar with Seghers’ work and the circumstances under which it was composed, is invited to seek comparisons with the situation in the GDR in the mid 1980s. Because she was one of the cultural leaders in the budding socialist state, Anna Seghers served as a privileged model for writers who came after her. Braun’s *Transit Europa* takes the themes of Seghers’ novel and sets them in the 1980s, while simultaneously responding to Seghers’ text. Braun thereby “hybridizes” and “re-accentuates” Seghers’ original utter-

ances.² He not only continues the message of *Transit*, but adds his own voice to it, expanding on Seghers' original concept.³

Braun and Seghers shared a political-geographic bond in the GDR, but stem from different ideological backgrounds. Seghers grew up in a bourgeois family; she first encountered Marxism and revolutionary thought at the University of Heidelberg. Her work draws on her life experiences, particularly the emotional scars of National Socialist terror and physical exile in Mexico. Furthermore, after choosing to settle in the GDR, Seghers actively promoted her state publicly. She chose to overlook mistakes and was unwilling to participate in any type of public protest that could possibly endanger the implementation of socialism. The texts that she wrote in the GDR depict existentially the protagonists' preference for socialist Germany. Her loyalty to the Party and the state was particularly evident during the 1957 show trial of Walter Janka. Janka was falsely accused of treasonous behavior and subsequently sent to prison. Although he was released in 1960, his name was not cleared until 1989. Seghers knew of Janka's innocence, and she could have spoken out during his trial; she opted not to reveal what she knew. Her loyalty to the State prohibited her from exercising any criticisms publicly. Unlike Seghers, Volker Braun grew into the socialist system as a child. His memories are shaped by the founding of the German Democratic Republic and the establishment of socialism. Although Braun's frame of reference is idealist, he sought to unmask society's contradictions in his works, in the hope that his textual provocations would motivate his society toward change--his efforts can be characterized by a desire to promote democratic socialism.

The historical circumstances to which Braun and Seghers responded differ considerably. Nonetheless, Braun's appropriation of Seghers establishes a dynamic relationship between past and

present texts. Braun attempts to push Seghers' work to the limit, a task inherent in his *oeuvre* and one which adheres to a position he articulated in the programmatic essay "Politik and Poesie" (1971): "Poesie muß ans Ende gehen" (EG 98). Braun's approach to Seghers' texts indicates a desire not to imitate, but to extend Seghers' original point. Braun used Seghers as a vehicle for his message. Since Seghers' texts were well known to many GDR readers, Braun's multiple references to particular texts had the potential for recognition by the audience. Thus, the *Transit* text offers us a glimpse at Braun's appropriation of a compatriot and an analysis of two German societies in a state of flux, two groups of people facing decisions about exile.

In *Transit* (1948) Seghers confronts her readers with the protagonist Seidler, an escapee from a concentration camp. Seidler is fleeing for his life and eventually winds up in the port city of Marseilles. He has no intention of leaving Marseilles for a distant land; rather, his sole purpose there is to find Weidel's wife and return the dead man's belongings to her. Seidler views Marseilles only as a way-station. He acts as an observer, listening to the stories of the people he meets in order to pass the time until he can leave Marseilles for another part of France. As he hears their stories, he at first finds the paper chase necessary for obtaining visas and transits ridiculous. But, almost as if in a state of ecstasy, Seidler becomes intricately involved with the bureaucracy and begins his own hunt for a visa, obtaining everything under the assumed name, Weidel. The plot turns absurd when Seidler finally meets Marie, Weidel's wife and a woman whom he had admired from a distance for some time. Marie makes Seidler's acquaintance during her search for Weidel. She mistakenly believes that Weidel is in Marseilles; she does not realize that Seidler has been posing as Weidel. Seidler vows to help her attain the necessary visas, but only in order to gain her affections and divert

her from her current involvement with a doctor. He then makes elaborate plans so that he and Marie can leave Marseilles together.

Seidler also submits to the visa frenzy for another reason: survival. Although he never really intends to leave Marseilles, Seidler must at least appear to wish to leave in order to receive permission to reside in the city. Survival, therefore, is the dominant theme of Seghers' novel, which is really the story of those persecuted by the Nazis and their attempts to stay alive. These refugees have a minimal existence, constantly scrounging for money and ration cards. Seidler describes their existence as an uncertain fight for survival as they flee from a known evil and surrender themselves to the unknown:

. . . niemals waren die Tratscher alle geworden, die bange waren um ihre Schiffsplätze und ihre Gelder, auf der Flucht vor allen wirklichen und eingebildeten Schrecken der Erde. Mütter, die ihre Kinder, Kinder, die ihre Mütter verloren hatten. Reste aufgeriebener Armeen, geflohene Sklaven, aus allen Ländern verjagte Menschenhaufen, die schließlich am Meer ankamen, wo sie sich auf die Schiffe warfen, um neue Länder zu entdecken, aus denen sie wieder verjagt wurden; immer alle auf der Flucht vor dem Tod, in den Tod.⁴

Seidler thus views this flight as pointless. He argues that there is no guarantee of safety in the distant lands, proposing that new persecutors will always arise.

Braun chooses this basic storyline as the framework for *Transit Europa*. The setting is again Marseilles in occupied France; the time is 1941. In Braun's adaptation only a skeleton of the fable remains. The protagonists' names are different, but Seghers' original cast shines through: Seghers' Weidel becomes

Braun's Weiler, Seidler is now Seidel, and Marie is Sophie, the name of one of the characters in Seghers' narrative "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen" (1946). We do not know how or why Braun's Seidel arrives in Marseilles, and he stays for only one reason--because of Sophie. In Braun's version, survival remains the focal point, but becomes more broadly defined. Wartime Marseilles becomes a metaphor for Braun's society. The 1984 exodus of GDR citizens to the West signalled to Braun that his society was destined for destruction. Such a drain on the populace and work force could only result in the demise of the GDR, an omen later born out by the masses in the summer and fall of 1989.

In Braun's opening scene, a lone character identified only as "Der Schwarze" relates the fate of the fleeing refugees on the passenger ship, *Montreal*--everyone died when the ship sank between Dakar and Martinique. The final words which "Der Schwarze" utters--"Die Lebenden sind die, welche kämpfen" (107)--call for resistance. The audience, however, has no clue as to the nature of the fight.

When the *Transit* plot begins, Seidel has arrived in Marseilles and takes possession of a room in which another German had just hanged himself. Although Seidel does not possess the proper paperwork, the hotel manager allows him to stay. While they are haggling over the room, Seidel encounters Sophie for the first time. Later he receives a visa from the Mexican consulate, the one that had been prepared for Weiler, the former occupant of Seidel's room. The consulate does not understand Seidel's protests, and assumes that Weiler has simply adopted an alias. Meanwhile, Sophie's companion, a doctor, learns that his visa has been given to someone else. At the same time, Sophie continues the search for her husband Weiler. Finally, both Sophie and the doctor obtain the necessary documents and depart from Marseilles on the *Montreal*. Seidel decides to forgo his passage on the

Montreal, and instead joins the resistance: “Die Welt ist ein Fragment, ich muß auf Montage” (137). Here Seidel rises to the call of “der Schwarze” at the beginning of the play: only those who fight can live. The underlying message of Seidel’s choice, directed at the citizens of the GDR, was Braun’s plea for a better society. If the world is still fragmentary, then society has not yet attained its goals. Braun appealed to the citizens of the GDR to remain and work for the betterment of society.

Braun’s message is ironic for several reasons. He wrote this drama in the years immediately following the GDR government’s decision to allow many of the citizens to leave. In April 1984 thirty-five managed to escape through the West German embassy in Prague. In an effort to avoid further scandal, the government relaxed the restrictions, resulting in more than 36,000 people leaving the GDR to establish permanent residences in the West.⁵ We can assume that Braun viewed this policy as a sign of government defeat. While he wanted his audience to acknowledge the contradictions in GDR society and find ways to correct them, change did not entail the dissolution of the GDR. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, he was still searching for a democratic socialist state: “Wir müssen zusammenbleiben, um uns wahrzunehmen; suchen wir die Staatsform, die ein Protestmarsch bleibt gegen die elenden Verhältnisse.”⁶

By the time *Transit Europa* reached the stage in 1988, the mood of the citizenry had drastically changed. Braun addresses the idea of fighting for survival only months before the mass exodus of GDR citizens to the West in 1989. We can only speculate whether Braun was aware of the growing unrest brewing within the GDR populace. Furthermore, in presenting *escape* as an underlying theme of the text, Braun addresses the momentary rift in the Wall in 1984. The play depicts places that were forbidden and that most GDR citizens had never seen. For the majority of

East Germans, travel to distant Western lands could only occur in their dreams.

To underscore the idea of survival, Braun includes two interludes in the play that not only interrupt the action, but direct the audience's attention to more recent events. In the first, "Der Ausflug der Toten," Braun makes obvious references to Seghers' narrative "Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen." In this narrative, Seghers' protagonist, currently in exile in Mexico, remembers an excursion from her school days. Most of her schoolmates are dead, having suffered severely at the hands of the Nazis. The choices that the girls made, including, for some, joining the Nazi Party, had a direct impact on their later lives.⁷ Seghers clearly illustrates the connection that exists between past actions and present behavior. She further explains, that one should only speak of the past in a way that demonstrates an awareness of the consequences of past behavior.⁸ Braun was well-aware of the importance of the past. It is for this reason that he incorporated Seghers' story into the interlude. Clearly, Braun was trying to warn his audience to make decisions carefully.

Seghers' narrative is reflective. Braun's excursus, on the other hand, is a mixture of impressions, depicting the difficult situation of those who resist:

Ich wußte nicht, was das Ziel ist. / . . . Der letzte offene
Hafen. Das offene Meer. / Es war die Rettung. Es war
der Tod. / Wir hatten das Leben hinter uns gelassen. /
Das Meer ist das Ziel, das Meer von Möglichkeiten! /
Wir waren Tote auf Urlaub. / Eine Karte der Welt ver-
dient nicht einmal einen Blick, wenn das Land Utopia
auf ihr fehlt War ich der Mensch für die andere
Seite? . . . Ein Mensch ist, wer widersteht. / Es gab
keine andere Seite (123-124).

In this interlude, Braun mingles thoughts on utopia, resistance, and disillusionment. He includes no stage directions for the proper execution of the scene. This affords the director the freedom to choose how the lines will be spoken and by whom. Although lacking in directional clarity, the sequence synthesizes the motivations behind the actions of the three main characters, Seidler, Sophie, and the doctor.

Protest, most poignantly indicated by the sentence, “Ein Mensch ist, wer widersteht,” is the central focus of this interlude. In quoting from Peter Weiss’ *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, Braun underscores the broader theme of resistance and directly refers to the execution of Harro Schulze-Boysen. Because of its legitimization principles based on antifascist resistance, the GDR often revered resistance fighters in the Third Reich. The organized efforts under the tutelage of Harro Schulze-Boysen and Arvid Harnack epitomized the anti-fascist resistance work of communists during the Third Reich. Peter Weiss’ trilogy was of particular interest to GDR authors. In his novel, Weiss represented a contribution to antifascist literature from a socialist perspective. In particular, Weiss’ portrayal of the working class’s efforts to act humanely underscores the GDR’s argument for legitimation. On a deeper level, Weiss addresses a different type of resistance, the resistance to “politische Unmündigkeit”, “Geistige Unterdrückung”, and “die Bevormundung durch Institutionen und Personen.”⁹ Braun also alludes to the atrocities of both Hitler and Stalin. The absurd and grotesque intermingling of these references confronts the audience with the complexity of difficulties that resistance fighters must face in their opposition to dictators.¹⁰ By including these references, Braun attempted to empower his audience. He wanted the audience to perceive his play as a type of resistance; the audience should focus on the need for change,

demonstrating Braun's unwillingness to settle for things as they were.

In the second interlude, "Das innerste Afrika," Braun focuses on even more recent times. Questions such as "Warum bei den Raketen wohnen" (135) point to the precarious political situation of divided Germany in Europe in the 1980s. Here, Braun criticizes the roles of both West and East Germany in world politics. Casting doubt on visions of the future, Braun challenges the contemporary state of "revolution":

Die Interessen verkabelt für die Religion vom NEUEN
MENSCHEN. Mein Paradies wurde vom roten Soldat-
en geöffnet, mit dem der Genosse Haltsmaul auf die
Welt gekommen ist. Es ist eine Steilküste; jetzt reißt
der Himmel auf, der Sperrmüll der Revolutionen ragt
bis in den Schritt. Was kann ich für euch tun, dunkle
Brüder. Wenden wir uns um in unser Unglück. Gehen
wir wieder in das alte Land hinein. Keine Ausflüchte;
wir müssen ins Innere gehn. Wir werden den Kontinent
nicht verlassen. Die Unterdrückung begraben wir auf
diesem blutigen Grund. (136)

The reference to Africa in the title of the interlude hints at the possibility that the Third World could become an alternative to the "Old World" of Eastern Europe, an alternative to societies that closely followed the lead of the Soviet Union in establishing social and political policies.¹¹ But rather than championing escape to a new world and a new beginning, Braun radically rejects the alternative, and instead advocates self-reflection ("wir müssen ins Innere gehn"). By promoting self-reflection, Braun encourages his audience to contemplate society's problems and seek solutions for eradicating oppression in the GDR.¹² The interlude thereby recognizes the GDR as a socialist state, a country trying to reach the

communist utopia. In order to remain on the path to communism, the GDR must turn inward and look to itself for answers. Instead of sanctioning escape (to the Third World), Braun encouraged his audience to seek solutions within its own capacities.

In the poem “Das innerste Afrika”,¹³ Braun similarly refers to Africa as a possible sanctuary:

Komm in ein wärmeres Land
mit Rosenwetter
Und grünen laubigen Türen
Wo unverkleidete Männer
Deine Genossen sind.¹⁴

He implores his readers to cross the border (“Überschreite die Grenze”)¹⁵ and come out into the open:

komm! ins Offene, Freund!
Nicht im Süden liegt es, Ausland nicht
Wo unverkleidete Männer
Wo der Regen
Denn nicht Mächtiges ists, zum Leben aber gehört es
Was wir wollen
wo dich keiner
Das innerste Land, die Fremde
Erwartet. Du mußt die Grenze überschreiten.¹⁶

This poem represents a plea for openness, an end to the big-brother syndrome, where the state security system (*Stasi*) had so much control in the GDR. But Braun also implores his readers to open their minds, to be receptive to policies that are based less on oppression and more on humanity.¹⁷ The border that he wishes to cross is clearly more than the physical barricade between East and West Germany. It is the barrier within ourselves that prevents us

from perceiving each other as human beings--an overt criticism of Cold War politics. But more importantly, Braun asks his audience to reflect on the world political situation, and return to their struggle for communism.

Braun's interest in global problems harks back to scenes from *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor*. The multiple coding in this text demonstrates on several levels the dangers of political machinations and the inherent tendency of history toward repetition. By parodying several instances of violence in history, Braun encouraged his audience not only to re-examine the historical events, but also to evaluate what sort of progress society has made. In language similar to that employed in the *Nibelungen* play, Braun continues his criticism of the world situation:

ABER DIE AUSGEGRENZTEN, DIE AN DEN
RAND GEDRÄNGTEN HABEN JETZT EINEN UN-
ÜBERWINDLICHEN VERBÜNDETEN--IN GE-
STALT DER WAND, ZU DER SIE MIT DEM
RÜCKEN STEHN. DIESE WAND--DAS SIND DIE
GRENZEN DER ERDE SELBST, AN DENEN WIR
FREILICH ZERDRÜCKT WERDEN KÖNNEN,
WENN WIR DIE VON UNS GESCHAFFENE
GROSSE MASCHINE NICHT ABBREMSEN UND
AUFHALTEN, EHE SIE ENDGÜLTIG ANSTÖSST.
(136-137)

Here Braun's apocalyptic visions become clear. He sees the world situation at the time as one where world leaders also have their backs against a wall. The *Maschine* symbolizes both the nuclear arms race that assured world destruction many times over, as well as the consumer-based industrial society that threatens to shatter the very ideological basis of the GDR. Braun therefore warns his audience to take action against the impending doom, to resist the

present, self-destructive course that society is following. Because the politicians are powerless, paralyzed by the past actions that led to the doomsday situation, Braun addresses the GDR citizenry directly. The people must break out of the pervading stagnation, must now propose and then enforce change. The GDR's *Transit* requires a change in ideology, a need for revisions that will alter social conditions:

aber heute müssen wir unvermutet alle den "Ort," unseren ideologischen und ökonomischen Standort verändern, wenn wir uns nicht selbst vernichten wollen durch Rüstung und Industrie. Wir alle sind die Verfolgten und die Verfolger: unsere problematischen Ziele, und das Transit, um das wir betteln oder um das wir kämpfen, sind Reformen.¹⁸

This message resembles a call to revolution. In fact, Braun is proposing a revolution from below (a second proletarian revolution). Ironically, many attribute the 1989 revolution to a grass-roots action. The change that occurred, however, took on a direction other than that which Braun had intended.

The theater program accompanying the play's performance at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin published some of Braun's notes on the play, aiding the audience in interpretation. He argued that the political concern for programs and five-year plans had only served to obscure the communist goal. In his notes from 4 November 1985, Braun explains his contention that the GDR was in need of reform: "auch in unserer heutigen transitangelegenheit ist ja zuallererst nach der richtung zu fragen: und dann werden wir ahnen, welche grenzen wir zu überschreiten haben."¹⁹ Braun sets this notation up as an appeal. He adamantly clings to his dream of utopia, the eventual evolution of socialism into communism. He positions himself as a champion of this cause. But instead of

taking his message to the streets, in the form of real protest, Braun remains within the realm of the theater: "es geht auf dem theater heute um die entwicklung des sozialismus von der wissenschaft zur utopie. der ausbruch, den das stück selber leisten muß aus dem flüchtigen getriebe der alten fabel, ist der in den kommunismus."²⁰ At this point, Braun's personal activism rested solely in his literature. His theatrical works served as a medium through which he sought to unmask social paralyses.

In *Transit Europa* he chose to adapt Anna Seghers' story to advocate resistance.²¹ Most of Seghers' characters in *Transit* were fleeing from oppression. Braun bases his main character on Seghers' Seidler, who does not flee. According to Ute Brandes it is this decision to stay that is important: "Seidlers Entschluß, *nicht* auszureisen, ist ein Ergebnis des klärenden Erzählprozesses und die Besinnung auf seine wirkliche Aufgabe: das Mitwirken bei der Befreiung seiner Heimat."²² Braun's Seidel is therefore a hero who opts to stay and fight. In twisting the theme of Seghers' novel, Braun was able to depict a different kind of survival, that of the communist ideal. Instead of promoting escape, Braun stressed the importance of remaining. He hoped to convince his audience that the communist ideal could only be attained if society recognized its stagnation and worked to eradicate inconsistencies from within the existing system.

From both *Transit Europa* and the poem "Das innerste Afrika" we can conclude that Braun interpreted the GDR's situation at the time as one of transition. He urged his audience to confront the idea of progress, to board the *Transitschiff* of reform and change. In *Transit Europa* Braun portrayed Seidel as an individual prepared to resist. He implored his audience to reflect on the situation of the GDR at the time. The citizens of the GDR must turn inward, not only personally, but also ideologically. Braun argued that his society had lost sight of the theoretical basis

upon which it was founded. Consumerism and nuclear proliferation had diverted society from the path to democratic socialism. The audience should recognize the problems because of the action portrayed on the stage. It should reflect on what it had seen and seek new avenues to facilitate the attainment of these goals.

This play was first published in the GDR in 1987, and its first performance occurred at the Deutsches Theater in 1988. Shortly thereafter, the citizens of the GDR did take to the streets and did tumble the walls of the GDR. We cannot know to what extent Braun's drama had a role in these events. We can, however, conclude that if his message was heard, it was also rejected. Rather than pursuing the more humane socialist alternative that Braun proposed, the citizens opted for the capitalism of the West.

I have argued that there is a dialogic relationship between these two works. This relationship goes beyond the mere incorporation of one author's works by another. At the time of composition (1985-1986), Braun himself was disillusioned with the path his society had chosen. This play indicates a break in the reactive nature of Braun's dramatic works until this time. While earlier dramas concentrated on promoting reform through action, Braun placed a greater emphasis on the need for reflection in this play. In the interlude "Das innerste Afrika", Braun hinted at the possibility that the Third World could become an alternative to Old-World Europe, just as Seghers' characters were forced to seek an alternative to their "old world." Braun, revealing his own inner turmoil, rejected this alternative and instead advocated self-reflection: "wir müssen ins Innere gehn." With this text Braun himself turned inward, placed himself in exile, and created a work from a perspective of one removed from society. In Anna Seghers he found a compatriot, an author writing from the perspective of

one detached (albeit by force!) from society and someone whose work expressed the emotions that he himself was experiencing.

Die Übergangsgesellschaft

Using another literary model, Braun situated Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1901) in the GDR for his *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* (1982). In Braun's version, the writer, Anton, identifies the relationship of Braun's play to Chekhov's for the audience: "Jetzt fällt es mir ein. Tschechow. Olga, Mascha, Irina. Bei Tschechow wollen sie alle nach Moskau, und sind todtraurig, wenn die Soldaten abziehen."²³ Chekhov depicts an excerpt of bourgeois quotidian in his play: the three sisters stem from a rich family, and all four acts center around social scenes in the sisters' house. Chekhov was concerned with portraying the triviality of life and exposing human pettiness. Braun keeps enough of Chekhov's plot to make the references apparent, but the characterizations are blended. The sisters play roles similar to those found in Chekhov's play: Olga is a teacher, Mascha is unhappily married, and Irina is engaged but uncertain about love. The Russian sisters long for Moscow, but they never undertake a move "because they know perfectly well that the change will not bring about any real transformation in their lives."²⁴ Braun replaces this specific longing for Moscow, with an overall dissatisfaction with their roles in life, although the reasons for their unhappiness are not completely clear. Although Chekhov's play clearly depicts the middle class, which he symbolizes through the big house, parties, and other social events, both Irina and the baron Tuzenbakh speak disparagingly about this way of life. They often refer to their need to work, expressing a desire to break out of the bonds of their boring everyday life. While hard labor is not depicted, Irina considers it essential to attain happiness. Chekhov ties happiness

to the concept of freedom and focuses on the promise of the future. When the character Vershinin speculates about the future, his vision attempts to give meaning to the boredom expressed by the other characters about their everyday existence:

I think everything on earth is bound to change bit by bit, in fact already is changing before our very eyes. Two or three hundred years, or a thousand years if you like--it doesn't matter how long--will bring in a new and happy life. We'll have no part in it of course, but it is what we're now living for, working for, yes and suffering for. We're creating it, and that's what gives our life meaning, and its happiness too if you want to put it that way.²⁵

The desire to be happy, along with a vision for the future are also central elements of Braun's play.

As Braun's play begins, the sisters are celebrating Irina's birthday and observing the anniversary of their father's death. The sisters' uncle, Wilhelm Höchst, who, like Chekhov's Chebutykin, constantly reads newspapers,²⁶ definitively places the action in a contemporary GDR setting: "Die DDR tritt für ein Verbot aller Arten von Waffen im Weltraum ein" (126). Wilhelm's thirst for news is coupled with an irreverence for the GDR. Olga comments: "Er sieht nur fern. Auslandsberichte, bis in die Nacht" (130).²⁷

The characters' conversations indicate that they are merely speaking words; no real communication and understanding are evident. Wilhelm, who wishes to encourage her to use her imagination, presents Irina with a globe for her birthday. She is unable, however, to recognize the symbolism of the gift, protesting: "Onkel, wozu das Ding-- . . . Ich kann doch nicht reisen!" (130), a comment that directly addresses the immobility of

GDR citizens at the time, as well as introduces the topic of freedom.

In order to overcome the inherent lack of communication the characters demonstrate, Mette, an actress and Walter's lover, suggests that they tell each other of their dreams. Bobanz, Mascha's husband, recommends that they fabricate a common dream about an airplane hijacking:

Mette: . . . Ein Traum muß erfüllbar sein.

Bobanz: Von einer Flugzeugentführung. . . .

Mascha: Und wo landen wir?

Anton: In dem Land, das wir uns wünschen.

Olga: Und was wäre das? *Lacht*.

Mette: Jeder hat seins (142).

While, at first glance, it appears that Braun is merely addressing the *Reiselust* of the GDR populace, the common dream symbolizes freedom. It was only in their dreams that GDR citizens were allowed to leave the confines of GDR territory. Dreams are also important because they are not real. Through this dream, Braun's characters could create a better future. In this way, they could speculate about the future just as Vershinin had done.

The fictional flight affords Braun's characters the opportunity to come to terms with themselves and with their pasts. As they describe to each other where they are, each character is able to attain a state of peace--in Braun's sense here this state of peace represents the *Übergang*, the possibility of a new beginning. For Walter, the sisters' brother and a VEB manager, the state of peace occurs when he acknowledges the inadequacies of the GDR's methods of production. In his dream he finds himself at his factory and denounces the GDR's manufacturing practices:

Eine Revolution die nicht überzeugen kann, ist keine Bewußtseinsfrage . . . Die Herrschaft der Armut ist nur eine universalere Unterdrückung und eine unnötige Grausamkeit der Geschichte . . . [ich] frage mich, warum ich meine Kraft hergebe meinen Namen für das Neue, das nicht das Bessere ist (145).

In this character Braun recalls images from his earlier worker plays. The situation in the factories is no better than when Braun began *Die Kipper* in the early 1960s. In fact, the only difference is that now management is also expressing its dissatisfaction with working conditions. Indeed, Walter views the whole process as pointless. The socialist revolution has not proved fruitful.

Wilhelm too, speaks of revolution. Because of his advanced age and his experiences as a revolutionary, he adds perspective to the visions of the other characters. He summarizes: “Die Revolution kann nicht als Diktatur zum Ziel kommen” (158). Here the audience should recognize GDR society, and Braun pointedly accuses the leaders of following the wrong path. For Braun revolution was always tied to the ideals of the October Revolution, that a revolution from below would lead to a better way of life for the common people. Braun’s vision of revolution viewed socialism as merely a point along the path to the ultimate goal of communism. Here he unequivocally states that communism will not be attained unless the dictatorship is toppled. He perceives the GDR therefore in a state of *Übergang* or transition.

The idea of *Übergang* is important, for the characters themselves are stagnant. They are dissatisfied with their lives, and the imagined dream allows them to break free of their physical and psychological barriers. The philosopher, Bobanz, for example, envisions capitalist lands. This is a definite breakthrough because, as he himself describes it: “Ich beschäftige mich mit dem Kapi-

talismus, und habe ihn nie gesehen" (134). This alludes to the propagandistic nature of GDR media and scholarship. Similarly, Mascha is a historian, who throughout the play wears dark glasses and claims she cannot see:

Am Morgen ist alles klar und deutlich. Auf Arbeit, über den Dokumenten, ich sitze im Archiv . . . als ob es verschwimmt. Am Abend seh ich fast nichts-- . . . es liegt nicht an den Augen. Die Augen sind gesund. Es wird immer schlechter (135).

Mascha's "blindness" is representative of the obstructed perspective with which GDR historians interpreted history. Instead of searching for verity, historical events were interpreted in a manner that corroborated the GDR's self-definition.

As the dream segment concludes, Wilhelm stresses the importance of individuality, of recognizing individual potential: "Wenn wir uns nicht selbst befreien, bleibt es für uns ohne Folgen" (158). Mette's intention for this dream sequence was to force the individual characters to come to terms with their emotions and dreams. For Wilhelm this means finding truth: "Übrigens, die Literatur, die nur niedermacht, und die Ideologie, die etwas vormacht, sind gleich weit von der Wahrheit entfernt. Sie haben beide das Leben nicht" (156). With this statement, Wilhelm points to Braun's own understanding of himself as a writer. While Braun realized that literature was not absolute, he hoped to portray a possible objectivity, so that his audience could search for its own truth. Literature can tear down what ideology promotes.

At the conclusion of the dream, Wilhelm dies, and Irina has set the sisters' house on fire. Whereas Mette describes Wilhelm's death as a form of release: "Er ist über die Grenze gegangen" (160),²⁸ the fire signals a definitive break with the past. The

characters must start their lives anew; they have the opportunity to redefine themselves. Their break with the past suggests the changes the GDR must make. In order to continue towards the goal of communism, the GDR should break with its past and re-define itself.

Perhaps the most intriguing character of the play is the writer Paul Anton, whose name refers to the first names of Chekhov. His status as a writer allows him to travel, a fact that removes him from the stagnant world of the other characters. Throughout the play, Anton speaks in Volker Braun's voice:

Die Literatur hat nur einen Sinn, das wieder wegzu-
reißen, was die Ideologen hinbaun. Das schöne Be-
wußtsein. Das uns so viel kostet. Solange diese Fach-
schaft jubelt, muß die Literatur gegenhalten. Unsere
Arbeit ist die Zerstörung (136).

Here, Anton adopts Braun's motto: literature must unmask and destroy ideology's illusions. Unfortunately, however, Braun could not follow his own advice at this point. His retreat from social realities had become so complete, that he could not recognize that his literature was no longer fulfilling this function. The end to stagnation did not lie in the "real" world. In this play, only the characters' own fantasy--their literature--ends their stagnation. When Mascha reads from Anton's book, Braun's own writings are again evident:

ICH BLEIB IM LANDE UND NÄHRE MICH IM
OSTEN./ MIT MEINEN SPRÜCHEN, DIE MICH
DEN KRAGEN KOSTEN/ IN ANDERER ZEIT:
NOCH BIN ICH AUF DEM POSTEN./ IN WOHN-
UNGEN, GELIEHN VOM MAGISTRAT/ UND ESS
MICH SATT, WIE IHR, AN DER SILAGE./ UND

WERDE NICHT FROH IN MEINER CHEFETAGE/
DIE BLEIBE, DIE ICH SUCHE, IST KEIN STAAT
(159-160).

Anton's words actually belong to Braun's poem, "Das Lehen". This poem pointedly signals Braun's disenchantment with the socialist system. Here he admits his preference for the East and his unwillingness to remain quiet:

Ich bleib im Lande und nähre mich im Osten.
Mit meinen Sprüchen, die mich den Kragen kosten
In anderer Zeit: noch bin ich auf dem Posten
In Wohnungen geliehen vom Magistrat.²⁹

While acknowledging his willingness to criticize, Braun concedes that any critique has ramifications for his literary production. He couches his consciousness as something temporary or transitional, confessing, through the combination of *Lehen* and *leihen*, that his entire existence is merely borrowed. The fact that Braun had chosen to be in the East did not satisfy his idealism. As the poem continues, this idealism clashes with reality. Braun's perfect *Lehen* is the communist ideal, but society's structure and hegemony interfere with the attainment of this ideal. In this pointed critique Braun recognizes the power of the Party, but decries Party doctrine--the Party grants its people everything--only *everything* does not include that which they desire most:

Die Bleibe, die ich suche, ist kein Staat.
Mit zehn Geboten und mit Eisendraht:
. . . Wie komm ich durch den Winter der Strukturen.
Partei mein Fürst: *sie hat uns alles gegeben*
Und alles ist noch nicht das Leben.
Das Lehen, das ich brauch, wird nicht vergeben.³⁰

Although “Das Lehen” signalled Braun’s disenchantment with the socialist system very pointedly, he remained within his role as social critic. He declared his preference for the East while simultaneously acknowledging an unwillingness to remain silent. The mere fact that Braun had chosen to be in the East was not enough to satisfy his idealism. This idealism clashes with reality when Braun accepts that society cannot attain the communist ideal (utopia) because of its structure and hegemony. In a later poem, “Das Eigentum”, Braun lamented the course that history had taken: “Da bin ich noch: mein Land geht in den Westen.”³¹ Braun no longer sees a clearly defined role for himself or his texts: “Und ich kann *bleiben wo der Pfeffer wächst*. / Und unverständlich wird mein ganzer Text.”³² Braun characterized himself as a bystander; history was taking its course and he could do nothing but sit back and watch. Because his entire world had been turned upside down, he inverted his revolutionary call: “KRIEG DEN HÜTTEN FRIEDE DEN PALÄSTEN.”³³ The death of Braun’s utopia is apparent in the poem’s final lines:

Die Hoffnung lag im Weg wie eine Falle.
Mein Eigentum, jetzt habt ihrs auf der Krallen.
Wann sag ich wieder *mein* und meine alle.

Braun decries his earlier hope as his downfall. The *Lehen*, which he had sought as his *Eigentum*, has disappeared. The conclusion demonstrates a longing for the socialist cooperative, indicating Braun’s preference for *alle* versus *mein*. We might conclude that a glimmer of hope still remains: the last line is essentially oriented to the future. But the presence of the question word *wann* stresses the indeterminacy of the future and calls the possibility of this ever happening completely into question.

Die Übergangsgesellschaft is a call to break out of the silence, to cross over the border from inaction to action. It si-

multaneously warns against complacency and reminds the audience that the action and commitment of the individual are important and necessary for society to advance toward its goal. I concur with Gerhard Ebert who argued that it was only through the re-examination of their desires and goals that GDR citizen could hope to incite reform in their society.³⁴ Thomas Langhoff, who directed the play at the Maxim-Gorki-Theater in East Berlin, believed, in 1988, that the play found resonance with GDR audiences.³⁵ Indeed, one could infer that the peaceful protests of 1989 were the beginning of the *Übergang* for GDR society. However, the result was definitely not the one that Braun desired. It is not exactly clear, what kind of transition Braun envisioned, for as Florian Vaßen stated: "Statt 'Ankunft' im Sozialismus oder 'Übergang' zum Kommunismus beobachtet Volker Braun desillusioniert eine Transformation und weiß bei aller Hoffnung immer weniger, wohin der Weg geht."³⁶ This is only a further indication of the extent to which Braun was detached from GDR reality. Like the characters in his play, Braun too could only *dream* of a better future.

In *Transit Europa* Braun portrayed Seidel as an individual prepared to resist; the characters in *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* learn that they can act as individuals. The fantasy flight of the characters is not a call to GDR citizens to abandon the fight.³⁷ Rather, Braun implored his audience to reflect on the situation of the GDR at the time. The citizens of the GDR must turn inward, recalling the original ideals of socialist society. The audience was aware that the GDR's original goals had not been attained. It is the character Anton who states this message moist pointedly:

Ja wohin? Wir haben etwas vergessen, wir müssen zurück . . . Es mag vorwärtsgehn, aber da ist kein Land für uns. Es ist besetzt, hier *schlägt sich an den Kopf* eine Kolonie. Wir zahlen Tribut, an die tote Zukunft.

Ja, einmal war es richtig, es war alles richtig. Wir haben die Morgenröte entrollt, um in der Dämmerung zu wohnen (147).

The audience should realize the social paralysis rampant in the GDR, should reflect on the action portrayed on the stage and seek new avenues to facilitate the attainment of the communist utopia.

The major difference between Braun's play and that of Chekhov is the fact that Chekhov's play projects a better future:

I loathe our present life, but thinking about the future makes me feel really good. I feel so easy and relaxed, I see a light glimmering in the distance. I have a vision of freedom. I see myself and my children freed from idleness and drinking kvass and stuffing ourselves with goose and cabbage, freed from our after-dinner naps and this vile habit of trying to get something for nothing.³⁸

The future that the brother Andrew describes resembles a socialist society. In Braun's play, however, this future (socialism) has already arrived, yet the characters are still not satisfied. If we assume that the writer Anton is Volker Braun, then we also know that Braun was disenchanted. Because he saw no hope for the future, the use of Chekhov represents a step backward. In going back in time, Braun once again was seeking answers in literature. But unlike the historical plays, Braun's *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* could not learn any lessons from Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. The Chekhov play serves merely as a backdrop for the futility that Braun depicted. Only through dreams could he achieve the social construct that he so desired. Clearly, we no longer have a poet who is trying to teach his audience; we now have a man who is merely trying to cope.

The focus of both *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* is that of a society in transition. Unlike Braun's other plays, however, these theatrical works depict no united message. The individual characters make individual decisions about their vision for the future. Society as a collective is no longer Braun's central focus. Despite Braun's own utopian dream, he was unable to bring this to the stage any longer. Actual historical events ended the *Transit/ Übergang* stage for the GDR. The reality of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the ultimate unification of Germany indicated that Braun had completely lost touch with his audience. Either his message was not heard or it was heard and rejected.

Connected to the idea of *Übergang* is that of *Selbstbefreiung*. On an aesthetic level, Braun was able to release his characters. If we view Braun's texts as a journey into literature, he was therefore able to realize this on a personal level as well. Although his audience was ultimately able to free itself from the tyranny of the hierarchichal social structure in the GDR, the choice of the people was not the future that Volker Braun had envisioned for his audience. At that point, Volker Braun's reality was severed from that of his audience. In the years immediately following unification, Braun was unable to regain the connection to his audience. In the following chapter, we will examine two post-unification plays that bring Braun back to Classical literature and signal the completion of his exile.

Notes

¹ Volker Braun, *Transit Europa. Ausflug der Toten, Texte in zeitlicher Folge 9* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1992) 106. Further references to this edition of the play will be noted parenthetically. The play was first published in 1987 in *Spectaculum* 45. Its first

performance took place in the GDR in the Deutsches Theater in 1988.

² Both of these terms stem from Michail Bakhtin's theories on discourse. M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Bakhtin defines "hybridization" as follows: "It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor" (358). According to Bakhtin "every age re-accentuates in its own way the works of its most immediate past. The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning . . ." (420-421).

³ According to Bakhtin, the productive influence of one author upon another goes beyond mere imitation or simple reproduction and is "rather a further creative development of another's discourse in a new context and under new conditions" (347).

⁴ Anna Seghers, *Transit* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1985) 80-81.

⁵ Hermann Weber, *Die DDR 1945-1986* (München: Oldenbourg, 1988) 240.

⁶ Braun, "Kommt Zeit, kommen Räte" 20-21.

⁷ Ute Brandes, *Anna Seghers. Köpfe des 20. Jahrhunderts* 117. (Berlin: Colloquium, 1992) 57.

⁸ Christiane Zehl Romero, *Anna Seghers* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993) 87.

⁹ Karl-Heinz Mauß, "Die Psychologie des Widerstands--Gedanken zum Handlungskonzept von Peter Weiss," in *Ästhetik des Wider-*

stands". *Erfahrungen mit dem Roman von Peter Weiss*, ed. Norbert Krenzlin (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1987) 66.

¹⁰ See also mw, "'Die Welt ist ein Fragment, ich muß auf Montage.' Volker Brauns *Transit Europa* als Schweizer Erstaufführung im Theater am Neumarkt, Zürich," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Fernausgabe, 15 April 1988: 33.

¹¹ Heiner Müller's works also question the state of revolution. In *Der Auftrag* (1979) in particular, Müller investigates the role of the white man in the revolution. In this text Müller also creates a dialogue with Seghers' text "Das Licht auf dem Galgen" (1961). For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Müller and Seghers see Christiane Zehl Romero, "*Seghersmaterial* in Heiner Müller and Volker Braun," *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 9, ed. Margy Gerber et al (Lanham: UP of America, 1989) 57-83..

¹² Peter Reichel describes this interlude as the quintessential scene of the play: "Die Quintessenz des Stückes *Transit Europa* im Jahre 1988: Europa verlassen, ohne Europa zu verlassen. Über Europa hinausgehen, ohne aus Europa hinauszugehen. 'Das innerste Afrika' ist die Mitte Europas. Die einstigen Grenzen haben ihre Bedeutung verloren, das Ringen der Menschheit ums Überleben kennt nur die Grenzen der Erde selbst. Transit in dieser Situation reduziert sich auf die letale Variante--die Nichtexistenz. Die Selbstvernichtung der Menschheit." Reichel, "'Infolge einer Verwechslung des Ortes, der Umstände oder der Zeit.' Zu Volker Brauns Stück *Transit Europa*," *Theater der Zeit* 43.1 (1988): 58

¹³ Klaus Schuhmann links this poem with Braun's Rimbaud essay. This creates a correlation between Rimbaud's real life actions, deserting the European continent for Africa, and Braun's own confusion at the time. Schuhmann, "Volker Brauns Lyrik der siebziger und achtziger Jahre im Spiegel der Gedichtgruppe 'Der Stoff zum Leben'" 266.

¹⁴ Braun, "Das innerste Afrika," *Der Stoff zum Leben 1-3* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1990) 60.

¹⁵ Braun, "Das innerste Afrika" 60. Braun uses this phrase three times in the poem. References to openness are also numerous.

¹⁶ Braun, "Das innerste Afrika" 61. These quotations stem from Hölderlin ("komm! ins Offene, Freund!") and Rimbaud ("Du mußt die Grenze überschreiten"). See also Christel und Walfried Hartinger, "Unerhörte Nachrichten," *DDR-Literatur '87 im Gespräch*, ed. Siegfried Rönisch (Berlin: Aufbau, 1988) 153.

¹⁷ Klaus Schuhmann states this somewhat differently. "Auch die Aufforderung zu gehen bleibt gültig, nur ist es eine andere Richtung, die nun vorgeschlagen wird, und es zeichnet sich ab, daß das 'innerste Afrika' weniger ein Land als eine Lebensform ist, die sich offen hält für das, was noch aussteht und unverwirklicht geblieben ist, für Ansprüche und Wünsche also, die dazu verlocken, neue Kontinente menschlicher Selbst-verwirklichung zu entdecken. Es ist eine Weltoffenheit, die auch die für das eigene Land notwendige meint, deren Sinn sich darin jedoch nicht erschöpft" (268).

¹⁸ Theaterprogramm, *Transit Europa*, Maxim Gorki Theater 1990/1991.

¹⁹ Theaterprogramm.

²⁰ Theaterprogramm.

²¹ The Swiss critic Christine Richard corroborates this assertion, arguing: "sehr politisch tritt [Braun] das literarische Erbe an, indem er daraus Kapital schlägt für die Welt von heute und es durchaus auch ummünzt in eine Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus. Eine doppelte Aneignung von Geschichte." Richard, "Die Grenzen des Wachstums. Das Exil-Drama *Transit Europa* des DDR-Autors Volker Braun in Zürich," *Badische Zeitung* 14 April 1988: 6.

²² Brandes 55. Her emphasis.

²³ Volker Braun, "Die Übergangsgesellschaft," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 8 133. All references are to this edition and noted parenthetically.

²⁴ Marc Slonin, *From Chekhov to the Revolution. Russian Literature 1900-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962) 66.

²⁵ Anton Chekhov, *Three Sisters, Five Major Plays*, Trans. Ronald Hingley (Toronto: Bantam, 1977) 219.

²⁶ The two men also demonstrate an affinity through their past loves. Chebutykin remarked that he never married because he was in love with the sisters' mother. Wilhelm reveals a similar secret in Braun's play.

²⁷ It was forbidden for GDR citizens to view foreign news programs.

²⁸ Both the concepts of *Übergang* and "über die Grenz gehen" recall the images of *Transit Europa* and "Das innerste Afrika."

²⁹ Braun, "Das Lehen," *Der Stoff zum Leben* 1-3 47.

³⁰ Braun, "Das Lehen". Braun's emphasis.

³¹ Braun, "Das Eigentum," *Die Zickzackbrücke* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1992) 84.

³² "Das Eigentum".

³³ This word play has undergone several inversions: "Brauns 'Hütten-Paläste'-Satz zitiert mit seinem spezifischen Aufbau zunächst Chamfort aus der Französischen Revolution, eine Losung, die umgeformt in den 'Hessischen Landboten' einging, daß dort der Pfarrer Weidig Büchners Text abwandelte, indem er dessen Kritik an den Reichen und am Mammon in eine Kritik an den Vornehmen und Tyrannen umformulierte." Dieter Schlenstedt, "Ein Gedicht als Provokation," *Neue Deutsche Literatur* 40.12 (1992): 128-129.

³⁴ Gerhard Ebert, "Aus synthetischen Hüllen gepellt: Tschechows *Drei Schwestern*. Die *Übergangsgesellschaft* von Volker Braun am Maxim Gorki Theater," *Neues Deutschland* 8 Apr. 1988: 4.

³⁵ "Wir sind keine Trottel mehr. Ein Gespräch mit Thomas Langhoff," *Die Zeit* 21 Oct. 1988. Indeed, the play enjoyed such success, that by October 1990, 100 performances had occurred on the stage of the Gorki theater.

³⁶ Florian Vaßen, "Vom Fliegen ins 'innerste Afrika'. Volker Braun's Komödie *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*--Stillstand und Grenzüberschreitung," *Deutsches Drama der 80er Jahre*, ed. Richard Weber (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1992) 89.

³⁷ "Seine [Brauns] Moral ist eindeutig: Nicht aus der DDR weglaufen. Für einen demokratischen Sozialismus kämpfen. Gar nicht bemerken, daß der demokratische Sozialismus unmöglich, weil ein Widerspruch in sich sein könnte." Georg Hensel, "Die drei Schwestern in der DDR. Der fortgesetzte Tschechow: *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* von Volker Braun," *FAZ* 27 Apr. 1987: 27.

³⁸ Chekhov 259.

Unfortunately, at least from Braun's perspective, an end to the status quo signaled an end to life as Braun knew it.

In a speech he held on 2 October 1990 in the Maxim-Gorki-Theater in East Berlin, Braun criticized the consumerism that East Germans demonstrated after the July currency reform and advised care after unification. He admitted that the utopian vision had vanished: "Die Utopien sind eingerollt."¹ Braun's message in the speech was very astute: it grants us insight into the difficult psychological decisions that all must make, and Braun notes that the changes on paper could not alter the forms and visions ingrained in peoples' minds: "Mein Luftkoffer, mein politisches Gepäck enthält Erinnerungen und Erwartungen, unkontrolliert und subversiv, schwer zu tragen, aber die Schritte treibend."² While he admitted that no one would be able to forget the history of the GDR, he recognized that time was necessary to heal the wounds of the past.

Following the unification of Germany on 2 October 1990, Braun became a man without a homeland. Although he continues to live in the Eastern part of Berlin, he no longer has an ideological home. When asked what his role would be in the new society, what texts he would write, he replied in November 1990 that his work was far from complete. He maintained that the problems he highlighted in GDR society--oppression, hierarchical power structures, environmental concerns--did not disappear merely because the GDR became absorbed into Western Germany.³ Clearly, Braun still saw a position for himself as a writer in this new society. His post-unification texts, however, depict a man who is severely troubled, deeply disillusioned, and very bitter. His poetry, prose, essays, and theatrical works have a plaintive undertone and they read like laments--Braun mourns his old society. Despite his

lofty ambitions, he was unable to find a place for himself within the new social construct. In fact, as the poems in *Die Zickzackbrücke* (1992) clearly demonstrate, Braun had gone from promoting utopian visions to signaling the death of utopia.

The poetry collection contains a very personal side. Volker Braun himself is often at the center of the stage in this poetry. In examining his role as social critic, he brings the *Täter/Opfer* dilemma to the forefront, and acknowledges that he himself played a large part in both the construction and deconstruction of his socialist society. Filled with disappointment, confusion, and disillusionment, these texts portray Braun as unable to grasp reality and relinquish his hold on his utopian visions. The ultimate betrayal of his utopian dream is not articulated until the final poem of *Die Zickzackbrücke*. "Ende Oktober im August" remarks on the dismantling of communism in the Soviet Union, the ultimate conclusion to the October revolution. Braun saw the constant struggle to achieve democratic socialism as a continuation of the original plan launched by the October Revolution. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the GDR's model for socialism disappeared. This symbolized the end of the world as Volker Braun understood it, and the ultimate death of Braun's utopia. Braun's insistence on a better society became at first clouded by his utopian idealism. As time progressed, his perception of reality cleared and his laments read as a mourning for socialism. During GDR times, Volker Braun was steadfast in his adherence to his dreams; by the conclusion of *Die Zickzackbrücke*, however, it is readily apparent that Volker Braun, forever disillusioned and disappointed, was finally resigned to the death of his utopia.

While this poetry collection illustrates the various stages of change that Braun underwent, it becomes clear in two dramas that

CHAPTER SEVEN

FREEDOM REVISITED: THE RETURN TO THE CLASSICS

While Braun astutely equated GDR society in the 1980s with the transitional portrayals of *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*, he was not well attuned to the real desires of the GDR populace. The eventual dismantling of socialism in Germany played havoc with Braun's *Weltanschauung*. Despite the fact that he had constantly promoted reform in not only his dramatic texts but in his lyrical and narrative works as well, he never really envisioned a "Germany" without socialism. Braun had dreamed of a better society, one that was humane, just, and free from oppression and hierarchy, and held fast to the belief that this utopia was attainable. Yet, an increased desire for freedom superseded these utopian philosophical ideals among the real people of the GDR.

Unlike his audience, Braun's hold on utopian ideals did not weaken. Indeed, we can argue that this determination had grown even stronger, particularly when we consider that the plays discussed in the last chapter had a utopian focus that did not present a concrete message to his audience. When the protests began in 1989, Braun rejoiced that the people had finally heard his message. As the people took to the streets, he envisioned another proletarian revolution: the base was rising up to inform the superstructure that it was no longer satisfied with the status quo.

Braun was completely out of touch with his society. Both *Böhmen am Meer* and *Iphigenie in Freiheit* illustrate Braun's retreat from reality. In these texts Braun completed his literary journey, finding solace in affinities and adaptations of Goethe and Shakespeare. This return to the classics heralds an end to his experimentation and his search for a means of expression. As the following analysis will show, Braun's message had become trite. This literature no longer serves as provocations for Braun's audience, but only as a means of solace for the author.

Böhmen am Meer

For the first time since the early 1960s, Braun treated a topic of contemporary relevance for the public of the former GDR. *Böhmen am Meer* (written 1989-1993) premiered at the Schiller-Theater in Berlin in 1992. In this portrayal of recent historical events, Braun set the stage to bury his utopian dreams. Drawing on absurd theater (recalling his use of Beckett in *Simplex Deutsch*) and vague references to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, Braun produced an artificial situation that amounted to nothing more than taking stock of one's options.⁴ The time frame during which the play was written is certainly evident in the action of the play. The Cold War or the struggle between the superpowers to attain ideological supremacy is clearly over.

The audience encounters three main characters: Pavel, a Czech forced from his homeland in 1968 and the impetus for the ensuing dialogue; Michail, a Russian journalist; and Bardolph, an American industrialist. Both men are friends of Pavel's but have never met. Pavel invites them to meet on an island in the Adriatic

Sea to take account of the events of recent history. The non-geographical reference to Bohemia at sea is merely a descriptor for Pavel's (Bohemia) island.

As we have already seen in *T. and Hinze und Kunze*, the year 1968 was of particular significance for Braun. In an interview with the Hungarian newspaper *Népszabadság* (18 October 1989), Braun reflected on the opening of the Hungarian border. It is clear that he had not yet reconciled himself to the changes that were occurring and was, in fact, somewhat disappointed in the direction that the protest had taken. He recalled the 1968 Czechoslovakian attempts at democracy, heralding them as ideal: "Was für eine ideale sozialistische Erneuerung, verglichen mit den polnischen oder ungarischen Reformen! Das Volk und die Partei verbunden."⁵ He portrayed the debate between the people and the party in the GDR as dysfunctional and shed light on their irreconcilable differences. The tone of the interview also illustrated Braun's reluctance to change. He continued to plead for reform, but was unwilling to accept that society take on a form other than socialism.⁶ As we shall see in the discussion of the play, Pavel remains ideologically grounded in the revolutionary time of 1968. On this level, we can see various similarities between Volker Braun and his protagonist. This is but one reason that the play is a comment on contemporary society, for we can see the pain with which the author, Braun, lives.

The events of the Prague Spring and the occupation of Prague by Warsaw Pact troops had a significant impact on Braun's psyche and his writings. The images in this more recent play recall an earlier poem, "Prag" (1969). In the poem, Braun lamented the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 and questioned if Prague is "Böhmen / Am Meer / Von Blut?"⁷ Braun also employed the flood

metaphor: "So liegt die Stadt / Sicher, darnieder / Womöglich, vor der herstürzenden / Flut / In den offenen Schleusen,"⁸ comparing the overrunning of the city with troops to a flood. At this point, however, Braun still sees hope and attempts to advise his readers:

Freunde, die ihr mit mir lebt, redet, freßt --
Menschen seh ich, keine Handwerker --
Fahrt aus aus den Rissen der Zeit
Stellt eure Netze quer
In den Strom.⁹

The flood in *Böhmen am Meer*, however, leaves no possibility for survival. What Braun previously perceived as merely a minor setback, against which the public of Prague could still fight, the play composed twenty years later leaves no room for hope.

Within the context of the play, the opposing sides display no semblance of animosity. Immediately after meeting, Bardolph and Michail strike up an amicable relationship. Their conversation offers an immediate assessment of current affairs. Bardolph comments: "Es ist vorüber. Vorbei, mit uns. Das Verschwinden der Gattung in der Hitze des Gefechts der Hemisphären."¹⁰ At this point, Bardolph and Michail are alone on the stage as well as on the island. The tourists have fled because of environmental problems: the sea is contaminated with an algae pest. On a more abstract level, this represents the extent to which politicians had lost touch with their people in 1989 and 1990. The presence of these representatives from previous warring factions was no longer of interest.

Pavel was forced to leave Czechoslovakia in 1968, assuredly because of the uprisings in Prague. Following this period, he

managed to find success in business, leading to his association with Bardolph. Despite the passage of more than thirty years, however, Pavel appears trapped in time: he remains bitter. Michail, as a Russian, speaks freely and openly. It was for such freedoms, however, that Pavel was forced from his homeland. Pavel hates both sides, because neither side allowed him to realize his vision for his life: “Du hast mir den Westen verbrannt. *Zu Michail:* Du hast den Sozialismus erschossen. Ihr seid Faschisten. Beide, beide. *Lacht:* Ich hasse euch. Ich hasse euch” (43). Here we can see that Pavel speaks for Volker Braun. Whereas Braun always wished for a communist utopia, he did not confine his wish to the German Democratic Republic. Rather, Braun viewed communism as the correct alternative. The abuses of power rampant in the GDR needed correction, but Braun believed in the principles. Yet, Braun’s desired “revolution” was only possible within the power struggle between East and West. Since this political situation no longer existed, the hope for Braun’s vision must also die. The play states this even more emphatically as it draws attention away from the East-West conflict. Although Bardolph and Michail are the protagonists, the events that take place in the shadows of the stage indicate a new direction. The German physics student, Robert, states this most concretely:

Dem Wunsch gemäß
Nach Süden. NICHT OSTEN UND NICHT
WESTEN
EIN WARMES LAND!”¹¹

Here we note an affinity to the message carried in *Transit Europa* and the poem “Das innerste Afrika”; once again, the possibility for the future rests with the Third World. The end of the East-West conflict is further played out in the figure of Raja, Michail’s

daughter who fled the Soviet Union for a better life in the West with Robert. As she describes her personal relationship with Robert, she metaphorically describes the relationship between East and West Germany: "Ich sage nur: du hattest leichtes Spiel. Ein junger Mann aus besserem Land, wie. Der seinen Vorteil wahrnahm bei der armen Ostlerin, der Retter aus dem Westen" (28). Behind these words we can read Volker Braun's bitterness at the direction that GDR history had taken.

Because of the new direction society chose, both Bardolph and Michail have difficulty finding their way in the new world order. Bardolph is bankrupt, sick, and "lebensmüde" (13), while Michail is an alcoholic and has become totally dependent on news. This is perhaps necessary to counteract years of secrecy and silence:

Die Geschichte stand still. Fünfzig Jahre
einunddasselbe Lied--VATERLAND KEIN FEIND
SOLL DICH . . . Es gibt keinen Feind mehr. Jetzt ist
das Vaterland verloren. Jetzt geht es vorwärts. Jeden
Tag eine andere Welt. Ich höre früh um sechs die ersten
Nachrichten, und nachts die letzten. Ich bin voll-
gepumpt. Wieviel Geschichte erträgt der Mensch am
Tag (22-23).

Slowly, both Bardolph and Michail recognize the error of their ways.

Michail: immer haben wir geglaubt, daß es nur eine
lacht . . . nur eine Wahrheit gibt. Das heißt, daß es nur
uns gibt, und --*Schweigt* Die Kraft unserer Idee . . . ist
die Einbildungskraft. Sie erlaubt uns, an die Sache zu

glauben, wenn draußen, in der Wirklichkeit, ihr schon gar nichts mehr entspricht (32).

Michail is able to think in terms of alternatives--the new way of life should be preferable to the old Cold War politics: "Die Alternative wozu? Zu uns" (12). Yet Bardolph's historical thought processes have not evolved, trapping his thought patterns in terms of winners and losers: "Die Katastrophe ist der Lichtblick, der Ausblick. Der zugespitzte Zustand, die ausgepackte Entwicklung, die Eingeweide des Widerspruchs, das Verhängnis pur. Wir sind am Ziel, Pavel" (21). Bardolph considers himself a victor, because communism was vanquished. This, of course, was the goal for the American side (capitalist West). Bardolph incorrectly assumes, however, that Pavel was also on his side. He presumed, that in order for Pavel to attain a better way of life, communism would have to be destroyed. Pavel, however, remains trapped within the old ideologies, and Bardolph represents for him nothing but the epitome of capitalist exploitation: "Neun Zehntel der Menschheit hungert, damit ich jetten kann" (23).

Throughout the play, Braun consistently diverts the audience attention away from the East-West conflict. His characterization of Bardolph is that he is dark, perhaps Chicano. Pavel's servant woman is an Arab, his son is as dark as an African and bears him no resemblance. Twice, news reports accompany the action on the stage. In both instances the events take place in a "southern" locale: Beirut and Papua New Guinea. Finally, various "dark" figures constantly move about the stage, unnoticed by the main actors. In the end these "dark" figures revolt, an action that results in Pavel's death.

With the figure of Raja, Braun completes the transition metaphor introduced in *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*. Robert managed to transport her away from Moscow and “Über die Grenze” (28). However, this does not result in a better life for Raja. She was forced to leave her family behind, and on Pavel’s island she encounters danger--she has gone swimming in the sea and appears covered in green--the algae, that cannot be removed. In other words, merely transgressing a border from one world to another does not immediately promise a better life.

Pavel mirrors the problems of the two ideologies with a parable about cannibals, that encounter an American, a Russian, and a Bohemian. While the American and Russian spouted political ideology, the Bohemian traded with the cannibals. Because he represented solidarity, the Bohemian was spared their hunger. Unfortunately, Pavel’s life did not parallel his parable. Whereas both Bardolph and Michail have learned to recognize the fallacies in their ideological thinking, Pavel cannot comprehend the changes. Life in Russia for Michail represents the dream that Pavel had held for life in Prague. Because Pavel was forced into exile, he could not fulfill his dream and begins to despair. As the three men finally sit down to enjoy the festive meal that Pavel had ordered, Pavel turns accusatory.

Deep down, all three men are confused and despondent. After twenty years of Party loyalty, Michail does not know how to think for himself. Bardolph views capitalism as a trap--he cannot escape the complicated net that has swallowed up his factory. His solution is to poison himself. Yet, they inform Pavel’s wife, Julia, that Pavel had indeed chosen the right course: “Er hat alles. Er hat das Leben . . . gepackt. Er hat es zu etwas gebracht” (58). Pavel, however, cannot cope with this “new world order” and lets himself

get shot by rebels. The fact that he gets killed at the end indicates that he had no desire to live, and leaves the audience pondering if his death was really a suicide. Pavel is symbolic for Volker Braun, who was also stuck in a 1968 mentality. As the play concludes, Bardolph and Michail are free to pursue their fate, although the audience has the impression that they will probably make the same mistakes again. A flood saves them from this fate, and cleanses Bohemia at the sea.

The rebel uprising turns the idyllic island into a scene of tragedy. Here I detect a fatalism in Braun's writing, similar to that of Büchner. Braun no longer saw possibilities for change within the East-West constellation. He even lets Bardolph remark to Michail: "Ihr werdet da ankommen, wo wir jetzt sind. Das ist das Paradies" (53-54). Braun saw no positive alternative for the changes that have occurred in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. He envisions a future for these countries that is identical to the destiny of the capitalist West. The character of Bardolph embodies the problems associated with this way of life. The only plausible future that the audience is left with is one of violence brought on by "dark" people from the South. Here it seems that, contrary to the poem "das innerste Afrika" where Braun pleaded for a turning inward in investigating the roots of revolutionary processes, Braun does indeed view the future as dependent on the actions of foreign lands. What remains unclear, however, is whether Braun assumes that the revolt will result once again in the establishment of communism as a viable world political ideology. Michail sums up the situation: "Der Witz des Jahrhunderts: der Sozialismus. Aber, aber der Aberwitz" (60).

For the 1993 version, Braun removed two main characters from the earlier version: Raja, Michail's daughter and Robert, a

German physics student. While their omission makes the later version of the play more theoretical, their inclusion in the original is important for an understanding of the East-West conflict. Unfortunately, audiences responded coolly to the West Berlin production.¹²

The play is almost trite and does not portray a productive use of literary reference. Braun couches his critiques of contemporary history in veiled references to Shakespeare. On the surface, he adapts Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, with the incorporation of a jealousy subplot. Shakespeare's Leontes believes that Hermine's pregnancy resulted from a tryst with Polixenes. Shakespeare combines intrigue and magic to guide Leontes to the truth. Although Hermine originally is declared dead, supernatural powers bring about a happy ending: Hermine comes back to life, and the daughter, Perdita, who really is Leontes' offspring, returns home. In Braun's play the audience learns that Pavel's wife, Julia, had sexual relations with both Michail and Bardolph in the past, a fact of which Pavel is well aware. He worries that she will succumb to her desires a second time when both men are on the island. The original tryst with Bardolph resulted in the birth of Vaclav, Julia's son, who looks nothing like Pavel, but resembles Bardolph. Pavel was always under the impression, however, that Vaclav was his own son. Despite Pavel's fears, Julia loved him, something he could never recognize. Missing from Braun's fable is the intrigue Shakespeare used to help Leontes to learn the truth. Additionally, Braun's play demonstrates no promise of a happy end, as a storm rages over the island.

This storm that destroys the island at the end of the play draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. While Shakespeare's play includes an element of political intrigue involving the struggle of

Prospero and Antonio over the dukedom of Milan, Braun's players are no longer political rivals. Yet, the fable, wherein the main character confronts enemies on an island in an effort to settle their differences, remains. Furthermore, Braun twists the chronology of Shakespeare's original: "Shakespeare endet, womit Braun einleitet, mit der Einladung, in die Zelle zu treten, um die Geschichte anzuhören. Es beginnt, womit Braun endet, mit dem Sturm."¹³ Indeed, Shakespeare's play ends with forgiveness and the promise of friendship. Although Braun demonstrates the end of the East-West conflict in the figures of Bardolph and Michail, Pavel remains bitter. His death eliminates any possibility for forgiveness. These two references to Shakespeare do not contribute to the actual story of the play. Instead of creating a productive adaptation of Shakespeare for socialist society (as in *Tinka*), Braun merely uses Shakespeare's fables as a frame for his own story.

Because this play contains no real message for the audience, one questions what Braun wanted to accomplish with this play. One critic pondered:

Schlimmer, mit diesem Stück schafft der Autor es, seine frühere Position unglaublich zu machen: War sie etwas doch nur Zustimmung zu einer Erziehungsdiktatur, in der man dem blöden Volk die Richtung wies und eine Nase drehte? Ist Volker Brauns utopischer Sozialismus nur eine aparte variante elitärer Besserwisserei gewesen, die nun, einmal falsifiziert, drohend auf die Verdammten dieser Erde weist als die schon auf der Matte stehenden Rächer der Enterbten?¹⁴

Although these words are harsh, they are justified. We must truly ask ourselves what Braun's early works had meant. Within the

context of the oppressive GDR society we can argue that Braun did conform to what the Party wanted. His provocations, although often critical, never spoke directly against the socialist way of life in the GDR. If we accept only this surface interpretation, then we no longer need to read Volker Braun's texts, because they no longer have relevance. If, however, we follow the trail of Braun's literary allusions, we gain insight into the psyche of a writer in an oppressive society, possibly representative of the psychological turmoil of writers in such regimes.

Although the theme of *Böhmen am Meer* focuses on more contemporary historical events, Braun turns to an older literary model. The brief affinities to Shakespeare indicate that Braun is clearly struggling. He, like Pavel, has no understanding of the world in which he now lives. Although he desperately wants to continue to portray society's contradictions, he no longer knows how. As a citizen of united Germany, Braun need not fear the censor, yet his language in this play is no more open than in any of his earlier works. Furthermore, his literary and historical references do not help him. Unlike the historical plays discussed earlier, it appears that Braun has no solid message here to deliver to his audience. On the one hand, he highlights the mistakes of socialism and capitalism, but he gives no insight as to how these contradictions may be conquered. And, while both Bardolph and Michail conclude that Pavel's way of life was the correct one, Pavel's death precludes this as a viable alternative. The ultimate destruction at the end of the play leaves no room for hope at all.

Iphigenie in Freiheit

An underlying theme throughout *Böhmen am Meer* is that of *Freiheit*. Embodied in the figure of Raja who fled her homeland in order to gain her freedom, Braun does not portray freedom as something positive. Both Bardolph and Michail are free, but they do not know how to accept this freedom. Similarly, Volker Braun is now free in united Germany, but he, like his protagonists, cannot extract himself from old thought processes. He remains trapped and presents tired messages. He broaches the topic of *Freiheit* again in *Iphigenie in Freiheit* (written 1987-1991).

The title immediately makes the theme apparent, not only in the use of the word *Freiheit*, but also embodied in the person of Iphigenie. According to both the Greek mythology and Goethe's drama *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1786), Iphigenie is a prisoner held captive by Thoas on the island of Tauris, away from her family in Greece. As Orest arrives in Tauris, Thoas orders Iphigenie to assume her role as priestess and sacrifice him. This would fulfill Tantalus's curse, which stipulates that family members die at the hands of other family members. Iphigenie is incapable of sacrificing her own brother, demonstrating for the first time, her free will. She had been unable to demonstrate a free will throughout her entire life: "Von Jugend auf hab ich gelernt gehorchen, / Erst meinen Eltern und dann einer Gottheit, / Und folgsam fühlt ich immer meine Seele / Am schönsten frei."¹⁵ In refusing to sacrifice her brother, Iphigenie acknowledges her internal humanity. She releases herself when she informs Thoas that the stranger is her brother. By placing the fate of herself, Orest, and Pylades in Thoas's hands, Iphigenie opens up the possibility that

Thoas will act humanely. In the end, Thoas sets them free and bids them "Lebt wohl!"¹⁶

Braun's version differs markedly from that of Goethe. Even its outward appearance belies a drama: there are no clear lines defining the characters and the action; the work is a "szenischer Text".¹⁷ Instead of acts or scenes, Braun divides this theatrical work into four parts, each of which contains a different significance.

Elements of the mythical fable do remain: Iphigenie is characterized as a prisoner, who is homesick. The conditions of Tantalus's curse also remain in the reference to Iphigenie as a member of a family: "Jetzt gehöre ich einer Familie, die sich schlachtet."¹⁸ But in the figure of Iphigenie, Braun symbolizes the GDR. We must then read the title as "DDR in Freiheit". Obviously, Braun viewed the end of the GDR as a release from bondage, a release from the strictures of government oppression. Unfortunately, however, Braun did not see this as a positive turn of events.

The first part of the drama is *Spiegelzeit*. Here, the audience encounters Iphigenie, who bemoans both her imprisonment and her familial history. No clear lines are drawn, as Braun makes reference to "Elektraorest" (130) and "MÖRDERVATER / MÖRDERMUTTER MUTTERMÖRDER" (128). Indeed, it seems that Braun even sets himself into the play, where it states: "DAS VOLK / Ich bin Volker" (127). Both within the context of the play and as its author, Braun's role is merely that of an observer of history. History has already set its course and the GDR has ceased to exist. Metaphorically, Iphigenie's imprisonment represents the GDR's absorption into the Federal Republic. The question of free-

dom, both for Iphigenie and for the people of the GDR, remains open.

The text borrows its title from the second part. In “Iphigenie in Freiheit”, Iphigenie herself is silent--she is not able to speak. Iphigenie’s text is presented as an internal monologue, that the Iphigenie actor can whisper to the audience. Wilfried Grauert maintains “Die Tatsache, daß Iphigenies Rede vornehmlich als innere Rede imaginiert wird . . . , verweist auf Iphigenies Isolation und Einsamkeit, ihre Flucht aus der Gesellschaft bzw. den Rückzug ihres Ichs auf sich selbst.”¹⁹ Here, the figure of Iphigenie serves as a metaphor for Volker Braun, who, with this return to mythology and Goethe, signals his ultimate retreat from society. The turning inward first mentioned in “Das innerste Afrika” has resulted in abandoning reality. Braun’s internal philosophical exile is complete.

Unlike in Goethe’s play, freedom for Iphigenie is not connected to the ideal of humanity. In Braun’s play, Iphigenie has already been freed and awaits her fate. Whereas Goethe’s Iphigenie had to make a decision in order to attain her freedom, Braun’s protagonist views this freedom as a gift. And, because Braun’s Iphigenie does not take charge of her fate, she also has no hope:

Und in kein Ausland flüchtete sich die Hoffnung
Die wüste Erde ist der ganze Raum.
Jetzt wird es endlich schwer. Ich weiß nichts mehr
Und weiß wer ich bin. Ich bin Iphigenie
Und lebe dieses unlösbare Leben
Mit meinem Leib und meiner eignen Lust (137).

Again, the similarity between Iphigenie and Braun's own despair cannot be overlooked. A future without hope holds nothing positive: there are no alternatives. There is no hope elsewhere, not in inner Africa, not in exile. Because of this despair, Iphigenie also loses her purity: "Nimm es dir, Pylades / Mein Eigentum. Entwaffnet von der Werbung / Geht Iphigenie handeln mit der Lust / Und mit der Liebe" (135). Braun reduces Goethe's ideal to a vulgarity.

In the third segment, "Geländespiel," Braun incorporates more contemporary associations into the play: "KZ und Supermarkt" (139). Using the metaphor of Antigone and her dead brother, the scene now turns to a woman searching for something in an unknown territory. Again, the mythological persona represents the GDR public, lost in an unknown region. In this instance, the unknown is capitalism ("ELEKTRIFIZIERUNG MINUS SOWJETMACHT / Gleich Kapitalismus" [139]), and Braun paints a distasteful picture of Western life. References to a concentration camp awaken memories of torture, pain, and unhappiness. Advertising and money become the operative words.

In the final section, "Antikensaal," the images tumble as the word "ZUVIELISATION" (142) summarizes the chaos that Braun envisions. The new civilization demands too many senses and sensations, with which Braun can not come to terms. Iphigenie herself "begreift . . . Geschichte als einen Prozeß der Barbarisierung."²⁰ Unification then becomes an "Akt historischer Verdrängung."²¹

Braun's fable here revolves completely around an understanding of the word *Freiheit*. At the outset, Iphigenie's fate is dependent on Thoas's actions. Once she is free, however, Braun sets

up a situation of "Sieger und Besiegte",²² mirroring once again the East-West conflict. As the victors, the West assumes a position of power. The absorption of the GDR into the Federal Republic resembles an act of colonization ("Kolonisierung" [144]), a theme Braun had already touched upon in the poem "Die Kolonie", wherein he turned his attention to the Third World. Written in the first half of 1989, this selection reflected the air of change present in the GDR, coupled with Braun's own sense of despair. Instead of finding the answers in "inner Africa", Braun situated the GDR as a colony: "Nun sind wir die Kette los" (34). The parallel with colonists expressed the powerlessness of the people and emphasized their subjugation to the authority of the Party. Despite changes occurring within the power structure, the question of the future remained uncertain. In pondering which path the future should follow, Braun realized that the *Täter/ Opfer* problematic was not clear cut. The question of complicity moved to the forefront:

Wir sind es selbst. Der durchgerechnete, planvoll folternde Apparat. Zerstört müssen wir werden, zerrieben, weggefeht. Es muß ein Ende haben. Was haben sie mit uns gemacht? Aber nun mal eine andere Frage: was machen wir?²³

GDR society was the *Apparat*, and each individual contributed to the problem. In order to achieve social progress, the *Apparat* had to be destroyed. The end result of this destruction, however, was the end of Braun's hope for utopia.

Iphigenie in Freiheit premiered at the Frankfurt Kammer-spiel in 1992, but the staging by Michael Pehlke was described by one critic as "phantasielos, blaß."²⁴ In the same year, the play was

produced in Cottbus, where it was well-received. Apparently Braun's characterization of colonization had more relevance for an Eastern audience who could sympathize with the message.

The most significant element of Braun's play and that which distinguishes (and distances) it the most from Goethe is the inherent lack of humanity in both the characters and the portrayal of history. Goethe's humanitarian conclusion would normally serve as Braun's utopia. During GDR times, Braun's technique would have been to take Goethe's play and put it in his own society--showing how Goethe could be productive for his audience. Following unification, Braun could no longer do this as he expressed thusly: "Das heutige Spiel benutzt und zerbricht die alten Vorschläge. Es wirft sie nicht weg, aber es zeigt, sie reichen nicht. Unser Humanismus, unser Humanismusbedarf sozusagen, hat eine andere Dimension."²⁵ Goethe's happy ending has no place in the barbaric present. Braun remarked:

Das alte Drama, das am Ende die schöne Welt zurechtzimmerte, wird verlassen, indem die Figuren auf einen anderen Boden treten, einen Boden, auf dem wir uns ja mit sehr widersprüchlichem Gefühl befinden . . . Und was dann kommt, ist das Ersehnte, aber mit einem ganz unangenehmen Gesicht.²⁶

Although Braun too had gained his freedom from the oppressive GDR, he disapproved of the look of West Germany's face.

Braun's dramaturgical technique in this play is reminiscent of the mixture of scenes in *Simplex Deutsch*. Here, Braun's Iphigenie supports scenes that carry his message and theme: "Braun modelt hier nicht nur an alten Figuren mit neuen Texten

herum, sondern greift auch die Grundstruktur von Goethes Werk an: Der Konflikt vom Frei-Werden durch Toleranz und Humanität wird eliminiert zugunsten der Frage, was denn das Frei-sein an Humanität in der Kapitalgesellschaft brauche und freisetzen könne?“²⁷ While the theatrics behind the text can be interpreted as rather innovative, Braun presents an old and worn out topic. As the text begins, Iphigenie has already been freed by Thoas (read GDR and Soviet Union). Her freedom is a life in capitalism--something that Braun interprets very negatively.

What is interesting for our purposes, however, is Braun's decision to return to an old myth to present his material. Unlike his early use of Goethe (in *Hinze und Kunze*) as a symbol of compliance with the dictates of literary heritage, Braun turns to Goethe here for other reasons. Because Goethe's Iphigenie is a well-known literary model, Braun's audience would be well aware of the inherent humanity message that this figure represents. Braun, however, does not conclude his play on this humanitarian note--he could not because he himself does not view capitalism as a positive alternative to the really existing socialism in the GDR. This serves as a surprise to the audience.

On a more personal level, we can detect that Braun no longer knows how to depict the present. While it appears that he turns to an old myth to present his material, this myth in its original form is not productive for Braun. Here, both Braun and his dramaturgy falter; as one critic stated: “man . . . ärgert sich über die leidenschaftliche Schwarzmalerei des anhaltend überzeugten Sozialisten. Diese Schmäherei aufs Theater zu heben ist jedoch eitel und eine Kateridee.”²⁸ Braun's despair was so great that he saw no viable alternatives for the future.

We can argue that Braun's portrayals in *Böhmen am Meer* were merely an absurd attempt at dealing with contemporary events. In tackling the topic of freedom in the Iphigenie-text, however, Braun was once again forced to turn to literature for answers. Yet, he reduces Goethe's positive model to mere caricatures, ignoring the humanitarian ideals of the original. This turn to Goethe illustrates that Braun has completely lost his voice. Iphigenie's inability to speak prevents her from giving voice to her feelings; she can "speak" only in reflections. Like Iphigenie, Volker Braun also could no longer *voice* his feelings: he could express himself only through the texts of others. Braun thereby also "speaks" in reflections.²⁹ Therein lies the completion of Braun's exile: his existence in reality is no more--he can only survive in literature.

Notes

¹ Volker Braun, *Die Zickzackbrücke* 48.

² Braun 49.

³ This was Braun's response when I questioned him in November 1990.

⁴ Theodore Fiedler has noted further intertextual references including Franz Fühmann's *Böhmen am Meer* and Ingeborg Bachmann's "Böhmen liegt am Meer". See Fiedler, "Apocalypse Now? Reading Volker Braun's *Böhmen am Meer*," *Studies in GDR Culture and Society* 14/15, Eds. Margy Gerber and Roger Woods (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996) 87-110.

⁵ Braun 45.

⁶ Braun's interest in the *Wende* and concern for reform are well documented in many of the petitions which he signed: "Entschließung von 28 Mitgliedern des Schriftstellerverbandes" 2

November 1989; "Aufruf für eine eigenständige DDR" 26 November 1989.

⁷ Braun, "Prag," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 4 99-101.

⁸ Braun 99.

⁹ Braun 100.

¹⁰ Volker Braun, *Böhmen am Meer*, *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 10 (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1993) 64. All references are to this edition and included parenthetically.

¹¹ Volker Braun, *Böhmen am Meer* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1992) 27. The 1993 version quoted earlier does not include the character Robert.

¹² Axel Schalk, "Wendestücke: German Plays for Today--Theater after the *Blitzkrieg*," *The Individual, Identity and Innovation. Signals from Contemporary Literature and the New Germany*, eds. Arthur Williams and Stuart Parkes (Berne: Lang, 1994) 279-280.

¹³ Wolfgang Fritzsche, "Endspiele des Postkommunismus? Zu Volker Brauns Stück *Böhmen am Meer*," *Freitag* 20 März 1992:9.

¹⁴ Roland H. Wiegstein, "Gewellte Pappe. Volker Brauns *Böhmen am Meer* uraufgeführt," *Frankfurter Rundschau* 12. März 1992: 8.

¹⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, *Werke*, 5. Band, 3. Auflage (Frankfurt/M: Insel, 1982) 67.

¹⁶ Goethe 79.

¹⁷ Wilfried Grauert, "Furor melancholicus auf wüstem Planum; oder, Abschied von der Präzeptorrolle: Zu Volker Brauns szenischem Text *Iphigenie in Freiheit*," *The German Quarterly* 67 (1994): 86.

¹⁸ Volker Braun, *Iphigenie in Freiheit*, *Text in zeitlicher Folge* 10 128. Further references are to this edition and included parenthetically.

¹⁹ Grauert 91.

²⁰ Grauert 89.

²¹ Eckhard Franke, "Freiheit für das Freiwild. Volker Brauns 'Iphigenie . . .' in Frankfurt uraufgeführt," *Badische Zeitung* 28 Dez. 1992: 14.

²² Braun, "Anmerkung," *Texte in zeitlicher Folge* 10 144.

²³ Braun, *Die Zickzackbrücke* 34.

²⁴ Franke.

²⁵ Andreas Lehmann, "Volker Braun," *Freitag* 21 Juni 1991: 19.

²⁶ Lehmann.

²⁷ Klaus Pfützner, "Ermunterung zu widerständigem Denken," *Neues Deutschland* 23 Dez. 1992: 10.

²⁸ V.A., "Mißlungenes Pamphlet. Volker Brauns *Iphigenie in Freiheit*," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 29 Dez. 1992: 9.

²⁹ Reflection is also inherent in the title to the first part, *Spiegelzeit*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Volker Braun's pre-unification dramas focused on presenting his vision for GDR society. As a dedicated Marxist, Braun steadfastly adhered to the notion of the dialectic, firmly believing that history was set on a progressive course. From the outset, inspired by his own work in an industrial collective, Braun noticed that his society was inefficient. He repeatedly encountered remnants of capitalist oppression in the form of hierarchical power structures within social and production spheres in the GDR. At first, Braun considered it possible to remove the vestiges of oppression from GDR society. As time progressed, the evidence of hierarchy and inefficiency continued to manifest itself. Indeed, history has shown us that the corruption that Braun perceived initially was present in all aspects of GDR culture. Since the unification of Germany, the entire world has been witness to the extensive debates concerning the corruption that was inherent in the East German system.

For Volker Braun, the only means available to come to terms with the inconsistencies in his society was through some form of literary adaptation. In his dramatic works, Braun attempted to create productive models on stage for his audience. Indeed, Braun thought that by merely presenting a "problem" on stage, his audience would recognize similarities to their own lives, and would leave the theater thinking about this problem and work, ideally as a collective, to find a solution. Unfortunately for Volker Braun, his dramas were not received in this way. While his

audience might have noticed similarities to their own everyday life, little was undertaken to rectify the inadequacies. We can assume that it was for this reason, that Braun continuously revised his message.

In this analysis, I have taken a thematic approach to Braun's dramatic texts, arguing that his presentations became ever more distanced from GDR reality. Indeed, the presentations grew ever more abstract in their form. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that Braun's use of literary references in his texts represents a type of journey, as the author travels through literature, searching for a voice for his provocations. Just as the form of the plays grew increasingly abstract, Braun's use of literary forebears altered from a programmatic reception of the GDR's literary heritage to a personal quest, in which Braun actually retreated from his audience and the problems of GDR reality, finding solace in his own literary production.

If we view Braun's dramatic texts chronologically, we notice a cyclical development in his literary adaptations. Braun vacillated between approved models for literary production and reactionary adaptations. The works in this latter category reflect the author's frustration. As time progressed, Braun's frustration and disappointment led to a growing disillusionment. The resultant dramatic works presented literary adaptations that were less productive for socialist society. Indeed, the protagonists in the post-unification texts are no longer agents, but merely actors.¹ Thus, Braun's development progressed from dramatic provocations for his audience to his dramatized vision of society.

The earliest plays, *Die Kipper*, *T.*, *Lenins Tod* and *Hinze und Kunze*, highlight some of the confusion and frustration that is endemic to Braun's writing. Paul Bauch represented the "new man", a strong individual, ready and willing to work to realize society's

goals. As a socialist, Bauch was immature--he thought more of himself than the good of society, and he refused to continue his work at the end of the play. Clearly, this play depicted many of the inefficiencies that Braun encountered in his own work in industry. At that point in time, however, Braun clearly viewed these industrial problems as temporary. When the audience recognized that Bauch's failure resulted from his own egotism, it would learn a valuable lesson about the collective. Braun was convinced that society could overcome these early problems through communal efforts. While his use of literary references included Schiller, Brecht, and Expressionism, we can argue that his employment of heritage was programmatic. Each of these elements conformed to the GDR's understanding of literary heritage. The fact that Braun failed to speak with only one voice may be indicative of his immaturity as a writer, particularly since *Die Kipper* was his first endeavor in the genre of drama.

In *T.* and *Lenins Tod* Braun made his first attempt at historical portrayals. As his second drama, *T.* deviated from both the production theme and the use of heritage. It thus represents Braun's first radical break with GDR literary traditions. In *T.*, Braun was able to express his frustration at the outcome of the Prague Spring in 1968. Unable to find an appropriate literary voice to express this frustration, Braun used history to inform his own voice. In focusing on Trotsky, he broke several taboos and placed a negative hero in the starring role. At this early juncture, Braun abandoned all of the GDR's literary, cultural, and historical mandates. From Braun's perspective, his portrayal of Trotsky did not emphasize the negative; rather, it reinforced the concept that Trotsky was an idealist who believed in the concept of a world revolution. Trotsky's idealism was an appropriate vehicle for Braun's frustration, whose own idealism did not permit him to comprehend the actions of the Warsaw Pact nations in Prague. Although disappointed and confused, Braun had hoped that

Trotsky's words and ideals would inspire an audience to continue seeking the goals of the October Revolution. Since Braun was aware that such a text could neither be published nor performed in the GDR, we have the first example of his employment of literature as a type of retreat.

In *Lenins Tod*, he tried to present a mellower version of the Trotsky material. Clearly, Braun thought the portrayal of hierarchy in the early history of the Soviet Union contained an important lesson for his audience. Although Braun often referred to the play's existence, *Lenins Tod* was not a productive literary attempt. Trotsky still appeared in a positive light and Braun's use of Büchner as a model was radical for that time. Indeed, because of Büchner's fatalism, he could not be a positive role model for GDR society. Although this play did eventually reach the GDR stage in 1988, its message was no longer relevant to East German society.

In *Hinze und Kunze*, Braun returned to a GDR topic. Continuing his provocations from *Die Kipper*, he presented more production problems. He replaced the individual with a collective, but also incorporated some of the critiques of hierarchy from the Soviet plays. Kunze's authority over Hinze repeatedly proves to be the reason for society's failure to attain its goals. Braun sharpened his critiques, moving from an individual who cannot work within the collective, to a collective that is inefficient. Endemic to Braun's work, he depicted the problems on the stage without providing the audience with a means to eradicate the inconsistencies. Indeed, Braun's ending is very critical: Hinze's final refusal to shake hands with Kunze represents a broken agreement. While Hinze claims he would like to begin anew, Braun did not show the audience how to make an effective new start. His use of Goethe represented a return to conformity, following the cultural mandates for adaptations of cultural heritage.

The various adaptations in these four early plays demonstrate a cyclical development. Initially, Braun presented a GDR theme in an appropriate adaptation. As current events developed in a direction contrary to the communist ideal, Braun distanced himself from the GDR with literary and historical adaptations too critical to warrant publication. In this way, Braun demonstrated that he could best reconcile himself to the contradictions he encountered in his society by creating a literary interpretation. The Soviet plays were only productive for Braun, because he could not actually bring them to his audience. Eventually, Braun returned to GDR themes and an appropriation of Goethe.

This type of cycle continues in Braun's dramatic works from the mid to late 1970s when Braun grappled again with production problems and the socialist ideal. In *Tinka* he continued his provocations about the GDR workplace, adding the dimension of personal conflict. In the characters of Tinka and Brenner, Braun demonstrated how decisions in the work environment could affect the personal sphere. With the character of Tinka, he presented a female Paul Bauch, who was willing to work not only for the good of society, but also to stand up to industry hierarchy and point out inconsistencies. Because the play ends tragically, we can conclude that Tinka was ahead of her time (even though Braun had allowed for alternative endings). In re-working his Bauch character, Braun indicated that he was not yet finished with the theme of the "new man." His choice of a woman protagonist attests to the value of women within socialist society. In selecting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a backdrop for his own tale, Braun looks to a forebear whose portrayals are greatly distanced from the GDR both temporally and geographically. Despite Shakespeare's importance within world literary history, his representations have little relevance to GDR reality. This illustrates that Braun was moving beyond "German" literature in his search for expression, a definitive signal that

Braun's journey had begun as he "traveled" to other cultures in search of his voice.

In *Guevara oder der Sonnenstaat*, Braun continues this geographic distancing. Like the earlier Soviet plays, Braun turned to an historical person, Che Guevara, to investigate the failings of revolution. Guevara's idealism, reminiscent of that of Trotsky, served as a positive metaphor for Braun's own vision. Yet, Guevara's optimism is not enough to sustain the revolution, and he meets with a tragic end. Basing his play more on the abstraction of revolution than on the ideal, Braun attempted to present the complicated lessons of history to his audience. While his innovative use of a reverse chronology should have helped the audience to follow the failings of Guevara's revolution, a play based on theories could have little resonance for Braun's society. We can surmise that Braun began retreating from the action of the worker plays. Indeed, Braun even began to abandon his use of literary reference--the final version of the play bears little resemblance to Hölderlin's *Empedokles*.

As historical circumstances proved more important for Braun than literature, his struggle to find an adequate means of expression grew increasingly evident. In *Großer Frieden*, he ventured even further into history. Whereas he was able to find the failings of socialism in ancient Chinese history, he was not able to present his audience with any concrete solution to the problem of hierarchical power structures. This play represents Braun at the apex of his journey, for the situation he portrayed was at the greatest temporal and geographic distance from the GDR.

He returned to a GDR topic with *Schmittchen*, continuing the provocations from *Tinka*. While Schmittchen is a stronger character than Tinka, one who is willing to express her opinions, she also demonstrates a degree of uncertainty about her own abilities,

believing that her value lies solely in her sexual prowess. Ultimately, although she must serve a prison sentence, Jutta Schmitt is a positive hero, because she desires to improve herself in the end. Returning to the theme of *Die Kipper*, Braun once again stressed the development of the individual over society. Whereas Bauch's egotism attributed to his downfall, Jutta's selfishness and education should benefit society in the end. Recalling the influences in *Lenins Tod*, Braun returned to Georg Büchner as his role model, although the adaptation did not cause much umbrage.

Until the end of the 1970s, Braun had taken a relatively conservative approach in his dramaturgy, appropriating one or two forebears and a cohesive scenario. In *Simplex Deutsch*, Braun employed a variety of techniques, adapting both Brecht and Grimmelshausen in his investigation of German traditions. Unable to present a unified script, Braun strings along a series of scenes. The lack of cohesiveness in this play is indicative of Braun's frustration and struggle, and the mixture is characteristic of his inability to speak with a single voice, as he realizes that hierarchical structures are inherent in social constructs. Although *Simplex Deutsch* set out to question the decision-making processes of the individuals in the various scenes, the fact that all of the individuals made an incorrect decision signals a growing amount of hopelessness in Braun's works. Indeed, the inclusion of a reference to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* illustrates the extent to which Braun was removed from his audience: the audience had little familiarity with Beckett's work and the absurdity of the play had little resonance with GDR reality. The utter despair expressed by E and W forces us to question to what extent Braun was relinquishing his hold on his utopian ideal.

During the 1980s, Braun's dramas became even more abstract. Beginning with *Dmitri*, Braun presented an historical event

once again remote from GDR reality. Yet, current events in Poland made the play uncomfortable for both GDR and Soviet officials. Because of the Solidarity movement in Poland, Braun was able to make older historical material productive for his contemporary society. Whereas earlier historical plays placed a strong emphasis on history, Braun turned to Schiller as his literary role model. Once again, the incorporation of the Classical heritage signals his retreat into literature.

In *Siegfried Frauenprotokolle Deutscher Furor*, Braun returned to German traditions to depict the evils of power. As warring factions struggled to attain supremacy, Braun recalled the seriousness of his contemporary age, confronted with the threat of a nuclear war on German soil. As in *Simplex Deutsch*, Braun tackled “German” heritage. In addressing world problems, he realized that not only were hierarchical power structures present throughout various moments in history and in various cultures, but the bent to destruction was also inherent in the structure of society.

As Braun investigated various literary and historical avenues, he repeatedly stumbled upon the same problems. Clearly, despite all of his attempts, Braun could not come to terms with the existence of contradictions. Unable to present a viable alternative for his audience, Braun’s remaining dramatic attempts signified his resignation. The final texts from the 1980s, *Transit Europa* and *Die Übergangsgesellschaft*, signaled his absolute withdrawal from GDR reality. Instead of producing viable contributions to socialist theater, Braun retreated into a fantasy world: both of these plays advocated a better future, one that could not reside on German soil. In *Transit Europa* Braun depicted his society in a transitional state reminiscent of the period of forced exile during the Third Reich. Just as those persecuted by the Nazis sought freedom in exile, Braun hinted that a state of freedom could only be attained by abandoning the old world. While Braun did not

wholly advocate flight, at this point, he placed his hope for the future in the audience's ability to reflect on society's original goals, on the mistakes made, and on the possibilities for the future. Here the term exile serves a metaphorical function: "das exil kann nur modell sein für die heutige befindlichkeit, für unser aller leben im übergang: die wir den alten kontinent unserer gefährlichen gewohnheit und anmaßenden wünsche verlassen müssen, ohne das neue ufer zu erkennen zwischen uns."² Braun still considered society's transition temporary, but he switched his emphasis from a dependence on socialist rhetoric to a wish for freedom.

In *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* Braun replaced Chekhov's longing for Moscow with a general longing for freedom. Yet, the play offered no possibility for freedom within the reality of GDR society. Indeed, Braun's characters could only attain a type of liberty through their dreams. At this point, Braun's despair was openly evident, and his hopes for the future appeared to be vanishing. While he did attempt to make the message productive by incorporating GDR settings and references, his adaptations of Seghers and Chekhov acted merely as vehicles for the expression of his own loss of hope. History has demonstrated that the GDR populace did indeed desire change. But Braun's adherence to utopian ideals prevented him from perceiving the true wishes of his audience. Because he was so far removed from the reality of his audience, his texts served more to provide solace for him than to provoke his audience.

The two post-unification plays indicate that Braun was completely out of touch with the desires of his audience. In both *Böhmen am Meer* and *Iphigenie in Freiheit* Braun presented speakers not actors. While he attempted to portray contemporary events on the stage, he became trapped in the rhetoric of the old regime. Even Pavel, who is depicted as having chosen the right path, could not be a positive hero. His death represents Braun's

own resignation, the recognition that his provocations were for naught. Because he let Pavel die, Braun implied that Pavel's way of life was not correct.

Unable to relinquish his obsession with freedom, Braun created the Iphigenie character to continue the abstraction begun in *Die Übergangsgesellschaft* and *Transit Europa*. Because the GDR citizens had, through unification with West Germany, attained many of the freedoms they had previously been denied, Iphigenie's freedom should be a positive picture. But, Braun portrayed Iphigenie without a free will. With references to colonialism, Braun's play implied that Iphigenie was released from one type of bondage only to find another. Clearly, Braun is uncomfortable with his new society. Although he is finally free to present his message in any form he chooses, he is unable to speak with his own voice. Braun once again emigrates into literature, letting other voices speak for him. The return to Goethe and Shakespeare invokes images of Braun's early adaptations, signaling the completion of the cyclical development and sealing his fate as an exile.

While Braun viewed exile as a state of transition, we can see from this analysis that his entire development as a writer was merely an excursion into literature. Unable to comprehend and come to terms with the inconsistencies and contradictions of his society, Braun turned to literature. Although his initial attempts were also provocations for his society to improve itself, his later works eventually proved unproductive for his audience. Indeed, Braun's dramatic works served to offer solace, acting as a vehicle for his pursuit of utopian dreams. Ines Zehert has speculated that one can speak of "einer Utopie wider besseres Wissens [. . .], Hoffnung tritt den Weg vom Gesellschaftsraum in den individuellen Bewußtseinsraum an."³ When the possibility of a better socialist society was no longer an alternative, Braun retreated

into the classics. Only time will tell if Braun can emerge from his self-imposed philosophical exile and create dramatic works that demonstrate an understanding for his contemporary society, works that will help his audience to become productive members of society, whatever form it may take.

Notes

¹ Vaßen 100.

² Quoted in *Börsenblatt* 3 Mar. 1992: 18.

³ Ines Zehert, "Diese Besondere Art von Hoffnung. Utopie und Geschichte in der DDR-Literatur," *FAZ* 6 Sept. 1992: 22.

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For over twenty-five years, Volker Braun was one of the most prolific and controversial writers in the former German Republic. This study posits Braun's use of literary references as a journey through literature that resembles a type of self-imposed internal philosophical exile. Literature assumes an increasingly important role for the author. Braun's intertextual references migrated from the programmatic use of the mandated literary heritage to a wandering through the history of literature. The resultant literary works are an external manifestation of the author's inner turmoil.

*

Volker Braun war mehr als 25 Jahre lang einer der bekanntesten und umstrittensten Dichter der ehemaligen DDR. Diese Arbeit untersucht die intertextuellen Bezüge bei Braun als eine Reise durch die Weltliteratur, die einem selbst gewählten philosophischen Exil ähnelt. Die Literatur spielte eine immer wichtigere Rolle für den Autor. Sein Gebrauch der Literatur wechselte von der programmatischen Aneignung des literarischen Erbes zu einem Ausflug durch die Literaturgeschichte. Die daraus entstandenen Werke sind die äußere Erscheinung der inneren Unruhe des Autors.