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EXCAVATING THE INTERTEXTS

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By

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ABSTRACT

The unification of the two Germanies in 1990 created a new interest in East Germany and an availability of information about the former communist country. The altered political context has fostered a re-evaluation of "things eastern," since much of what had previously been rejected or undervalued as the product of a communist-socialist regime has now proven to have its own merit. In this spirit, I have pursued a thesis which begins to re-examine East German literature — specifically through a study of Ulrich Plenzdorf's Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.

Plenzdorf's novel provides an ideal basis for a discussion of the major issues surrounding writing, author-state relations, and the relationship between politics and culture in East Germany. Although Ulrich Plenzdorf is a well known East German author, his fame is based more on the controversy surrounding the use and imitation of Goethe in Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. than on his own literary accomplishments. However, the strengths of the novel can only be explored and appreciated through a broader perspective. Using theories of intertextuality, I have investigated strong connections between Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. and Robinson Crusoe and The Catcher in the Rye and identified more significant relationships than those of mimicry between Plenzdorf's novel and Goethe's Werther. Of particular interest is the way in

which this pairing reveals and contrasts with the dominant East German view of the German cultural heritage. The comparison between Die neue Leiden and Salinger's Catcher in the Rye reveals the implications of this relationship between East German and American literature. The overt connection which Plenzdorf creates between his book and this American classic is both an expression and contradiction of the dominant East German view of the United States.

The work of intertextual theorists provides a framework for the examination of the literary interrelationships, as well as for the identication and analysis of linguistic, cultural, and political intertexts. But while Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. is a compilation of recycled material, it is also a unique piece of literature. Not only does Plenzdorf borrow from a number of other sources, but he makes the inevitability and necessity of this adoption a theme of his work. Just as the central figure Wibeau searches for his own identity, moving through imitations of Robinson Crusoe, Holden Caulfield, and Werther, so too Plenzdorf is searching for his own voice in the chorus of the masters of the past such as Defoe, Salinger, and Goethe. In this quest for self-development and self-realization, Plenzdorf and Wibeau confront traditions, assumptions, and present practices, stimulating questions, discussion, and creating the original work Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.

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INTRODUCTION

The Tools: Intertextual Theory

Originality is an ideal subscribed to by our society, an achievement we as consumers of art expect of its creators. When considering the lengthy traditions of which we are a part, it often seems that the greatest works have already been born — that every picture has already been painted, every style already applied, every melody already composed, every word already written. We lament the loss of originality and mourn for the artists who are now doomed to copy, mimic, and repeat what we have already heard, seen, or read. However, even a cursory examination of literature written prior to our age reveals that not even those we now consider the giants and geniuses created works fully independent from those which came before. "Even as the text appears to be the transparent and spontaneous expression of a writer's intentions, it must necessarily contain elements of other texts" (Worton and Still 19). Whether implicitly or explicitly, life, art, and literature are all interdependent; there is no starting point, no ultimate primary text. All writing is rewriting, and all composition consists of quotation, acknowledged or not. Today's authors form part of a great tradition indeed — a tradition of creators who are also borrowers. While this realization may create difficulties and challenges to those still seeking conventional originality or who are skeptical of the value

and inevitability of literary borrowing, it is a cause for celebration, not for condemnation of the creative process. Although the idea of the creator as independent originator and individual genius has ceased to exist, the position of the creator remains (Hutcheon 85). Authors have had to find new means of coming to terms with the past, and although quotation existed before, it is now becoming a "significant, self-conscious device" (Rabinowitz in Hutcheon 12). Writers now flaunt their adaptations of tradition and their use of the works which went before, creating a whole new kind of originality in literary recycling.

Not without apprehension and anxiety, authors use the past in order to create something new. Literature builds itself on the foundation of what came before. "Literatur nährt sich von Literatur" (Meyer in Weisgerber 42). Of course, literature is nourished by many different texts, not just the literary, but this statement underscores the positive nature of literary borrowing. Quotation, borrowing, recycling are not simply "the use of stolen goods" (Rabinowitz 262). In her study of intertextuality in modern German literature, Ingeborg Hoesterey explains literary borrowing as "der Versuch, durch eine Integration alter und gegenwärtiger Sprachcodes zu einer noch unverbrauchten Expressivität zu gelangen" (170). But this "quest for novelty" is ultimately "founded on the support of tradition" (Weisgerber 44). When Ulrich Plenzdorf, in Die neuen Leiden des jungen W., writes "Sowieso sind meiner Meinung nach in jedem Buch fast alle Bücher" (32), what he is in fact expressing is this intertextuality and so demanding its

application to his work. Indeed, Plenzdorf's novel is explicitly intertextual, "feeding" directly on three novels from three different national literatures, as well as cultural and political circumstances, and making use of slang and of innovative language. Julia Kristeva, a pioneer of intertextual thought, emphasizes the importance of examining the text with relation to society and history, both of which are also texts ("The Bounded Text" 36). "Texts are made out of cultural and ideological norms; out of the conventions of genre; out of styles and idioms embedded in the language; out of connotations and collocative sets; out of clichés, formulae or proverbs; and out of other texts" (Frow 45). Any interpretation of Plenzdorf's novel faces the rewarding challenge of integrating cultural, linguistic and literary intertextuality to present a credible vision of the novel.

Plenzdorf is and is not the sum of Goethe, Defoe, and Salinger, just as he is and is not a socialist realist novelist. The novel, too, is a combination of Die Leiden des jungen Werther, Robinson Crusoe, and The Catcher in the Rye, and yet it is not so limited. Because Plenzdorf makes such conscious use of other literature in Die neuen Leiden des jungen W., he exemplifies the challenge of the post-modern writer. "Der Autor konfrontiert nicht mehr nur den eigenen Erzählakt, er konfrontiert darüber hinaus dessen intertextuelle Bedingtheit und macht dieselbe zum konstitutiven Agens seiner Schrift" (Hoesterey 167). References to its precursors both define the tradition of which Plenzdorf and Die neuen Leiden are a part and highlight where the differences lie. It is not solely within Plenzdorf's text itself that its meanings are located, but also in its

relation to the other texts and to cultural and linguistic traditions and norms. What matters, furthermore, is not the fact that the texts are similar or different, for such a comparison would merely amount to a source checklist, but rather what these similarities and differences mean. Central to the understanding of this relationship, then, is the realization that texts are not self-contained structures. In advocating this broader definition of text, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida even go so far as to say that it is impossible to live outside the infinite text (Leitch 109). In fact, texts are "not structures of presence but traces and tracings of otherness" (Frow 45).

It is important to realize that, in an analysis of Plenzdorf's novel, the traditional dispute about whether intertextuality is located in the reader or in the author (Riffaterre 75) does not apply. In Die neuen Leiden, Plenzdorf points out the "traces and tracings of otherness" to the reader, either by naming the books, as in the case of Robinson Crusoe and The Catcher in the Rye, or by recounting the plot, as he does with Die Leiden des jungen Werther. His references to American culture, too, are clearly set out by his jeans 'worship' and his love of jazz, Satchmo in particular. Thus, in this case it is not "essential that in each reading, the (various) readers sense, indeed presuppose that there is an intertext through their perceptions of ... the text itself " as Michael Riffaterre claims is necessary for intertextuality to exist (26-27). Plenzdorf makes certain that there is no question about the intention or recognition of his intertextuality. By overtly defining his foundation, he does not demand well-read "sophisticated readers" (Hutcheon 88-89) and

overrides possible discrepancies in their backgrounds, making the novel generally accessible to the public, despite its relatively complex premise. The interpretation of these intentions and intertextualities, however, is necessarily far less defined. Although Plenzdorf does readily identify his intertexts, the analysis of their interplay is still very open, as is recognized by the critics themselves (Fox 134). In fact, Plenzdorf confesses to writing the novel "bewußt auf Auslegbarkeit" (Weimann "Diskussion" 178). Thus, he defeats Riffaterre's concern that "when it activates or mobilizes the intertext, the text leaves little leeway to readers and controls closely their response" (57). Rather than imposing limits, the result of Plenzdorf's particular intertextuality is far more the reader's questioning of whether the use of intertexts is meant to "orient or to disorient" (Hutcheon 92), and in the absence of clear indicators for either case, the reader is free to consider both and form an independent conclusion. There is no closure here — the text is and is not its intertexts.

It is not just Plenzdorf's refusal to take a position within the novel, but also the nature of the intertexts themselves which make the reader unsure of how to judge them. Goethe is generally considered the master of German literature, and yet here is a German author questioning the value of one of his masterpieces. Through the main character Edgar Wibeau, Plenzdorf criticizes Die Leiden des jungen Werther in a way that some critics feel almost amounts to sacrilege (Mews 51; Girnus ed. 152). The key here is that it is not the pure and "original" Goethe which Plenzdorf is invoking; it is his own version

of Goethe. Plenzdorf has established his own "criteria of significance" from Goethe's narrative, and its meaning in this new context is a constructed one, not simply "extracted" (Worton and Still 12). Furthermore, within the text Goethe is only who Plenzdorf wants him to be. Here, while important by implication, he is an unnamed influence whose novel is variously used as toilet paper, rejected, and accepted. Rabinowitz classifies this clash of interpretations as a conflict between the narrative audience, who believes the assumptions in the book, and the authorial audience who exists outside of the narrative, and thus has its own opinions and experiences of the people and issues commented on within the book (254). In Plenzdorf, there is clearly a distinction between the narrative audience, who identifies with Wibeau and his opinions of Goethe, Salinger and Defoe, and the authorial audience, whose experiences differ from those presented in the novel.

In the process of writing, then, "every writer creates his own precursors" (Borges in Bloom 141). Harold Bloom attributes this adaptation to a "misreading," stating that there are "no interpretations but misinterpretations" (95). Plenzdorf's use of Goethe is not, however, a "creative correction" (Bloom 29) in which he sets right something he feels is incorrect or incomplete in Werther. His "misinterpretation" is a far more intentional and calculated use of the original. Plenzdorf's "stance appears to be that of the precursor, but the meaning of the stance is undone" (Bloom 90). Useful is Hutcheon's description of a "process of revising, replaying, inverting and 'trans-contextualizing' previous works of art" (11). Plenzdorf quotes from Goethe whenever an

event is paralleled in the intertext, but he also "transcontextualizes" these references through the addition of scenes, references, and implications which Goethe never included or intended (14). Similarly, Wibeau's assumption that The Catcher in the Rye is based in fact, and his equating of Holden Caulfield with Jerome Salinger himself, are meanings which Plenzdorf has constructed, not merely "extracted" from Salinger's narrative. "Inevitably a fragment and a displacement, every quotation distorts and redefines the primary utterance by relocating it within another linguistic and cultural context" (Worton and Still 11). While it is helpful to consider how the characters treat the "original," as Rabinowitz suggests, it is not necessarily true that through this "we can discover how we should treat the work in front of us" (247). This consideration alone is not sufficient because even the construction of the characters' reactions to earlier works is playing upon and against the reader's own knowledge of the intertexts or lack of familiarity with them, their possible interpretations and reception. Quotation is "assess[ing] the value of the present in comparison with the past" as Weisgerber asserts (45), but it is also evaluating the value of the past with respect to the present.

Not only is every quotation a distortion and redefinition of the primary text because it is placed in a new context, but it is also a denial of chronology in literature. "To quote is...to interrogate the chronicity of literature and philosophy, to challenge history as determining tradition and to question conventional notions of originality and difference" (Worton and Still 12). Meaning in Plenzdorf's text is not only a product of

the relation between it and its intertexts, it is also the result of the interplay of the time periods in which they take place. Die neuen Leiden is not simply a modernized version of Die Leiden des jungen Werther, as some critics initially suspected (Brenner 21). By reinterpreting the earlier work, it is in effect denying that Goethe's novel actually preceded it, thus interrogating the past and creating a different future. "Texts can only be understood when set against the contextual backgrounds from which they emerge; and...the same texts paradoxically contribute to the backgrounds that determine their meanings" (Hutcheon 24). Die neuen Leiden is not only viewed through its relation to Goethe's work, but Die Leiden des jungen Werther is now also viewed by the reader through its relation to Plenzdorf. "The past provides a vantage-ground from which the present can be viewed in a new perspective; it is a standard which brings out in bold the absurdity, the uncertainty, and the anxiety of our age. Conversely, the present also illuminates the past" (Weisgerber 42).

By overcoming history in this fashion, the modern writer exercises power over his/her predecessors — the power of revision. However, an unavoidable force is exerted by the text with reputation and time in its favour. For both reader and author, the influence and citation of other texts is never neutral, but part of a power relation, because such reference is always "emotionally and politically charged" (Worton and Still 2). Plenzdorf's literary references are to recognized, even canonized texts, which "stand for a system of power that gave status" (Chambers 143). Furthermore, writing in a socialist

state as he did, Plenzdorf was also writing against the background of firmly established and definitely defined state positions. The official East German stance with regard to the German cultural past, the American cultural and political present, as well as the role and function of the writer were all carefully set out. Erich Honecker stated that there should be no taboos in art and literature provided the artists proceeded from a firm point of socialism (Fox 128; Brenner 24). In reality, of course, creators were not so free. Plenzdorf himself admits that "die Hauptrolle äußerer Druck gespielt hat, will sagen, mehrere Jahre, in denen ich nie ganz das machen konnte, was ich wollte..." (Weimann "Diskussion" 178). Significantly, the German Democratic Republic always considered itself the inheritor of German culture (Fox 130). The East German state adopted humanism as a means to the "Erneuerung der deutschen Kultur" which they believed should proceed through the use of the "erhabenen Ideen der besten unseres Volkes," and Goethe is certainly a German master (Pieck in Brenner 22). Although these were part of tradition and "bürgerliche Kunst," the implication among East German theorists was that the humanist ideals could only be realized in a socialist society. Brenner outlines in depth the progression of East German thought towards the classics, especially the use of the classics to counteract trends towards modernism and internationalism. Most revealing, however is the following statement, generally suspected of being a thinly veiled expression of party opinion: "Die Unterschätzung des klassischen Erbes der deutschen Kunst muß überwunden werden...Die Mißachtung der Klassik, die Verneinung

der großen Errungenschaften der klassischen deutschen Kunst, sind eine der Erscheinungen des Kosmopolitismus, dessen Ziel es ist, die deutsche Nation durch die amerikanischen Imperialisten zu versklaven" (Orlow in Brenner 23). Following prescriptions like these, one East German critic even went so far as to complain that Wibeau received more, intellectually, from 'them' than from 'us' (Neubert 218). What all of this demonstrates is a fundamental hostility to American culture and thought among East German authorities, making Plenzdorf's use of americanisms and his largely positive presentation of Salinger, jazz, etc. controversial, especially in light of his criticisms of Goethe.

In this inversion of prescribed perspective and in Plenzdorf's failure to produce an unquestionably edifying novel, he attacks socialist realism. Furthermore, within the novel he ridicules the view that art must be useful, for and about work and workers, and even allows Wibeau to give a lengthy criticism of a didactic film which he must see in school. In this way, Plenzdorf's novel is also political. What is incorporated here is an ideological intertext. When Wibeau says that everyone wants to see the world, and whoever does not is lying (41), Plenzdorf is presenting his interpretation of the political realities of living in an East Germany surrounded by the Wall. With respect to these ideological and political issues, Plenzdorf does, however, guide the reader in drawing conclusions. Plenzdorf seems to suggest that it is the system he is criticizing, not the idea. Making clear that his criticism comes from the left, Wibeau says, "Ich hatte nichts

gegen den Kommunismus und das, die Abschaffung der Ausbeutung auf der ganzen Welt. Dagegen war ich nicht. Aber gegen alles andere. Daß man Bücher nach der Größe ordnet, zum Beispiel...Zum Dafürsein gehört kein Mut. Mutig will aber jeder sein" (80-81). It is the rules and practices as they exist that he questions, not the theory behind them, he indicates to his readers. But again, the intertexts here are not simply "models whose recasting in a modern work is...aimed at a satirical ridicule of contemporary customs or practices" (Hutcheon 10). He is both affirming and criticizing the political system of which he is a part, and it is this ambiguity which permitted the existence of the novel. Ulrich Plenzdorf had written the story several years before, but did not think it would be accepted for publication, and so considered it simply a piece for "die Schublade" (Weimann 178). Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. was published in 1972-73 during a brief window of relative tolerance between periods of unease in writer-state relations. By 1976 there was no longer much co-operation or goodwill between artists and the government of East Germany.

Although Plenzdorf in part indicates his position with regard to the elements he has incorporated, he leaves the interpretation of his own work up to the reader. Without Plenzdorf's overtly expressed opinions, interpretation is a challenge, but since the book is not simply a compilation of intertexts, clearly Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. must be more than the sum of its parts. By examining Die neuen Leiden with respect to language and narrative form (Chapter 1), the conflict between the individual and society, and the

meaning of invention and death (Chapter 2), meaning, reception, and politics (Chapter 3), and the thematization of the literary and the intertextual (Chapter 4), I will use the relationships and criteria established in this discussion of intertextuality in order to come to a credible, more comprehensive interpretation of the novel. Plenzdorf takes on the past with its traditions, as well as the present with its assumptions, and gains from questioning and confronting both.

CHAPTER ONE

The Site: Language, Narrative Form, and Plenzdorf's "Waffen"

Around the publication and performances of Ulrich Plenzdorf's Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. in the German Democratic Republic in 1972-3, a large body of commentary and speculation about the potential meanings and possible reasons for the resounding success of this work emerged. Although its obvious use and adaptation of the classical German literary tradition is the focus of much discussion, the consensus among academics and the public alike is that the incorporation of Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werther is not the reason for its immense popularity with East German youth (Schumacher in Weimann "Diskussion" 176; Biele 206). However, in order to consider its literary qualities and the way in which the novel functions, it is necessary to begin an interpretation of Die neuen Leiden by examining precisely this facet. In fact, the narrative innovations extend beyond a simple recasting of Werther, for although largely underplayed in the criticism, Plenzdorf also brings The Catcher in the Rye and Robinson Crusoe into the East German literary tradition. Plenzdorf's use of these literary intertexts, as well as the subjectivity and dual perspective of the narrator must be examined with respect to language and narrative form.

In a novel so notorious for its borrowing from other literature, the language is necessarily extraordinarily revealing. Die neuen Leiden includes references to Robinson Crusoe, direct quotation from Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and imitations of The Catcher in the Rye in style and atmosphere. But what do these linguistic parallels indicate for Plenzdorf's primary text?

> Mit Auffälligkeiten im Sprachduktus kann Einfühlung während der Rezeption verhindert werden; ebenso kann aber ein Teil der Rezipienten dadurch angesprochen und zur Identifikation geradezu eingeladen werden, wenn nämlich der verwendete Sprachduktus der einer bestimmten Gruppe ist und unmittelbar aus der Realität übernommen wurde. (Schregel 238)

In order to determine the effects of Plenzdorf's language choices, it is first necessary to examine the lexical specifics. The most obvious linguistic play occurs in the titular reference to Goethe's work, in which the major difference is the addition of the word *neu*, suggesting that the novel will not just be a modernized copy of Goethe's original, but that, like the title, it will include and address something new. However, rather than a simple imitation of Goethe's style or language, the "besonderer Reiz [of Plenzdorf's style] ensteht aus der größtmöglichen Ferne zwischen Werthers Herzergießungsstil und [Wibeau's] eigenen Jargon" (Brandes Zitat 114). While Werther wrote in a style typical of his century, Plenzdorf makes no attempt to integrate this into his twentieth-century text, instead leaving any quotes from Werther as obvious references to the Goethean intertext. As a result, the classical language of Goethe contrasts with the casual style, slang, and Americanisms incorporated into Plenzdorf's novel. The use of words like

"Fakt," "Recorder," "High," "Bands," "Jazz," "Sofa," and others which are part of Edgar's language and speech patterns, show his fascination with Western culture. While Hans Galinsky evaluated this type of transference in authors like Benn, Brecht and Kafka as "linguistic sensitivity" (179), the GDR critics were far less positive about Plenzdorf's adoption of English words and American culture, especially given the East German emphasis on linguistic purism (Langenbruch 61) and their political animosity toward the United States (Zipes 329).

Not only does Plenzdorf borrow words and phrases from the English language, but the bulk of his text is written in a style reminiscent of J. D. Salinger's in the American classic The Catcher in the Rye, characterized by simple, unsophisticated vocabulary, slang, loose expression, and exaggeration. The same figures of repetition, overgeneralization, hyperbole, judgement and digression which are so common in Holden Caulfield's speech reappear in the narrative of the East German Edgar Wibeau. Preceding Edgar's judgement of literature in general is a digression which begins from a play on the word "Stoff." Wibeau says, "Mein Problem war bloß: Ich hatte keinen Stoff. — Ich hoffe, es denkt jetzt keiner, ich meine Hasch und das Opium," but only completes his point over a page later, just as Caulfield might have done, with "Was ich meine, ist: ich hatte keinen Lesestoff" (Plenzdorf 31-32). Caulfield's type of "typical informal, colloquial teenage language" (French 106) as it is adopted and adapted, comes to characterize Wibeau, with equally humorous and insightful results. While this language

may have been a cause for East German critics to lament that Plenzdorf has inherited more from "them" [the Americans] than from "us" [DDR cultural ideology, authors, critics] (Neubert 218), it is also this aspect which has brought many readers closer to the text.

Some critics congratulated Plenzdorf for authentically capturing the language and attitudes of GDR youth, but Marcel Reich-Ranicki denounced the use of slang and teenager language as no more than a simple imitation of Salinger as it was translated by Böll (266). However, Plenzdorf actually picks up on elements from Salinger which Böll omitted (e.g. "Old" Werther) and is truer to the relaxed language of the original than Böll's more elevated linguistic style (Riedel 200). Clear indication that Plenzdorf was in fact familiar with Salinger in the original and uses this as his point of reference, is his criticism of the translation of the title. "Laßt euch nicht vom Titel täuschen. Ich gebe zu, er popt nicht besonders, vielleicht ist er schlecht übersetzt" (Plenzdorf 38). Reich-Ranicki's entire argument is undermined, however, by those who assert that debating whether this language represents reality is irrelevant because it is not true jargon but art, a stylized "Kunstsprache" (Jakobs 232). The language of the text is indeed art because it is used in the novel, but it is nonetheless intended to imitate and represent real speech using slang and Salinger's relaxed style, especially as this narrative language contrasts with the excesses of Werther and the detailed catalogue of Defoe. It is this use of slang and the references to Salinger that will cause Die neuen Leiden to be forgotten or impossible to

understand in less than two hundred years, suggests Neubert as proof that Plenzdorf's novel is a lesser work than Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werther (220). Even if Plenzdorf's novel is forgotten in the future, it is in large part its innovative use of language and references to other novels, including Salinger's, which have made Die neuen Leiden so interesting and successful with both the public and literary critics to date.

But while the language Plenzdorf uses is firstly a stylistic choice, that choice obviously also has consequences for the novel as a whole and reflects meaning within the story. Robinson Crusoe, Werther, Caulfield, and Wibeau all object to the norms and traditions of their respective societies and choose some form of escape, but the similarities in Caulfield's and Wibeau's speech style also indicate deeper psychological parallels (Weimann 164). For both of these characters, speech and language style is especially characteristic of their conflict with reality and distance from the adult world. Furthermore, while Wibeau chooses the Werther passages to communicate his emotions, these quotations also distance the reader from Edgar because he does not reveal his feelings in his own words (Weimann 157). Instead of telling the reader or Willi what he thinks about Charlie or how he feels about Dieter's arrival, Edgar simply quotes the corresponding passage from Werther, which transmits the information but erases the personal aspect. This borrowed vocabulary, though a means for Wibeau to communicate with the world, is also a confrontation with tradition, simply because of the new context

into which all of the works and the language of these characters are placed. Although Weimann suggests that Edgar finally stops quoting Werther because he is "healed" and has rejoined society, Wibeau himself admits that he chose to stop using Werther's words because he was pretending to fit in so that he could continue work on the "nebelloses Farbspritzgerät" in private (Brandes Zitat 117). Edgar's conscious language choices textually demonstrate that he is not simply mimicking the language of other characters in other novels, but formulating his own method of communication which has its basis in other texts while extending beyond them. In direct contrast to Edgar's critical thinking and calculated use of language, stand Dieter's uncontemplated remarks, exemplified in the conversation about art.

> Ich glaube nicht, daß er irgendeinen blödes Wort sagte, das er nicht dreimal überlegt hatte, wenn das reicht. Dann legte er los: Ich würde sagen, es könnte ihm nichts schaden, wenn er sich mehr auf das Leben orientieren würde in der Zukunft...Und dann natürlich gibt es hierbei wie überall gewisse Regeln, die er einach kennen muß: Perspektive, Proportion, Vordergrund, Hintergrund...Der Mann meinte das ernst, völlig ernst. (75)

While Dieter's assessment of Edgar's art sounds like a valid opinion, Edgar's keen interpretation of these statements reveals that Dieter is no more than a mouthpiece for socialist standards and ideals, and that he has uncritically adopted the prescribed opinions and language of the system.

A particular achievement of Edgar's language and speech style is that he is not simply a first person narrator writing his story, but a character who addresses and

communicates directly with his audience/readers. In fact, "der Leser wird als Kumpel, als Gleichdenkender angesprochen" in order to establish sympathy and understanding for his problems (Schumann 160). However, despite the strengths and creativity of Edgar's language use, his communication through the words of the characters in the intertexts also indicates that Edgar has problems communicating on a verbal level. This lack of his own language is an external signal of his internal conflict (Brandes Zitat 117). While his quotations from Werther begin as attempts to communicate, they soon become a linguistic medium for provocation. Although he sends the recorded Werther passages to his friend Willi, because he does not reveal his source or provide any clues to help decipher his meaning, he is only relaying the events of his life and emotional reactions without actually facilitating communication of any real kind. Like Plenzdorf's use of the intertexts in the actual writing process, Wibeau uses Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger as keys to unlocking hidden and disguised meanings. But where Plenzdorf draws the reader into the novel by using the intertexts and pointedly identifying them within the story, thus providing the reader with the tools for interpretation that the characters lack, Edgar uses these same intertexts as a means to keep his distance from others and challenge his companions. Neither Willi nor Charlie understands what Edgar means or is trying to say. Willi asks for the code, and Charlie tells Edgar's father "Er redete Blech...Ein dermaßen krauses Zeug. Vielleicht nicht sinnlos, aber völlig verschroben. Von sich hatte er das nicht. Wahrscheinlich aus der Bibel" (57). Edgar maintains many contacts with people

but is either unable or unwilling to express his own feelings or explain himself, resulting in miscomprehension. The often repeated figure "Ich weiß nicht ob mich einer versteht" shows that even the words he chooses demonstrate Wibeau's own concerns about being understood and the lack of understanding between people. The failure of language and communication serves to alienate people from one another and as a result, Wibeau has lost faith in the ability of others to truly comprehend him.

In Goethe's novel, the inability of the characters to comprehend each other is a theme as well, developed especially between Werther and Albert. After they discuss suicide Werther writes, "Und wir gingen auseinander, ohne einander verstanden zu haben. Wie denn auf dieser Welt keiner leicht den andern versteht" (Goethe 58). Salinger's novel also uses failed communication as a recurrent motif. In Holden Caulfield's search for meaningful communication, he often picks up the telephone in order to contact the people with whom he can truly speak, but rarely ends up achieving real communication. "Jedesmal wenn die Kommunikation in der Wirklichkeit *nicht* zustande kommt, erträumt sich Holden ein ideales Verhältnis, so etwa mit seiner Schwester Phoebe und mit Jane Gallagher" (Grotzer 133). A similar problem occurs in Robinson Crusoe's narrative because of the concretized speech which is used; the more direct and authentic the emotions, the more the inadequacies of Crusoe's elevated language are exposed, because speech itself is suppressed (Zimmermann 23). In Werther too, the pressure of experience straining against the confines of language can be felt,

especially later on in Werther's decline when his language becomes dislocated and fragmentary (Swales 27). While language and quotation are powerless when communication fails, they can also have ultimate power by influencing behaviour. In some instances, Wibeau chooses his actions in order to be able to mimic Goethe's text (Brandes and Fehn 615). Although this outright copying seems to suggest that Wibeau's actions are not self-determined, the consciousness with which he enacts these episodes indicates that their purpose must also be to require the reader to examine these textual portions more carefully and determine how their meaning relates to Edgar's situation. In one sequence Edgar introduces his quotation of Werther with the phrase "ich wollte folgendes loswerden" (69-70), indicating a real desire to apply passages from Goethe's text. In this instance Edgar eats lettuce that he has grown himself in order to copy Werther, but his actions represent a craving for the freedom to experience and are motivated by the potential for self-sufficiency, both of which Edgar seeks.

The inability to fully express oneself — "Sprachlosigkeit" — is a "Leiden" for both Werther and Wibeau (Brandes Zitat 111). Werther's writing deteriorates as dashes begin to replace words and thoughts he cannot express, and Edgar cannot express his true feelings, since "über das Eigentliche schweigt er sich in einem Schwall von Worten aus" (Brandes 109). A perfect example of this failure to communicate that which means most is Wibeau's visit to his father. "Ich weiß nicht, ob einer glaubt, daß ich so blöd war, mich gleich vorzustellen...Wissen, man hat einen Vater, und ihn dann sehen, das ist *überhaupt*

nicht dasselbe...Ich weiß nicht, was ich sonst für ein blödsinniges Zeug zusammenredete. Ich glaube, ich hörte erst auf zu reden, als ich wieder auf der Treppe stand, die Tür zu war, und ich feststellte, daß ich kein Wort gesagt hatte, wer ich war und das" (103-108).

Although some critics also identify the incident with Fleming as an example of Edgar's inability to verbally communicate his opposition (Brandes and Fehn 615), suggesting that he drops the iron plate on the teacher's foot *instead* of speaking, there are flaws in this argument. Firstly, Edgar does in fact speak, saying "Aber Uhrmacher wollten wir eigentlich schon damals nicht werden" (13). Furthermore, when Edgar the narrator comments on this incident, he emphasizes that it was not planned, and that any attempt to criticize the existing system is doomed to failure, admitting that "besonders scharf war ich auf das Nachspiel nicht...Ich hatte was gegen Selbstkritik, ich meine: gegen öffentliche" (15). It is not an inability to express himself, but rather the futility of attempting real communication which leads Edgar to refuse language. His use of Werther's words instead of his own do not just function as a "Sprachrohr zum Ausdruck von Empfindungen die Edgar selbst nicht ausdrücken kann" (Brandes Zitat 114). Edgar uses quotation as a conscious choice *not* to directly say what he thinks because he already knows that a resistance to alternative and rebellious truths will prevent his voice from being effective, and he further realizes that miscomprehension will render his attempts at communication meaningless. His decision not to write "Mein größtes Vorbild ist Edgar Wibeau. Ich möchte so werden, wie er mal wird" (15) is not one of simple cowardice, but

rather a realization of the limits of the society in which he exists and a recognition of the fruitlessness of such rebellion. "Dabei wäre der Aufsatz höchstens nicht gewertet worden" (15). Holden Caulfield's wish to be a deaf-mute is a direct result of a similar conviction about the failures of language. Holden believes that society suffers from an "Überdruß an einer nicht mehr das Wesentliche zum Ausdruck bringenden Sprache" (Grotzer 135). But despite their consciousness of the corruption of language, all the narrators and all authors must nonetheless use it to express themselves, and if "adequate personal expression through the given [or] official language has become impossible, different modes of expression must be explored" (Hoegl 41) It is Plenzdorf's goal in Die neuen Leiden to capitalize on the breadth of language in order to create meaning from emptiness and entropic possibilities.

It is especially in the relationship between Wibeau and Charlie that the problem of communication emerges. The floundering love relationship in Goethe's novel is a central example of Werther's inability to find the words to express himself, just as Caulfield's confusion about gender relations and sex is a large part of his inability to comprehend himself and communicate his malaise about society. Wibeau too either does not or cannot tell Charlie his real feelings. "Außerdem sagte ich ihr die ganze Zeit, daß sie mir ungeheuer was sein konnte. Ich meine, ich sagte es ihr nicht wörtlich. Ich sagte eigentlich überhaupt nichts. Aber sie merkte es doch, denke ich" (53). Although Brandes and Fehn insist on ascribing Wibeau's inability to reveal his true intentions and emotions

to a failed response to other people (615), Plenzdorf takes the issue beyond the "Sprachlosigkeit" plaguing Werther. Even though Wibeau does not tell Charlie how he feels verbally, or speak about her and his feelings toward her in his own words, this lack of words is not indicative of failed communication because messages are still successfully sent and received.

The difficulty Edgar experiences in expressing himself is bridged especially through Zaremba and Charlie, with whom meaningful communication and exchange also occur through non-verbal channels (Shaw 93). Given the emphasis on language and quotation in Edgar's own speech and in the novel, it seems unlikely that Edgar "consciously rejects verbal (and especially conceptual verbal) language...in favour of body language which is spontaneous, direct, and unambiguous..." (93), but substantial communication certainly takes place through music, dance, art, and body language, just as it does in Werther through reference to literature. Zaremba, for instance, expresses himself more in song and through the variations on the word 'no' than in language of any formal kind (Plenzdorf 89, 94). "Der Mann konnte mit diesem "no" mehr sagen als andere in ganzen Romanen..." (94). Other alternative forms of expression are demonstrated in Edgar's relaxation and feeling "high" while dancing and listening to his music, and his inclination to burst into song while 'making love' to Charlie. "Happiness, inner and outer harmony, [and the search for them] tend to be expressed by them through music" (Shaw 94). Furthermore, considering the Blue Jeans song which Edgar himself

writes, it is rhythm and "harmony of body and soul" which are significant, not the words (93). Similarly, Charlie's behaviour, her eyes, her blushes, and her particular way of lifting her skirt as she sits down, are all "directly and unambiguously meaningful to Edgar" (94). Edgar also communicates his hatred of Dieter's attitudes to Charlie without verbal commentary. "Wir landeten auf Dieters Bude...Es war ungefähr so gemütlich wie der Wartesaal auf dem Bahnhof Mittenberg. Bloß der war wenigstens nie aufgeräumt. *Das* konnte ich leiden...Und das schönste war: Charlie dachte plötzlich genau dasselbe...Dabei hatte ich den Mund nicht *einmal* afgemacht" (78-80). Not only does this passage illustrate the depth of the connection between Edgar and Charlie, this affirmation of non-verbal communication indicates an even more profound questioning of language and quotation, confirming Plenzdorf's narrative originality. Like Edgar, he is using the verbal language of the text as imitation, communication, alienation, and provocation in indirect, non-verbal communication with readers. Literature is always as much about what is written as it is about what is left out, and Plenzdorf sends the reader possibly even stronger messages and raises more questions through that which he does not say outright or include in his text as he does with the words written on the page.

While Plenzdorf's "revising, replaying, inverting and 'transcontextualizing'" (Hutcheon 11) of the works by Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger certainly reverberates through every aspect of the text and its interpretations on linguistic and extra-linguistic levels, it is in itself a narrative technique and must be examined as such. It was likely the

legitimation of the socialist system through tradition, and not literary intertextuality, that East German critic Peter Biele had in mind when he identified the central issue writing, "jeder, auch wenn er, wie Edgar, nichts davon weiß [ist] ein Erbe klassischer Helden, und wenn er leben will, [hat] in [diesem] Sinn zu leben" (208). While Biele expresses the socialist realist conviction that all modern authors and characters should honour their predecessors (the neglect of which was one of Friedrich Kaul's complaints about Plenzdorf; Girnus ed.151), an equally important implication is that any individual or any author creating a character in a novel cannot ignore the existence of those who came before. Not even the first English novel Robinson Crusoe, about which James Joyce wrote "Defoe was the first English author to write without imitating or adapting foreign works, to create without literary models" (quoted in Ellis 8), was free from some kind of borrowing of the past, since it is in part an imitation of the style of spiritual autobiography and confessional works (Richetti 54). Werther too is famous for its reference to Klopstock and use of Lessing's Emilia Galotti, Homer, and Ossian. Wibeau's casual statement that "Sowieso sind meiner Meinung nach in jedem Buch fast *alle* Bücher" (32) proves insightful with reference to more than just his own story.

The duality of borrowing and creating which characterize Plenzdorf are not just controversial with respect to Goethe, for Plenzdorf's skilful adaption of Salinger also attracts commentary and criticism. "Aber so unverkennbar seine direkte Abhängigkeit von Salinger, so geschickt und häufig überzeugend die Adaption des Vorbilds, seine

Paraphrasierung auf dem Hintergrund der Ostberliner Verhältnisse. Daher kann Plenzdorfs schriftstellerische Leistung als epigonal und originell zugleich gelten" (Reich-Ranicki 265-66). This assessment shows far more insight into the nature of literature and Plenzdorf's particular accomplishments than the gross misunderstandings of Heinz Piontek, who snidely remarks that "Der Autor wußte, daß man ihm auf die Schliche kommen würde, und läßt daher seinen Edgar Wibeau mehrfach für den "Fänger im Roggen" schwärmen. Das ändert zwar nichts an der Tatsache der Imitation, verärgert aber den Leser auch nicht so, wie es eine versuchte Verschleierung täte" (293). While it is certainly evident that The Catcher in the Rye is a *model* for both Wibeau and Plenzdorf, this relationship is not one of simple imitation and in fact adds to the intricacies of the novel rather than detracting from its creativity. Plenzdorf cannot be original in his story of a boy who rejects society to develop himself in isolation, because he cannot ignore that Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye have already been written. What makes Die neuen Leiden original is that it *is* a "Robinsonade in der Großstadt" (Reich- Ranicki 266), and it *is* Holden Caulfield's weekend of freedom, and it *is* Werther's escape to the country — but it is also simultaneously much less and much more.

Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye do not interrelate with Die neuen Leiden just because Plenzdorf mentions them, but rather because they also share certain themes and characteristics — elements they would have in

common whether or not the reader's attention were specifically drawn to their commonality. The implications of this referentiality, of course, are that since Plenzdorf realizes that unintentional adoptions from other books are unavoidable, those he specifically mentions must have significance (Reis 45). The textual recycling to which critics have reacted most strongly is Plenzdorf's use of Goethe's Werther. Initially it is called a "Vogel" and used for toilet paper, but its words are tellingly also mistaken for quotes from the Bible (Plenzdorf 57). In neither East Germany nor in the West can the critics determine how to evaluate the relationship between Die neuen Leiden and Werther, whether it is meant to be favourable or unfavourable, to "orient or disorient" the reader. What is evident, however, is that the strongest reaction against Goethe in the twentieth century has been in the German Democratic Republic, a fact hardly surprising considering the attempt by the East German government to force an assumption and admiration of the classical tradition (Mandelkow 235). In one of his novels, Volker Braun addresses what has happened to Goethe in the East German state:

> Sie haben aus Goethes Werk einen Werkhof gemacht für die schwer erziehbare Nation...Sie haben seine Erbe gepachtet und bleiben darin sitzen. Sie haben seine Schwellen gebohnert — aber wagen sich nicht mehr darüber. Sie leben mit seinen Bücher so, als würden die Bücher schon leben...Sie sind neue Aristokraten, wir sind seine alten Freunde. (Mandelkow 232)

However, although the East German government tried to use Goethe to defend their "good" Germany, "the same Goethe who can be used to provide legitimation and affirmation of political and cultural policies can also be used to challenge established

aesthetic and social norms," leading to the far more critical "reflection of the actual function of this heritage in socialism" which characterizes Plenzdorf and his contemporaries (Herminghouse 274; 276).

There is in fact a dispute within the criticism about whether or not the use of Goethe's Werther as a model does justice to the German master or even constitutes a socialist position at all. One East German critic comments that in fact there is too much emphasis on the classical tradition because extensive parallels cannot exist between Werther and Edgar Wibeau since Werther is a tragedy, and such a tragedy could never exist in East German socialist society by its very nature (Plate 229). Thus while some affirm the existence of a socialist standpoint in Die neuen Leiden (e.g. Neubert, Weimann), others like Plate reject it, claiming Plenzdorf did not find the proper ironic distance to convey his parody of the past. It is this very issue of whether or not Plenzdorf parodies Goethe that makes critics unable to determine whether it is a negative or a positive portrayal, and what Plenzdorf is intending to communicate about Goethe through this representation. Some critics consider Plenzdorf's treatment of Goethe disgraceful and disrespectful (e.g. Plate, Kaul), but Biele, for example, considers that Plenzdorf does not devalue Goethe at all. "Objektiv wurde das Bekenntnis zu den klassischen Werten bekräftigt...Plenzdorf führt vor, daß Goethes Text...heute noch rezipierbar ist" (207). Plenzdorf tries neither to erase the original, nor to replace or improve it, but rather to create from it (Jakobs 233), using it as a "Muster" presented at

ironical distance (Piontek 294); but these statements simply identify Plenzdorf's use of intertextuality, and do not prove that he does not employ parody. Because Plenzdorf transports the classical text into a modern context and orchestrates its blind analysis: "Der parodische Effekt entsteht, weil Edgar naiv und unvorbereitet den Werther-text benutzt zur Definition seiner eigenen Situation und als Waffe in der Auseinandersetzung mit seiner Umgebung — kein Wunder, daß er ihn naiv und unkritisch rezipiert" (Karthaus 114). Certainly parody can be neither excluded nor proven as an interpretation since both are possible; however, it is not the question of whether Goethe is parodied or given sufficient respect that is most important, but rather the way in which Plenzdorf's use of this intertext influences his own novel and characters. If Plenzdorf has violated Goethe at all by opening Werther to reinterpretation by readers of his novel, it is only the Goethe that the East German critics have defined as worthy of adulation. The aim of an examination of Plenzdorf's novel and its provocative language and narrative form is not primarily to attack or defend his use of Goethe's legacy, but to come to a greater understanding of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. as a novel.

Edgar's unfamiliarity with Goethe's masterpiece is scandalous to the critics, as too is the total ignorance of all of those around him to the origin of his archaic quotes, including Dieter the German literature student (Herminghouse 277). Although Wibeau may be naive about *whose* book he is reading, he does not remain ignorant of its meanings and implications, and it is certain that he is not receiving the book uncritically.

In fact he is very direct about stating his opinions and judgements of the text. "Das war nichts Reelles. Reiner Mist. Außerdem dieser Stil. Das wimmelte nur so von Herz und Seele und Glück und Tränen. Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, daß welche so geredet haben, auch nicht vor drei Jahrhunderten" (37). Also critically significant is that while Caulfield's perception of the books he has read remains the same, Wibeau's changes and grows as he himself develops (Weimann 164), for although Edgar begins by rejecting the "Vogel" Werther, he accepts it more and more as he begins to identify with it, even while he continues to disagree with Werther's suicide, overly emotional style, and failure to act. Plenzdorf uses "Banalisierung, Trivialisierung, und Entauratisierung um das überlieferte Einverständnis aufzubrechen und eine neue Naivität experimentell herzustellen" (Mandelkow 235). By allowing new interpretations of these "fremdgewordenen Werke," Plenzdorf brings them close again because he forces the reader to also consider how s/he would naively interpret literature. In The Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield is also critical of the classics, already rejecting "all that David Copperfield kind of crap" at the beginning of the novel (Salinger 1). In thus judging literary history, Caulfield in effect denounces Dickens and all the American novels written in that style (e.g. Moby-Dick, Huckleberry Finn) (Pinsker 27), just as Wibeau condemns Werther's "Herzergießungsstil" and so too criticizes the novels of Goethe's time. But whereas Salinger does not expressly use the past as a stimulus for the present, tradition for Plenzdorf is a historical product which enters into contemporary literature as a productive

moment rooted in history (Weimann 172). "Freedom comes not in ignoring, denying, or trying to escape the powerful presence of the past, but rather in engaging tradition in some way" (Wilson 233). Whether or not it is true that "Wibeau kann keineswegs als moderner Werther angelegt sein" (Reis 52), or that the main characters of Plenzdorf's work are conceived antithetically, for instance Wibeau as an "agierender anti-Werther" (Reis 8), the influence is clear. Plenzdorf engages Werther as part of tradition to fill out his characters and confront the past, but he does not borrow Goethe's character or copy his attributes. Wibeau is modified in a way to reflect his context and his time, and so also provides an implicit commentary on Werther and the past. As an anti-Werther, Wibeau is criticizing Werther's excessive subjectivity and his failure to act by living his life differently, proving that outcomes can be different, and undermining the assessment of Werther's death as a logical and necessary conclusion of the way he lived his life.

Plenzdorf clearly uses all of the intertexts, Goethe most obviously, not as models from which to copy, but as foundations upon which to build his own creativity. Critics find this intertextuality difficult to appreciate and tend to place an emphasis on the "original" texts rather than on their role in Plenzdorf's novel, undermining the significance of Plenzdorf's narrative technique. Some classify Plenzdorf's quotation of Werther a clever manipulation which creates superficial and foolish parallels between the classical and modern texts. "Plenzdorfs Rückgriff auf den 'Werther' erweist sich als amüsanter Trick, als frappierender Gag. Nicht mehr und nicht weniger...Die Parallelen

bleiben vordergründig und bisweilen billig und auch, kurz gesagt, einfach läppisch" (Reich-Ranicki 264). Samuel Moser too accuses Plenzdorf of writing a "banale und unwichtige Geschichte," only using vague and superficial references to Goethe as a "facade" in order to make it more attractive and readable (300). Many consider that because Wibeau is "not subject to inner conflict from which he cannot escape and which ultimately destroys him" as is Werther (Tate 204), the relationship between the two must remain superficial: "Niemals geht es für [Wibeau] um das Sein oder Nichtsein, immer um weniger als für den Werther Goethes" (Reinoß 311). What these critics fail to realize, is that Wibeau's conflicts are different in nature and effect than Werther's but they are no less significant, nor do these differences make him a lesser character. Wibeau is Plenzdorf's character, and Plenzdorf does not intend to create a new Werther. It would indeed be terrible if new literature only comprised of "Versatzstücken der alten" (Moser 302), but if such a simple collage is even possible, it is certainly not an accurate description of Plenzdorf's achievement. The straightforward response to all of these criticisms is that although Wibeau's life mirrors Werther's in many ways, the two are not identical. Plenzdorf is not rewriting Goethe, but he is using literary intertextual references as a narrative technique to create his own story which takes root in several other narratives of the literary past. These relationships do not preclude originality, they *require* it, but not in the traditional way. While traditional notions of originality are based in Romantic ideals of "original creation" as something totally new and as yet

unexpressed, the realities of intertextuality have proven that such creation does not, cannot, and never did exist. Plenzdorf's originality is based in the recognition of this impossibility, and in the creation of new modes of expression by explicitly using what came before.

There are many valuable aspects in Plenzdorf's use of the past, even for those who do not consider it a building block for a new literature. Knowledge of Goethe's text only serves to enhance the meaningful contrast between the two characters, humorously exemplified in the scenes where Werther and Wibeau meet their respective love interests. Werther and Lotte have a formal-social meeting, whereas Charlie discovers Edgar as he stumbles, unkempt, out of the "Laube" one morning (Goethe 20; Plenzdorf 45-46). But even without a familiarity with Goethe's Werther, the reader can still appreciate the distance between the two worlds through the language and Edgar's own commentary "Leute! War das ein Krampf!...Ich kam einfach nicht mit dieser Sprache zu Rande" (58). The fact that Plenzdorf does little within the narrative to minimize the distance between the eras in which Werther and Wibeau exist, but instead capitalizes on it (Corino 253), creates what Biele calls "ein poetisches Spannungsfeld" through the 'meeting' of Edgar and Werther (Biele 208). The function of this "Spannungsfeld" can best be explained as a type of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*: "Die Transplantation eines Stückes kulturellen Erbes in die Gegenwart und ihre Transformation in die Manier unserer Zeit...Derartige schöpferische Umformungen...sollen Denkweisen und Argumentationen verflossener

Zeiten [hereinbringen], um einen Verfremdungseffekt zu schaffen, der es uns ermöglicht, nicht den Werther, sondern unsere Zeit besser zu begreifen" (Jakobs 232-33). In addition, readers of Die neuen Leiden can also re-examine and judge Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye as a by-product of the intertextual relation between these works constructed primarily to illuminate Edgar Wibeau, his life and his society. Significantly, Werther is only important within the story because Wibeau relates to him (Brandes Zitat 108) and chooses to read and use his story in his own life, not because the book is considered a classic or because it is written by Goethe. Plenzdorf is not depending on tradition, the literary canon, or Goethe's legacy to promote or strengthen his book, for it is primarily the plot of Werther which is significant in the book, and not its author or reputation. Goethe and Die Leiden des jungen Werther play only the role in Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. that Plenzdorf provides for them — an unmentioned author and an untitled book to which the character discovers he can relate.

Most critics summarize this connection between Plenzdorf and the texts to which he refers by identifying literature as a "developmental model" for a still developing Edgar Wibeau (Weimann 165). "Damit gibt sich die literarische Selbstbestätigung des Helden in spontanem Bezug auf ein Traditionsbewußtsein zu erkennen, das von Defoe bis Salinger reicht" (163). Of course such generalizations are necessarily both true and untrue since Wibeau both uses the characters as models and develops independently. While Reis spends pages making specific, minute linguistic and situational comparisons

between Werther and Die neuen Leiden, she fails to fully examine the implications beyond the very existence of these similarities. Each character has an entirely different relationship to reality, and comes from a different social and economic situation, meaning that Wibeau can never fully identify with Crusoe, Werther, or Caulfield. Even as he uses Werther's words to express his emotions (Brandes Zitat 122), he knows where his own thoughts end and Werther's words begin. The Werther connection is nonetheless productive because it helps Wibeau's subjectivity find expression (Weimann 168). Weimann has found a unique formulation to express this relationship — "eine dialektische Entsprechung und Nicht-Entsprechung" (160). Although he refers almost exclusively to Werther, this pattern is also applicable to Edgar Wibeau's relationship to Holden Caulfield and Robinson Crusoe. Weimann identifies a parallel between events, emotions, and names, but sees the Goethe text not as an "Abbild" but as a "komplexe Metapher" which functions on two levels — plot (Fabel) and quotation (Lektüre/Zitat). The "Werther-Lektüre," more often the moment of "Entsprechung" matches with respect to the "Figurenperspektive" and the subjectivity of the hero, whereas the "Werther-Fabel" expresses more of the "Nichtentsprechung" since Wibeau does not confirm or repeat Werther's social experience, nor does he voluntarily give up his life (Weimann calls it "nicht Selbstaufgabe, sondern selbstgestellte Aufgabe," 162). Werther functions as an "Index eines weltanschaulichen Wachstums des Helden," because through the past, Edgar

Wibeau comes to a greater comprehension of the present. It is in the gaps in Wibeau's understanding of the other heroes that Wibeau himself becomes productive and original.

In effect, Wibeau's growing understanding of Werther is a theme of the novel and "ein dynamisches Moment der Erzählung" — a change which does not occur with respect to Salinger (166), likely because he has already worked through his reading of this novel. By contrast, Reich-Ranicki wryly claims Salinger as the main model for both Plenzdorf and Wibeau, suggesting that Plenzdorf should have titled the book "Der Fänger im DDR-Roggen" instead in order to reflect these true affinities and the atmosphere he creates (265). While there are obviously more numerous and more apparent parallels between Plenzdorf's novel and Goethe's than there are between Die neuen Leiden and The Catcher in the Rye, Plenzdorf borrows and modifies different aspects from each to incorporate in his own novel. While the title, basic plot, and characters of Die neuen Leiden are based on Goethe's work, the mood and language (except for the direct quotations from Goethe, of course) stem more from Salinger. Given the friction in the relationship between East Germany and the United States, it is probable that one of Plenzdorf's main goals in the use of Salinger is provocation, and given the reaction of critics like Reich-Ranicki, he has succeeded. Furthermore, since "in jedem Buch [sind sowieso] fast *alle* Bücher," there are undoubtedly other texts which have influenced Plenzdorf as well, and which are not even identified. It is not of much significance to

examine which of the literary intertexts has the greatest influence because the function of each within the novel is distinct, important, and unquantifiable.

Another parallel between Werther and Wibeau is their obsesssion with reading. Reis suggests that Wibeau's change from reading The Catcher in the Rye and Robinson Crusoe to Werther is the mirror of Werther's own movement from Homer to Ossian (12). While this match is certainly a narrative construct and not mere coincidence, it is not possible that Wibeau designed this progression to match Werther's. A clear overextension of this relationship between two characters is any claim that the novel ends with the "Identifizierung Wibeaus mit Werther" (Corino 254), because although Wibeau's reception of Werther is no longer that of total rejection, he never fully accepts Werther either. Wibeau comes to a greater understanding of Werther, but always reserves some criticism for Goethe's hero and independence from him. Furthermore, the suggestion that, at best, Wibeau's reception of Die Leiden des jungen Werther and its tradition is limited by its naivete (Weimann 167) is clearly erroneous, for although Wibeau's reception may be unconventional or may not be as reverent to Goethe as socialist critics deem proper, Edgar's ignorance of author, title, and context make his an honest interpretation of Werther. Weimann would certainly never criticize Werther for his naive interpretation of Ossian, although he was unaware that the poem was a fraud and thus analyzes it on the basis of an incorrect context and is unable to comprehend its

full implications. Wibeau's reception and interpretation of Die neuen Leiden des jungen Werther is valid and justified because it is based entirely on the text itself.

Plenzdorf as author derives some of his own creative narrative innovations from the critical reaction to Goethe's novel. After the initial success of Werther which lead many young men to identify with Werther's *Leiden* and also commit suicide, Goethe tried to stem this trend of imitation by placing a monograph at the beginning of a subsequent edition: "Sei ein Mann und folge mir nicht nach!" (Brandes 116). As a result of the copycat Werthers and the phenomenal success of Die Leiden des jungen Werther, a great number of "Wertheriaden" or Werther imitation stories were published shortly after Goethe's text became popular. The four best known "corrections" of the Werther saga, intending to instill a morally and socially acceptable code in the novel and its readers, all employed the technique of providing the hero with "voice from beyond" (116). This voice was used to argue against suicide and provide "moral corrections of an anti-social personality," thus reshaping Werther into a productive, sensible, middle-class gentleman and restoring the pious and proper (116). By approaching Werther from so many different angles, both complimentary and critical, Die neuen Leiden is an "open challenge of one-sided Marxist interpretations of Goethe" which flourished in the GDR (Brandes 119). Plenzdorf's particular innovation of the Werther saga is to include both the inside, personal, subjective perspective for which Werther is so famous, along with the outside,

corrective, self-conscious and self-critical angle of the "Wertheriaden" in one character — Edgar Wibeau, the first person, subjective narrator (117).

The subjectivity of narration is something that Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, The Catcher in the Rye, and Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. all have in common. Holden Caulfield's monologue is the only source of information in The Catcher in the Rye, but its effect is so personal and natural that it does not seem to be an incomplete perspective. In Robinson Crusoe, the first person narrative gives the story an air of immediacy and comprehensiveness. Criticizing the single-mindedness of this narrative, Virginia Woolf once commented that "there is no escaping Robinson Crusoe" because everything is seen through his "shrewd, unimaginative, middle-class eyes" (Woolf 22). Like Robinson Crusoe, Die neuen Leiden and The Catcher in the Rye give "primacy to individual experience" and tell the story of "personality and its triumph over circumstance and the environment" (Richetti Narratives 22). Similarly, in Goethe's Werther all information and accounts of his experiences come directly from Werther's own pen until the entrance of the editor near the end. In Plenzdorf too, everything the reader knows is told by Edgar. Even when there are dialogues among the other characters, Edgar corrects, completes, confirms, and comments on them. In fact, Plate suggests that Plenzdorf "ermordet seinen Helden, um über ihn erzählen zu können" (226) and simply to create an interesting perspective, adding: "Ich habe nichts gegen ausgeprägte Subjektivität literarischer Helden, aber eine literarische Arbeit sollte meines

Erachtens helfen, ein Stück unserer objektiven Umwelt durchschaubarer zu machen. Edgar Wibeau verdeckt aber zu sehr den Blick auf die realen Verhältnisse" (226-7). Critics complain that this limited perspective does not allow the characters to establish their own value, permits no objectivity, and places too great an emphasis on the individual to the detriment of social responsibilities, the representation of which is even more questionable in the novel in general (226). However, a subjective account is productive because it demands a more active reception from the reader or audience as a "den Leser stärker fordernde Erzählmittel" (Schregel 221). When the reader recognizes the unreliability of the narrator — Holden Caulfield for instance admits that he is a "terrific liar" (Salinger 16) — then s/he will examine and analyze the perspective more carefully. Furthermore, although the entire story is told only by Edgar, he criticizes himself and his own actions which encourages the reader to exercise the opportunity to do the same.

It is the existence of this double narrative perspective in which Edgar the narrator comments on himself that helps the reader to recognize the need for questioning and examining the narrator. For instance, because the quotes from Werther are the only direct verbal testimony of the living, experiencing Edgar, all that the reader knows about Edgar's inner development is related through the commentary of the dead Edgar. This account from "jenseits" seems rational and logical, but is also very ironical and self-critical, giving the reader insight into the narrator, and Edgar the narrator insight into

himself. Furthermore, because Plenzdorf removes all the surprises about plot by informing the reader of the death of the hero right at the beginning and by printing the Werther quotations before the actual story, the question of *what* will happen is subordinated to the observation of *how* the story unfolds, which is where the reader can then focus his or her attention. Because of the way in which the story is told, Plenzdorf can present two distinct perspectives on politics and culture in one figure (Brandes Zitat 119), but because there is a single narrator, Edgar from "Jenseits" is the mouthpiece for both. The story is "the objective examination of a youth's role in contemporary socialist society" as well as "that youth's subjective evaluation of the effect of that social structure on him" (John 35).

In fact, all of these novels thrive on the contrasts and implied commentary created by the dual perspective. Werther similarly functions on two levels — the past experiencing, acting level, and the present level of reflection, commentary, and writing. Furthermore, Werther's story also includes the fictional framework in the perspective of the editor/compiler. In The Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield is also able to comment on his own actions because his narrative, like Wibeau's, comes after a period of convalescence or adjustment. Similarly, a mature Robinson Crusoe discovers patterns and providential warnings in his life that were invisible to the experiencing youth. The resulting narrative effect gives the impression that "Robinson Crusoe [or Werther or Caulfield] is watching himself in action as he tells the story" (Richetti 65). When Edgar

narrates, however, he is not only recalling his own motivation and behaviour, he is also watching others talk about his life and his actions.

This detachment in time and perspective between action and composition is a major defining feature of narration in Die neuen Leiden (Shaw 92). Both a strength and a weakness of the extreme subjectivity and the narrative detachment in all four novels is that: "the very distance of the narrator from his earlier self prevents him from capturing the self entirely (or allows him to avoid doing so)" (Brandes and Fehn 614). In fact, because of Edgar's death and his father's quest to reconstruct the final months of his son's life, all of the characters critique themselves and their actions when reviewing the past. In hindsight Charlie says that they should have gone to the police, while Addi refuses to speak ill of the dead, suggesting: "Wir haben Edgar leider von Anfang an falsch angefaßt, einwandfrei...Ich hab in ihm von Anfang an nur den Angeber gesehen, den Nichtskönner, der nur auf unsere Knochen Geld verdienen wollte...Heute ist uns viel klarer. Edgar war ein wertvoller Mensch" (87). Significantly, however, the statements of the other characters do more to characterize themselves than to draw any more complete picture of him (Rubinstein 320) and Wibeau's characteristics and behaviour are not explained or commented on by the author in any way. The reader receives multiple perspectives of Edgar, from Edgar himself and the other characters, but must compile and interpret them on his/her own.

Because Die neuen Leiden is both Edgar's tale about himself and also the story of his father's search for "the real story" of his son's life, a narrative "Spannungsfeld zwischen das Recherchieren und den Jenseitskommentar, das Geschehen und das Zitat" (Labroisse 160) is created. This inner framework of the narrative is a montage of four different types or levels of information — documentation (e.g. notes and newspaper ads), dialogues (e.g. interviews), quotations (e.g. direct citations of Werther [I would also include more informal quotation, such as the stylistic imitation of Salinger and the use of teen jargon]), and finally Edgar's own speech (e.g. interruptions, correction, narrative monologue) (Brandes Zitat 101). Raddatz criticizes this aspect of Plenzdorf's technique, suggesting that it is not a "schicke Montage" at all, but rather simply the "bewußtes Kontinuum einer Doppeltradition" of which Goethe was already a part (306). However, considering how many perspectives Plenzdorf incorporates, it is evident that while he may have begun with the "Doppeltradition" of Goethe, Defoe, and even Salinger, he certainly developed beyond it. The presentation of a montage of many opinions requires the reader to formulate his or her own dialectical process of reading and synthesis (Brandes 119).

But while this demanding reading process and narrative innovation have both excited and irritated the critics, it is the realism of Die neuen Leiden which has made it so popular with the general public. The youth of the German Democratic Republic have discovered a character with whom they can identify, just as readers of Robinson Crusoe,

Die Leiden des jungen Werther and The Catcher in the Rye did before them. Even now that the political weight of the story is no longer significant, the book stands as a testament of its time and still attracts readers through its playful narrative style and universal themes. It is not, according to Jakobs, that the readers and the youth of the time saw Wibeau as an ideal because "[Plenzdorf] macht aus Wibeau weder Abschaum noch Idol" (232). Instead, it was a "Gleichnis jugendlichen Denkens und Empfindens in unserer Zeit und in unserem Land" (232). "Er ist keine typische Person; Er ist auch keine Ausnahme! Er ist eine erdachte, eine Kunstfigur. Es wurde versucht, viele Probleme, die das Leben mit sich bringt, in ihm zu vereinigen" (Herzog 222). After the publication of Plenzdorf's book, a survey for an East German journal made the distressing discovery that the GDR "Arbeiterjugend" really were unfamiliar with Goethe, and that Plenzdorf's book accomplished more for the public interest in the classics than twenty years of ideology (Herminghouse 277; Scharfschwerdt 259). Nonetheless, the party criticized Plenzdorf for "giving a distorted view of GDR society and for not giving his audience exemplary heroes and model solutions" (Neubauer 72). What this reception proves, however, is that "man muß nicht 'gebildet' sein, um Plenzdorf zu verstehen...'gebildete' Menschen können nur stärker am Spiel beteiligen" (Reis 8). The youth of the German Democratic Republic, and indeed all readers, relate to Wibeau and yet do not — the same ambiguous relationship which Wibeau himself has to Werther, Robinson Crusoe, and Holden Caulfield in his favourite books.

CHAPTER TWO

The Layers: The Individual and Society, Creation, and Death

Like Plenzdorf's style of writing, which grows out of an adoption and adaptation of Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger, the central conflicts of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. form part of the universal themes represented in the earlier novels, and yet are also culturally specific to the German Democratic Republic, with issues which are developed in a fashion unique to Plenzdorf's own work. Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, The Catcher in the Rye and Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. are all novels which focus on the growth and development of the individual and his conflict with society. But only in Plenzdorf does this conflict, this search for self and survival, play itself out through the obsessed and disastrous attempt to create and invent. The implications of Edgar Wibeau's death and the machine are inseparable from assessments of Edgar as loner and hero, outcast and rebel, misguided youth and socialist, as well as from his relationship with society and its morals — hence from interpretations of the novel as a whole. Are his actions merely typical of restless youth, or are they indicative of larger problems in society or within Edgar himself?

When Plenzdorf was asked, "Kennen Sie Ihren Helden?" he answered, "Er ist zusammengesetzt, wenn Sie wollen, ein Gruppenporträt" (Gajek 131). This definition of

Wibeau's character is a good summary of the intertextual literary influences on his development. Robinson Crusoe, Werther, Holden Caulfield, and Edgar Wibeau all undergo a process of "allseitige Persönlichkeitsbewegung" (Scharfschwerdt 246), which can only occur outside of society, its codes and restrictions. Plenzdorf's overtly declared breadth of sources makes it unjust and impossible to follow the majority of criticism and place so much emphasis on the connection between Werther and Wibeau, to the relative exclusion of other influences. Claims that Werther is Edgar's developmental model (Brenner 29) underplay the significance of other influences, particularly that of Holden Caulfield. By suggesting that Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and Caulfield are strong individuals and part of the "privatmystischen Apparat" which Wibeau uses to define and discover himself, the broader base of the novel is revealed since they all of the characters are "Einzelgänger" with very intimate relations to themselves (Großklaus 90). Like Caulfield at the end of The Catcher in the Rye, Wibeau is "noch im Werden" (Reis 19) even at the end of his life, whereas Werther is a developed character and personality by the end of Goethe's novel, as is Robinson Crusoe when his story ends. Edgar is an "Unreifer, dem es noch nicht gelungen war, ein klares und ausgeglichenes Verhältnis zu seiner Umwelt zu gewinnen" (Girnus 194). Although Girnus is referring more to Edgar's lack of an established, undisputable socialist perspective in life, his statement is a good indication that Edgar is still discovering himself and his relationship to society. Edgar is not simply a good socialist citizen gone astray who realizes his mistakes after death and

reforms; he is a young man in search of himself and an improved society. Unlike Werther, who in his "gefühlvollen Innerlichkeit" judges reality according to its worth for individual development and tradition, Wibeau's self-centredness still maintains some focus on the external (Scharfschwerdt 253,267). Werther's emotional intensity, inwardness and failure to find a channel for his energies result in an irreversible process of psychological and spiritual decline with the reader as witness (Swales 44). Werther withdraws and hides within himself, in fact creating an even greater prison of his own making than the external one from which he was trying to escape (29). Edgar, by contrast, does not philosophize about love, nature and religion the way that Werther does because he is more practical than abstract, and instead of trying to define himself solely through writing and introspection, Wibeau becomes increasingly active and comes to a better understanding of himself and his situation through the critical distance from society, and his reading of Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye.

Robinson Crusoe, Werther, Holden Caulfield and Edgar Wibeau are all outsiders who refuse to be simply assimilated into society and fulfill its demands. Of primary significance in Wibeau's relationship to society is the fact that, like Werther and Holden Caulfield, he is not thrown out, but rather chooses to remove himself, chooses to escape the confines of his life and seek freedom. When, for the first time in his life, he is finally alone, he realizes that he has control over himself and that "ich ab jetzt machen konnte, was ich wollte. Daß mir keiner mehr reinreden konnte...Ich verstreute also zunächst mal

meine sämtlichen Plünnen und Rapeiken möglichst systemlos im Raum. Die Socken auf den Tisch. Das war der Clou" (28-29). Although Robinson Crusoe says he is the agent of his own fortune, describing "...a secret over-ruling Decree that hurries us on to be the Instruments of our own Destruction, even tho' it be before us, and that we rush upon it with our Eyes open" (Defoe 14), he does not exercise the choice Wibeau controls. Where Robinson Crusoe has his isolation forced upon him by shipwreck and works hard to reestablish the conventions of civilization, Wibeau, like Holden Caulfield, reacts to the forced conformity, meaninglessness, and restrictions of the established "adult" world and withdraws from it, affirming the values of individuality and spontanaiety. Both Caulfield and Wibeau demonstrate the problems and pressures underlying seemingly smooth, ideal societies, causing them to search outside of the communities they reject. Critics have considered the external causes of Edgar's departure banal and unjustified (Plate 227), because Edgar seems only to reject his mother and his continued role as "Musterknabe": "Ich hatte einfach genug davon, als lebende Beweis dafür rumzulaufen, daß man einen Jungen auch *sehr* gut ohne Vater erziehen kann" (22-23). Clearly, Edgar's mother is representative of society as a whole (Brenner 32), imposing restrictions and placing demands on Edgar which he refuses to satisfy, resulting in a departure he had long planned. Furthermore, by allowing herself to be called Wie*bau* instead of insisting on her true name Wibeau, his mother has allowed her identity and individuality to be sacrificed

to career and community — concessions which Edgar the individualist cannot accept or respect.

Wibeau is unfulfilled and unhappy in Mittenberg, and "seine Auflehnung entspricht gerade dem Wunsch nach Anerkennung seiner Werte" (Weßel 185), indicating that like Werther and Holden Caulfield, he is both running from society and towards a "tranquil sanctuary," seeking understanding and sympathy (French 110). This strong connection between Wibeau and Caulfield is supported by the novel, and is important because even though Edgar's and Werther's experiences with society and the search for freedom which society fails to offer them seem most similar, it does not follow that Wibeau patterns his life only after Werther as Brenner seems to suggest (28). Firstly, Wibeau discovers Goethe's book only after he has fled, and moreover, Wibeau does not shun work nor retreat entirely into himself in the way that Werther does. Instead, Edgar borrows from all of the protagonists.

The departure of each of these characters demonstrates a conflict with society — an inability to develop fully within the community. Wibeau indicates the restrictions by describing how he was almost forced out of his left-handedness, how his mother did not permit him to become an artist, and how he was pressured to be a model student and conform to prescribed standards. Furthermore, Wibeau's obsession with his potentially noble Huguenot ancestry firstly does not express the rejection of class which he should ideally possess in socialist society, and secondly identifies a "distinctive part of his

identity which is threatened in a society with a blinkered sense of its own heritage" (Tate 202). The fact that Edgar is descended from Huguenots is also a further expression of his individual, outsider status, for he is not simply German. Wibeau is impatient and disappointed with the world; by quoting Werther, or pulling his "Wertherpistole," he transfers "die radikale Kritik seines Vorgängers an seiner gesellschaftlichen Umwelt in zunehmendem Maße auf die sozialistische Gesellschaft" (Scharfschwerdt 261), and seeing no immediate opportunity for change, runs from it. By using intertexts, Plenzdorf brings all the time periods of these intertexts into Die neuen Leiden, revealing that Wibeau's critique is not solely or specifically about his own socialist society, but is a timeless complaint about all "Regelsysteme" in all societies (263). Wibeau's complaints against his society and his life in Mittenberg are waged against contemporary circumstances certainly, but they are based largely on issues and problems which could exist anywhere, not simply in the GDR. For example, when Edgar quotes Werther's view on rules, he is redirecting a comment made about eighteenth century society.

> Man kann zum Vorteile der Regeln viel sagen, ungefähr was man zum Wohle der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft sagen kann. Ein Mensch, der sich nach ihnen bildet, wird nie etwas Abgeschmacktes und Schlechtes hervorbringen, wie einer, der sich durch Gesetze und Wohlstand modeln läßt, nie ein unerträglicher Nachbar, nie ein merkwürdiger Bösewicht werden kann; dagegen wird aber auch alle Regel, man rede, was man wolle, das wahre Gefühl von Natur und den wahren Ausdruck derselben zerstören!" (Plenzdorf 75-76; Goethe 15)[1]

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[1] Plenzdorf/Wibeau misquotes Werther saying "zum Wohle" instead of "zum Lobe der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft" and "nie ein unerträglicher Nachbar" instead of "wie," placing the emphasis on the problems with rules and society, while strengthening the sense of community.

Where Werther continually withdraws further into himself and rejects society, Wibeau, like Caulfield, is "gesellschaftskritisch" not "gesellschaftsfeindlich" (Reis 97) and continually tries to make contact to others. However, it is not even the actual complaints themselves but the fact that Edgar *can* apply these and other grievances to East German society that make his objections controversial.

These objections, direct and implied, lead to a dispute in the criticism about how contentious Plenzdorf's and Edgar's comments really are. John Neubauer, for instance, asserts that "Edgar Wibeau's Wertherian qualities, his individualism, his impulsiveness, his idiosyncratic language and work ethic, and his rejection of ready-made answers are, of course, as defiant of the ethical norms of the GDR as Werther's attitude was of those of the eighteenth-century German bourgeoisie" (71-72). Neubauer, like many other Western critics, seems surprised that Plenzdorf was permitted to say what he did without stronger political repercussions. What Neubauer forgets, of course, is that by Wibeau's own admission, he supports communism: "Ich hatte nichts gegen Lenin und die. Ich hatte auch nichts gegen den Kommunismus und das, die Abschaffung der Ausbeutung auf der ganzen Welt. Dagegen war ich nicht. Aber gegen alles andere" (Plenzdorf 80). Rather than reading this passage literally, and considering it a lukewarm political confession or mere lipservice to the communist ideal, the reader should already be accustomed to searching for a deeper level. When Wibeau says "alles andere," he is referring to the state — to the current application of those very communist ideals. The only critic to identify

Werther's criticism as pro-communist but anti-state is D.G. John, but while his political insights are valuable, he fails to cite this key textual passage. Instead, he focuses on a constitutional and behavioural argument, suggesting that "much of his [Wibeau's] apparent unconventionality is simply the exercise of this constitutional right [das politische, wirtschaftliche, soziale und kulturelle Leben der sozialistischen Gemeinschaft und des sozialistischen Staates umfassend mitzugestalten]" (35). Not even the East German critics go so far as to claim that "seen against these fundamental tenets of the Constitution, Edgar Wibeau appears to be an exemplary figure, offering more than most, truly developing and contributing within the context of the socialist state" (36). The open-endedness of Plenzdorf's novel, and Wibeau's overt criticism of himself and his society make it too difficult for any critic, especially the East Germans, to proclaim Wibeau an indisputably socialist figure, especially since doing so would mean acknowledging, as John contends, that "the problem lies in the failure of present GDR society to actualize these [constitutional] principles" (37).

One factor that makes Wibeau's political position so difficult to pinpoint is the dual narrative perspective. Edgar's "jenseits" commentary is not just narrative, but it is also extremely self-critical. He continually critiques his own behaviour, calling himself an "Idiot": "...Mann, Leute, war ich ein Idiot...Ich war vielleicht ein Idiot, Leute...Ich Idiot wollte immer Sieger sein" (119; 145; 147). But just what this corrective commentary is meant to communicate is questionable. If Edgar's commentary is to be

taken literally, then it seems logical to conclude, as most critics do, that the living Edgar does not have a positive GDR-socialist perspective and that the dead Edgar's views are the proper ones (Karthaus 108; Brandes 117). However, Edgar himself says "Ich hatte was gegen Selbstkritik, ich meine: gegen öffentliche" (15), so when the reader realizes that the entire commentary consists of precisely such public self-criticism in novel form, s/he must be attentive to the message framed in those words. While Edgar's denial of his own principles from the grave creates a humorous contrast for the reader, the implications are broader. Although it is the dead Edgar who proclaims his socialist views, it is not by way of criticizing his own political opinions, because none were previously expressed. Instead, it is Edgar's method of rebellion, his actions and reactions, which Edgar criticizes from "jenseits." The dead, better adjusted Edgar has the advantage of hindsight — he knows that the invention of the "nebelloses Farbspritzgerät" would not be successful, and as he considers his single-minded, but also narrow-minded, attempt at discovery, he also knows that it *could* not be successful. The malfunction of the machine was not, according to the dead Edgar, a result of Edgar's individualism or failure to include others, but a consequence of his obsession. In his drive to achieve, to create a technological wonder, Edgar lacked perspective — he lacked the more intensive self-examination which would have admitted his shortcomings and allowed his success. His major internal motivation is for external recognition, and neither as character nor as narrator is he ultimately rejecting all societal expectations, but rather defending individual

needs and desires. He wants to prove that an individual can accomplish that at which a group has already failed.

The difficulty in determining Wibeau's position with relation to the state has lead the majority of East German critics to focus on the relationship between Goethe and Werther, or to criticize the protagonists' extreme individualism and lack of social responsibility. Given the strictly subjective narration, it is not surprising that Edgar's character emerges as the most attractive. Plate suggests that Plenzdorf loves Edgar too much to let any of the other characters even seem positive (227). East German critics in particular have found the presentation of Dieter, Charlie's fiancé, frustrating because it denies a positive socialist "Vorbild" (Biele 209). Important, however, is that Wibeau does manage to admit that Dieter is acceptable, whereas Werther, by his own admission, could not be just to Albert. "Zu Dieter will ich noch sagen: Wahrscheinlich war er ganz passabel...Und wahrscheinlich war er sogar genau der richtige Mann für Charlie..." (77). Plenzdorf's refusal to supply a "Vorbild" in fact questions the very notion of a model for society and whether it is possible to define one. Edgar himself had seemed a model son, student and citizen mere months before, and he turned his back on society and chose a private, subjective existence. Represented in the confrontations between Edgar and Dieter, who is presented by Edgar as an inconsiderate bore, is the dispute between constitutional theory and social practice in East Germany. Dieter is a representative of rules, education, the army and the system — in short, all of what Edgar questions or

rejects — and thus their meetings represent a socially critical moment, especially since Edgar, the outsider seems the more appealing of the characters. Significantly, however, there is no clear winner since, according to Edgar, both men think they are victorious. "Ich sah sofort, daß ich die Fäuste runternehmen konnte...Jeder vernünftige Trainer hätte ihn aus dem Kampf genommen...Ich weiß nicht, was er sich dabei dachte. Wahrscheinlich glaubte er, *er* hätte mich ausgeknockt... " (75). This duality mirrors that of the conclusion, for the result of Edgar's battle with society is never certain.

From the beginning of Robinson Crusoe, and The Catcher in the Rye, the reader is aware of Robinson's and Holden's eventual reintegration, just as Werther's and Wibeau's death and failure to live inside or outside of society are established even before their stories really begin. It is this loss of community, temporary or permanent, which represents one part of the problematic condition for each of the protagonists, and not just because they are neglecting their social responsibility to the community. For Robinson Crusoe, it is the lack of human contact altogether that results in his attempt to recreate civilization through the making of bread, clothing, pottery and furniture. Although his initial journey may have been an attempt to escape from the world, through his forced isolation Crusoe discovers that humanity is in fact fragile and dependent on the tools and artifacts of civilization (Richetti 59-60). For Werther, the loss of community means a total loss of external reference or focus, leaving him in an entirely subjective, internal existence. In the case of Holden Caulfield, even though he hates to be alone and

continually tries to make social contact, it is the lack of meaningful interaction and communication which are so problematic, not the lack of community itself. Plenzdorf combines aspects of each of these other conflicts in Edgar Wibeau. Unlike Werther's exclusive subjectivity, Wibeau's retreat from society allows him to focus on himself and his own development while still acknowledging the existence of a world beyond. Although Schumann claims that Edgar is "zu sehr in seiner Eigenwelt verstrickt, um eine echte Du-Beziehung aufbauen zu können" (157), Edgar and Charlie clearly have a deep understanding that extends beyond the verbal, as we saw in Chapter 1. Furthermore, in order to establish an "echte Du-Beziehung," Wibeau would have to find someone with whom he could engage in meaningful communication, and with the exception of Charlie and Zaremba, there is no one he knows and respects enough.

Although Wibeau sees Charlie as a partner for interpersonal exchange, the nature of their relationship is another ambiguous feature of the novel. The love triangle between Edgar, Charlie and Dieter matches that which exists in Die Leiden des jungen Werther between Werther, Charlotte and Albert, as does the main course of events, for in each novel Charlie/Charlotte remains close to her admirer Wibeau/Werther even after her marriage. As we have seen, Dieter and Edgar never have the intense relationship that Werther and Albert share, largely because Dieter himself lacks the depth which characterizes his parallel character, Albert. Clearly Edgar's affinity for Charlie and his relationship with her and Dieter are events which occur independently of his

identification with Goethe's novel and characters; what is unclear, however, is whether Edgar enhances the connection between his life and Goethe's work within this character constellation. For instance, when Edgar's father finds Charlie and tells her that she was mentioned on the cassettes: "Daß sie Charlotte heißen und verheiratet sind" (44), she responds with: "Wieso Charlotte? Ich heiß doch nicht Charlotte!" In so denying her name, the reader cannot be sure whether she is just asserting that her name is Charlie, or whether, as the narrator Edgar comments from "jenseits," "Ich hatte den Namen aus dem blöden Buch" (44). None of the critics has commented on this ambiguous passage which supports interpretations that Wibeau produced a conscious and intentional duplication of Goethe's novel, and that Plenzdorf simply intended it to be a coincidence that Charlie's name corresponded so closely to Charlotte. Again, this duality is certainly intentional and forces the reader to recall that s/he only knows the story and characters through Edgar, and also to recognize that he is not a fully informative nor reliable narrator. Furthermore, since Edgar places so much importance on his own name, it is interesting that here the correctness of the name is so insignificant. If Charlie is only the name that Wibeau gave her, then he is forming her as the woman he desires and needs, just as Werther creates Charlotte as the woman he wants her to be. Despite the connection in the names Charlie and Charlotte, the characters and the roles they play in the lives of their suitors are very different.

There are indeed a great number of similarities between Edgar's situation and the one about which he reads in Die Leiden des jungen Werther, but he meets and determines his affection for Charlie before he knows that she is engaged, and therefore is not completely modelling the events of his life after the novel. Nevertheless, like Werther in his love for Charlotte, Edgar is obsessed with Charlie, admitting that: "Ich himmelte Charlie die ganze Zeit an" (50), even though Edgar's youth makes the seriousness of his desire for Charlie questionable, if not absurd. However, as much as Edgar's quest for Charlie may seem ridiculous, especially after he learns that she is engaged to Dieter, his behaviour is more excusable than Werther's because he receives more encouragement from Charlie herself. The nature of the bond between Charlie and Edgar remains as ambiguous as that between Werther and Lotte, although in a different way. In Plenzdorf, Charlie becomes a far more active participant in the relationship, making Wibeau's perception that "Ich lese in ihren schwarzen Augen wahre Teilnehmung an mir und meinem Schicksal" (58) more justified and realistic than Werther's. But when, in Charlie's discussion with Edgar's father, her tears, concern and involvement with Edgar cause him to ask, "Darf ich Sie etwas fragen? — Haben Sie Edgar gemocht?" (85), she neither denies nor admits to any emotions, answering, "Edgar war noch nicht achtzehn, ich war über zwanzig. Ich hatte Dieter. Das war alles" (85).

Whereas Lotte's encouragement of Werther consists mainly in a failure to *dis*courage him, Charlie's actions, as reported by Wibeau, indicate an active participation

in the preservation and progression of her relationship with Edgar. It is her idea to go to Edgar's *Laube* and it is she who then asks him to paint her portrait (52-54). The reader cannot be certain whether Charlie finds posing for Edgar as erotic as he does, but her vehemence in insisting he give her the silhouette and her refusal to go back to Edgar's house until accompanied by Dieter (64) seem to justify Edgar's assessment that, "Auf jeden Fall hatte Charlie begriffen, was gespielt wurde. *Das* war's doch! Sie fing an, mich ernst zu nehmen...Verlobte tauchen immer dann auf, wenn es ernst wird" (55). Considering Charlie's probable awareness of Edgar's feelings and intentions towards her, her own actions and behaviour can only be interpreted as flirtatious encouragement of him. It seems that: "Insgesamt verhält sich Charlie, zwischen Vernunft und Gefühl hin- und hergerissen, widersprüchlich" (Ahlers 93). Not only does she allow him to place his head in her lap on one occasion, but:

> Charlie hatte eine Art, sich hinzusetzen, die einen halb krank machte. Sie hatte wohl nur weite Röcke, und bevor sie sich hinsetzte, faßte sie jedesmal hinten nach dem Saum, hob ihn an und setzte sich auf ihre Hosen. Sie machte das sehr präzise. Deswegen war ich immer schon da, wenn sie kam...Aber daß ich zusah, wenn sie sich hinsetzte, wußte sie genau...So sind sie. Sie wissen genau, daß man zusieht, und machen es trotzdem. Eine Schau für sich war auch, wie sie dabei jedesmal ihre Scheinwerfer nach unten hielt... (67)

Furthermore, it is Charlie who reestablishes contact with Edgar and then even invites him to kiss her when they are out in the boat together, leading to their sexual encounter. Unlike Werther and Lotte, then, Charlie and Edgar actually act on their interest in each other, although whether this scene is a rape, an act of revenge against Dieter, or a

consummation of their affection for each other is not clear. Charlie runs off and Edgar is left telling the reader: "Ich kann euch bloß raten, nie an ein Scheißboot oder was zu denken und sitzen zu bleiben, wenn euch eine wegläuft, an der euch was liegt" (136). He realizes that he has gone too far with Charlie, and so although he is berating himself for succumbing to inactivity, it is not in the same way that he criticized Werther earlier, when he suggested that Charlotte was only waiting for him to do something (36). What he laments is that by doing too much he has destroyed the understanding and real communication that existed between them.

Most evident from Wibeau's relationship to Charlie, however, is that he seeks contact with people. The very fact that he seeks work is an admission of a certain dependency on others and the community. "Immer nur die eigene Visage sehen, das macht garantiert blöd auf die Dauer...Dazu braucht man Kumpels, und dazu braucht man Arbeit" (Plenzdorf 66). Like Crusoe and Caulfield, Wibeau needs people and real communication. Clearly then, Edgar is not selfishly rejecting work or society in general, but rather criticizing their specific applications in the GDR which do not permit him his 'self'or individual needs and rights. "Wibeau tritt für das Recht einer individuellen Lebensführung, für eine radikal Selbstverantwortliche, die Vielfalt veräußerlichter Lebensformen sprengende ganzheitliche Lebenswert ein" (Scharfschwerdt 267). He says, "Wenn ich gammle, dann gammle ich, wenn ich arbeite, dann arbeite ich" (Plenzdorf 66), and although he quotes Werther "Und daran seid ihr alle schuld, die ihr mich in das Joch

geschwatzt und mir so viel von Aktivität vorgesungen habt. Aktivität!" (Plenzdorf 101; Goethe 74), the quotation does not truly apply. Work for Werther is a *Leiden* to which Wilhelm has convinced him to apply himself, whereas Wibeau has chosen, based on need, to work in construction. It is as he becomes obsessed by his invention that he begins to fall into the trap of work: "Die meisten verarbeiten den größten Teil der Zeit, um zu leben, und das bißchen, das ihnen von Freiheit übrigbleibt, ängstigt sie so, daß sie alle Mittel aufsuchen, um es loszuwerden" (Plenzdorf 56, 100; Goethe 10). Because Wibeau then focuses entirely on the machine while pretending to fit in and get along with the crew, he is no longer directly confronting his own internal development.

Literature and art satisfy the need of individuals to identify, but within Die neuen Leiden, books have lost their integrative potential (Großklaus 90); if there is any reconciliation at all between Edgar and society, it comes through art and creation which here primarily take the shape of Edgar's invention of the "nebelloses Farbspritzgerät"or NFG. In the development of the NFG and Edgar's reasons for attempting such a creation, Plenzdorf contains all of the major features of the conflict between the individual and society, especially socialist society — restrictions, work, individualism, and social responsibility. What is perhaps most significant about this portion of the novel is how little indication Plenzdorf and Wibeau give the reader about how to interpret the obsessive invention and Edgar's subsequent death because of it. The question of whether Edgar is attempting his invention as the ultimate contribution to his construction crew

and hence society or as a means to gain individual status and recognition remains impossible to answer definitively. Even the simple statement "In seiner Erfindung für die Gesellschaft hofft Edgar sich selbst zu verwirklichen" (Schumann 157), which seems to include both individual and social aspects and is used to introduce a discussion of the invention and why it failed, can be misleading. Is the invention for society? Is Edgar trying to find himself through his invention? Or is he "hoping to regain entry into the socialist enterprise from which he fled" (Herminghouse 277)?

What cannot be excluded from a discussion of the machine are Edgar's previous efforts and experiences with production and creation. Edgar is a model student and proficient in all aspects of his apprenticeship until he decides to drop out. Obviously he is a skilled worker and knowledgeable technician, for Willi describes him saying, "Er war Chef in allen Fächern, ohne zu pauken" (21). Furthermore, one of the reasons given for Edgar's departure from society is the fact that his mother would not allow him to become an artist. After arriving in Berlin Edgar continues his painting, with results as ambiguous as any evaluation of the NFG itself. Edgar continually calls himself a "verkanntes Genie," and yet the narrator figure also suggests that Edgar had no talent at all. "Aber daß jeder gleich gesehen hat, daß ich nicht malen konnte, ist trotzdem nicht ganz korrekt. Ich meine, er hat es vielleicht gesehen, aber ich hatte es hervorragend drauf, so zu tun, als wenn ich könnte...Es kommt nicht so drauf an, daß man etwas kann, man muß es draufhaben, so zu tun" (45). Charlie is very suspicious of Edgar's abilities, and believes

that he cannot paint, even calling on Dieter to pronounce judgement (75). But when Dieter's evaluation proves to be nothing but the official state position on art, the reader remains uncertain of how to judge Edgar's creative abilities. Edgar himself questions the judgement of art: "Eine Zange ist gut, wenn sie kneift. Aber ein Bild oder was? Kein Aas weiß doch wirklich, ob eins gut ist oder nicht" (45). At best, the reader can definitely determine that Edgar's paintings do not fit into the GDR type because "sie sind Ausdruck einer eigenwilligen, phantasievollen Persönlichkeit" (Karthaus 109).

Edgar is also linked to creative production through music. He claims to be a wonderful dancer, and indeed dances and listens to music (jazz and Satchmo in particular) quite often throughout the book. In this respect he is certainly similar to Werther, because they both seek comfort from an unbearable and empty world in art (Reich-Ranicki 263). His own composition, the bluejeans song, however, is more a tribute to his affinity for clothing than to any musical talent, although Willi has attested to his exceptional skill (20). It is both a parody of songs with empty lyrics and a tribute to the celebration of the everyday. Significantly, after performing his song in his *Laube*, Edgar says, "Ich glaube ich hatte diesen Song vorher nie so gut draufgehabt. Anschließend fühlte ich mich wie Robinson Crusoe und Satchmo auf einmal. Robinson Satchmo" (30). For Edgar to mention Robinson Crusoe at such a critical creative moment — Crusoe who of the three literary intertexts has the least connection to art as such — is to draw an intense parallel, but it is a connection which critics have failed to

explore. Whereas art and creation for Werther and Wibeau are part of a creative impulse, Robinson Crusoe invents and reinvents, creates and recreates for his own survival. While Edgar is skeptical about the ability of anyone to judge good art, in Robinson Crusoe's case, the criteria for evaluation are clear; everything which is useful or appealing to him is good. Since he is a one man community, the subjective becomes the social; judging according to his own standards is also serving the greater good. Furthermore, Crusoe's ability to survive and duplicate civilization to the extent that he does, proves that he in fact *is* a "verkanntes Genie," whereas Edgar's claims are never proven. It is precisely these qualities that Wibeau wants to use to define himself. When Charlie tries to indicate that he cannot paint and that he needs guidance and financial assistance, Edgar says, "Und ich wollte ihr das Gegenteil beweisen. Daß ich ein verkanntes Genie war, daß ich sehr gut so leben konnte, daß mir keiner zu helfen brauchte, und vor allem, daß ich alles andere als ein Kind war" (49).

By trying to invent the NFG on his own, Edgar is asserting the creative impulses which society has denied him, and combining them with his desire for self-sufficiency, proficiency, and his technical skills. The East German critics have tended to interpret Edgar's invention as an attempt to contribute to society and a demonstration of his reformed support for the system despite his previous rebellion against it in an attempt to "claim a potentially problematic work as their own" (Sevin 70). However, when considering the intensity with which he approaches this project, "a suddenly awakened

interest in the common good" is not indicated (Brandes and Fehn 616). The idea of inventing his own NFG comes to him immediately after what is perhaps the most profound example of miscommunication in the novel — the visit to his father. Upon returning home, Edgar says, "Ich analysierte mich kurz und stellte fest, daß ich sofort damit anfangen wollte, *meine Spritze* zu bauen" (109). Already having realized that the Spritze was Addi's weakest point, Edgar now decides that "wenn sie funktionierte, meine Spritze, wollte ich lässig wie ein Lord bei der Truppe aufkreuzen" (109). Obviously, Wibeau is thinking of showing off to the others and proving his own excellence, not improving the working conditions or giving the invention to his team. Furthermore, "The sheer bravado of the final touch [the doorbell] makes it clear that Edgar's personal satisfaction is as important as the invention itself or any technological contribution" (John 36). He wants to prove his talents and independence to society.

The final indication that Edgar's "Erfinderrolle" does not represent a "Versöhnung zwischen den kreativen Bedürfnissen des einzelnen und den praktischen des Kollektivs" (Großklaus 91) is the fact that Edgar gives up his fight against society while he is in the process of inventing. Edgar does not change his opinion of the world or the people around him, but he stops protesting because he believes he has the upper hand.

> Für gewöhnlich brachte mich so was sofort auf die Palme, und auch diesmal war ich sofort oben. Aber ich nahm mich zusammen und kam wieder runter und war ganz der bescheidene, vernünftige, gereifte Junge, der ich seit kurzem war, Leute. Ich weiß nicht, ob sich das einer vorstellen kann — ich und bescheiden. Und alles das bloß, weil ich dachte, ich hab diese Spritze in der Hinterhand, ich Idiot. (119)

He stops quoting Werther and plays at belonging and agreeing with the others because he sees it as a temporary measure to protect his invention and and ensure its impact, not because he has reconciled himself with society in any greater sense. He does not seek "an acceptable reason for his unconventional actions" (Brandes and Fehn 616), nor does he simply want "reentry" into society — he wants victory. His actions express his opinions and he does not apologize for them, claiming full responsibility for himself. "Hier hat niemand Schuld, nur ich" (16), he says, aligning himself more with Robinson Crusoe by identifying himself as the agent of his own demise, than with Werther who seems to believe that nature and events overpower him. Wibeau wants to triumph over society with its rules and restrictions, master his environment, and conquer all adversity as thoroughly as Robinson Crusoe does; he refuses throughout to give in and give up like Werther.

Wibeau's assurances that he "hätte nie im Leben freiwillig den Löffel abgegeben. Mich an den nächsten Haken gehängt oder was. Das nie" (147) lead the reader to further question the meaning of Edgar's death and the failure of the machine. The issue of death in literature is problematic for socialist society, especially in this case because Edgar learns from his life and his mistakes, but can no longer put it into practice (Brenner 43). There is certainly no definitive reason for Edgar's death, and politics plays as large a role as the text itself in any attempt to interpret the conclusion of the novel. Although Edgar's

death superficially mirrors Werther's, it is neither tragic nor "komisch-satirisch" enough to carry the same weight (Weimann 161). Plenzdorf works against the tragic denoument by informing the reader of the death at the very beginning of the novel; scenes like the gun episodes in Werther work as foreshadowing in Goethe's novel, but function only as an opportunity for citation in Die neuen Leiden (Reis 31).

Although some critics see Wibeau's death as suicide, such a conclusion seems unlikely, especially since he overtly denies it. Even if there is a "totalen Verwerfung alles gesellschaftlichen, die im Anblick der gegebenen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse gerechtfertigt sei" (Scharfschwerdt 256), this does not indicate that suicide is Edgar's only option. One critic suggests that it is a case of hidden suicide because Wibeau wants to be viewed as a martyr and genius who sacrificed everything for his invention, including his life, and because Plenzdorf wanted his book published in East Germany, where the issue of suicide was particularly difficult (Sevin 74). However, if Werther commits suicide because he refuses to relinquish anything of his revolutionary humanist ideals (Lukacs 48), what would be the purpose of Wibeau's suicide? Considering his obsession with his invention and his desire to use it to prove himself to the world, it is implausible that while he is so full of hope for his machine, he would not do what he could to ensure his own success through it. His death occurs at the point of greatest activity and work, which does not indicate a surrender to the power of the state and society at all. Scharfschwerdt claims that "Selbstmord ist die letzte Möglichkeit der

heroischen Selbstbefreiung des leidenden und bedrückten Menschen" (256), but clearly Edgar sees his opportunity for freedom and self-realization in the invention of a "nebelloses Farbspritzgerät," not in death. Furthermore, whereas Werther's death may be the logical result of the turmoil and decline of his story, Wibeau's is not. They may experience very similar *Leiden*, but the cause of their resulting fates is different.

If Wibeau's death is not representative of his irreconcilability with society through suicide, then it must either simply be an accident or a logical conclusion of the life that Edgar lived. The socialist viewpoint indicates that Edgar's death is required "als letzte Konsequenz des Einzelgängertums" (Biele 207), but Plenzdorf's harshest critics must disapprovingly concede that the conclusion is openended (Plate 225). Schneider, a Western critic, even speculates that because Edgar's death is rather unconvincing as an accident, it must be the politically necessary demonstration of Edgar punishing himself for "seinen luxurierenden und privatistischen Rückzug aus der sozialistischen Gesellschaft" (292). Considering that he hardly speaks to anyone in the days leading up to his death because he is focusing on his invention, Brandes and Fehn have even suggested that death is the final stage in his solidarity and a natural conclusion to his disoriented life (Brandes Zitat 118; Brandes and Fehn 117). If this is true, Wibeau does not die because of the nature of society, but because of his disturbed and destroyed relation to it, which creates a tension because he only realizes too late that he could have reconciled himself (Biele 207). However, he says, "Aber ich bedaure nichts. Nicht die

and his rush to complete the NFG make him careless — a miscalculation against which he warns the reader. "Vielleicht ich Idiot dachte wohl, daß ich unsterblich war. Ich kann euch bloß raten, Leute, das nie zu denken" (136).

So is Edgar Wibeau a "tragic victim of a society with no room for gifted individuals" or "a repentant individual whose return is thwarted" (Shaw 86) or both and more? Because Plenzdorf gives no definite answer, nor any clear indication of how to interpret the events, no explanation of Wibeau's death or the failure of his invention can be conclusively excluded. Some of the questions that this uncertainty raises are those of rebellion: What is an appropriate form of rebellion? When is a personal rebellion against society a success or failure? All traces of Edgar's rebellions and existence outside of society are destroyed because his machine explodes, his artwork is destroyed, his *Laube* is torn down, and he himself is dead. Whatever Edgar might have been, whatever his departure from society might have accomplished, did not come to fruition, except through his ultimate creative work — his story. By reminding people of his existence, Edgar is providing himself with a guarantee of continued life because "wir aufhören zu existieren, wenn ihr aufhört, an uns zu denken. Meine Chancen sind wohl mau. Bin zu jung gewesen" (17). His reintegration with society does not come within his physical lifetime, and does not follow any prescribed pattern for reentry into socialist society. Edgar's narrative, Die neuen Leiden des jungen W., while telling his own personal story of the complex and ambiguous relationship between an individual and society, also causes every

reader, especially those in East Germany both before and after 1989, to consider Edgar's situation and construct his or her own meaning of the open-ended sequence of events. How readers assemble the pieces of departure, love, work, individualism, invention, and death to form a story makes them conscious of their own views of the relationship between individuals and society. Just as reading Goethe causes Wibeau to reconsider his own life, Edgar demands an examination of the lives of his readers. By refusing to explain both the purpose and failure of the invention and the reasons for Edgar's death, Plenzdorf has opened discussion about these key issues.

CHAPTER THREE

The Findings: Meaning, Reception, and Politics

One of the significant strengths of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W., a strength that it shares with Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther and The Catcher in the Rye, is that it is both a subjective, individual narrative and a universal story. Although on the surface Plenzdorf's novel is simply the story of a teenage boy in East Germany, and can easily be read on this level, it is also an expression of much more complex themes and issues. Speaking about Werther, Goethe once wrote,

> If one examines it closely, the much talked of age of Werther, it is true, does not belong to the course of world culture, but rather to the life-process of every individual who, with a free and innate sense of nature, seeks to find himself and adapt to the restrictive forms of a world grown old. Thwarted happiness, hampered activity, ungratified desires — these are not the infirmities of a particular period, but those of every single human being... (Lukacs 47)

Similarly, although Die neuen Leiden is very East German in its specifics, all readers, especially young people, can identify with Edgar Wibeau in his desire to escape from the world into which he was born, his compulsion to be independent, his quest to discover and develop himself. His story is his own, an expression of his time and circumstances, and yet also greater than that — a story true for all time: seventeenth-century England, eighteenth century Germany, and twentieth-century North America and Europe. In this

way, it cannot simply be brushed aside as are those works "deren künstlerische und intellektuelle Bedeutung geringfügig oder fragwürdig ist und die dennoch wichtige literarische Dokumente ihrer Zeit sind, weil sie zum erstenmal etwas artikulieren oder erkennen lassen, was vorher überhaupt nicht oder nicht so deutlich sichtbar war" (Reich-Ranicki 269). It is more than just a document of its time. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the novel also encompasses or addresses conflicts between the individual and society, as well as issues of creativity, invention, intertextuality, language, and even death. But what meaning can the reader find in Die neuen Leiden, indeed in the story of Edgar's life when he himself is still searching? By its very nature as a novel about an outsider in East Germany, it demands an examination on a political level. Its reception and interpretation in the GDR reflect not only the domestic political situation, but the condition of writer-state relations. More fundamentally, as with Edgar's death, there are many possible meanings to the novel, and although the critics provide a wealth of options, positive and negative, Plenzdorf himself gives few clues to direct any interpretation, leaving it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions.

It is this very openness, this explicit permission for each reader, each critic, each interpreter to find and express an individual, independent meaning which has caused the book to be so widely discussed. It appeals to the youth, both within East Germany and outside of it, because they feel addressed at last; their problems are recognized for the first time because Plenzdorf takes them seriously (Jakobs 232). The critics find the novel

intriguing because Plenzdorf uses Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger, and shows that "auch das Alte sehr neuartig und aufregend sein kann" (Hermann Kant in Brenner 46). Western commentators are amazed that Plenzdorf managed to publish such an overtly rebellious novel in an oppressive state (Karasek 247). The ideological watchdogs like Kaul and Plate find it scandalous and disconcerting that there is such ignorance of the classics among the characters and that, because the author omits it (not on purpose, they hope), the reader is left to build the "gesellschaftliche Bezogenheit" him/herself (Plate 228; Girnus ed. 154). Even Honecker decided Plenzdorf was an author worthy of public comment when he complained of the tendencies of modern writers to concentrate too much on the personal, "eigene Leiden" (Brenner 45). This novel tells the story of the relationship between an individual and society, of "die Beziehung des schöpferischen Einzelnen zur Öffentlichkeit, zu Institutionen, und zum Staat" (Gajek 132) both within the book and outside of it. Is Edgar a "Suchender," seeking to find his place within society, or a "Quertreiber," trying to rebel against or reform society (Schmitt 261)? Or is he both? To the extent that the story is critical of society's failure to take responsibility for individuals like Edgar, it is also critical of the society whose members are reading the book.

There are, however, no prescribed interpretations for the book in relation to society, the novel as a whole, or even the various levels of the story itself. The action of the characters too is such that: "Das Handeln der Menschen mußte zugleich so sein und

mußte zugleich anders sein können" (Brecht in Reis 108). The reader does not and cannot *know* whether or not Wibeau's invention would have been great, or why Edgar died, nor is s/he forced to decide. The advantage to the multiple perspectives and the various possibilities is that it causes the reader to think more consciously about his or her own reactions and responses; the reader of Die neuen Leiden must consider the same questions which both the living and dead Edgars face. The fact that the reader is external to the story does not provide an advantageous overview, but only manifests itself as another perspective, another option to be considered. With respect to Edgar's death alone, the reader must ask him/herself: Did Edgar have to die because of his individualism? Was it an accident? Suicide? Was he trying to make the ultimate contribution to society? Was his death a message to society within the book or to society outside the book? Was his death an imitation of the ending of Werther? All of these and other options which individual readers might consider can be justified by the text. Werther complains that "in der Welt ist es sehr selten mit dem *Entweder-Oder* getan; die Empfindungen und Handlungsweisen schattieren sich so mannigfaltig, als Abfälle zwischen einer Habichts- und Stumpfnase sind" (Goethe 50), and this is certainly true of interpretations of Edgar, his life, and his world. It is not simply a question of whether or not the invention will work (Reis 52), but also what it will mean for Edgar, what he wants by inventing it, whether his goals will be met by the invention, and myriad other questions that cannot be answered definitively.

Interestingly, Werther itself was never "eindeutig bewertet" (Brandes Zitat 121) in the literary criticism, and it is possible that "many of the divergent assessments of Edgar have roots in conflicting explanations of Werther's difficulties" (Brandes and Fehn 620). Although politics have a greater influence on the various interpretations of Plenzdorf's work and its relation to Goethe's novel, this comment sheds particular light on the comments of those critics who see Die neuen Leiden as a love story. While some consider Wibeau's story a correction of Goethe's because there is no death due to helpless love (Schütte 278), one critic even goes so far as to call it "Die *Love Story* aus der DDR" (Zimmer 255)! Certainly the story of Edgar's affection for Charlie forms a large part of the novel, but to call it a love story, or to compare it to Eric Segal's work, is far too limiting and is seriously misleading. Even Werther's story cannot truly be classified a love story even though he is far more obsessed with Charlotte than Edgar ever is with Charlie, but the fact that some critics see it as such may be an explanation for this classification of Plenzdorf's book. Similarly, the application of the term *Bildungsroman* to the four novels Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, The Catcher in the Rye, and Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. is only partially enlightening. While the classification is appropriate given that Defoe, Goethe, Salinger and Plenzdorf all present stories of young men growing and developing through experience, they are also both more and less than this motif: Edgar's growth, for instance, is never completed, and Werther is in a decline by the time he writes his story. However, the story of Edgar

Wibeau incorporates all of these elements — love story, *Bildungsroman*, and implications of its literary intertexts — questioning both the easy categorization of literature and the possibility of a single valid interpretation.

Many critics have serious problems with Plenzdorf's openness. Is the author's lack of position acceptable, or is it "eine bloße Gestaltungsschwäche?" they ask (Labroisse 170). Even if Plenzdorf himself does not make a statement, "hat der Leser nicht das Recht, von der literarischen Figur eine intellektuelle Begründung pro und contra zu verlangen?" (Karthaus 112). Plate complains throughout his essay that Plenzdorf does not provide the answers for the reader, that instead he provokes through his "Standpunktslosigkeit" (229), and is unacceptably vague. Even though Großklaus recognizes the intentional open-endedness and acknowledges the multitude of possible interpretations, he nonetheless insists on contradicting exactly this principle by establishing nine theses at the end of his article which put substantial limits on interpretation of Die neuen Leiden (93). What seems to be most useful in making sense of all of the possibilities is Plenzdorf's own statement that the novel is written "bewußt auf Auslegbarkeit" (Weimann, "Diskussion" 178); therefore different levels and different aspects of interpretation are all justified and supportable in theory. What these infinite interpretations indicate is that Plenzdorf's novel is well suited and constructed expressly for creating discussion, and it has succeeded in accomplishing precisely that. Neither the novel nor the author can definitively answer the questions raised by the text because that

is the job of society (Jakobs 234), and each individual as a part of their society. Therefore, not only is the author's lack of standpoint acceptable, it is desirable; it is not a "Gestaltungsschwäche" but an intended construct. Plenzdorf requires that the reader approach the interpretation of the text with an open mind, just as he created an opportunity within the book for Edgar to approach Werther naively — for him there are no established conclusions.

Although Plenzdorf grants the reader full freedom with respect to the interpretation of the text, he did not have that same luxury in writing it. He admitted to being unable to work as he wanted for several years (Weimann, "Diskussion" 178), and that he originally wrote the novel/play for "die Schublade" until its publication was finally permitted and the work subsequently widely acclaimed. By leaving his work so open to any and all possibilities, he is in fact making a political statement. The release of restrictions on the writer and literature which Honecker granted was conditional on the fact that the author was starting from a position of socialism (Brenner 44), and while Plenzdorf supports socialism in theory in the novel, his writing is neither expressly socialist nor socialist-realist, as we have seen. A socialist interpretation of Die neuen Leiden is possible, but so are any number of other options, political and apolitical.

The undetermined nature of Die neuen Leiden is a particular challenge to the establishment of the GDR, because in traditional socialism the value of art is not simply in its aesthetics, but in its "gesellschaftlich aktivierende Komponente" (Plate 228). The

direction and "Die Breite der Auslegungsmöglichkeiten macht die Arbeit Plenzdorfs in meinen Augen weitgehend fragwürdig" (Plate 228) — the intentions of the novel are too confusing to be socially useful. It is for this reason that Friedrich Kaul wanted the story, whether novel, short story or play, published with a commentary: he felt the reader needed to be guided in deriving the "correct" [read socialist] meaning (Girnus ed. 152). However, such an imposed direction or prescribed interpretation is precisely what Plenzdorf has so carefully constructed his novel to avoid. Edgar's support for communism and his rejection of the army may be weak or unconvincing (Neubert 217), but it cannot be discounted either. Neither the socialists nor the rebels and reformers can conclusively claim Edgar Wibeau as one of their own.

Problematic for the party functionaries is that Plenzdorf shows through Edgar that life is not superior in the socialist state (Neubert 214), a fact which the government did not admit nationally or internationally. Even though the universal complaints and the pointed commonalities with the characters in the intertexts seem to indicate that Plenzdorf is criticizing all restrictive societies as they exist and "alle seelenlose Funktionieren der Angepassten aller Systeme," not solely the GDR (Piontek 294; Rubinstein 322), the fact remains that he *is* critical of East Germany. Considering the responsibility of the artist to communicate the socialist position, it is indeed surprising that Plenzdorf did not create stronger enemies or meet with more resistance. In fact Friedrich Kaul, his strongest opponent and the critic who most clearly represented the

traditional party line, was defeated by other literary critics and sharply criticized by *Sinn und Form* before his words and concerns had any effect (Karasek 247). On the surface, Plenzdorf is not dangerous because his novel appears to be apolitical, but "in einem Staat, wo die Politik in das private Leben eines jeden Individuums eindringt und es unentwegt regeln und überwachen möchte, [hat] jede Kritik an der Welt der Erwachsenen automatisch einen eminent politischen Charakter" (Reich-Ranicki 266). The very fact that sufferings comparable to Werther's are possible in the socialist state is controversial (Fehn and Brandes 619), and Plenzdorf's novel highlights the similarities, thus underlining the problems and restrictions in the GDR as well as the need to reform society to make it truly socialist. This critical element in Plenzdorf cannot be silenced by claiming that the socialist position is made evident in the fact that the questions and problems which the book addresses are only solvable in the GDR, or by classifying Die neuen Leiden as a "sozialistischer Diskussionsbeitrag" (Neubert 219). Indeed, if the problems in the novel are truly applicable to all societies, then it is the responsibility of each society to allow an existence more favourable to the individual, his/her needs and desires, regardless of political system.

One of the most revealing, but also one of the most contentious elements in the novel is its positive presentation of the United States and American culture. Not only is it true that "Momentan oder für längere Zeit sind die Einflüsse 'der anderen' stärker als unsere" (Neubert 218), but the presentation of Salinger and Defoe is totally positive. For

a large part of the book, however, Wibeau criticizes and even mocks Werther, one of the masterpieces of German literature, part of the heritage of which the East Germans claimed to be sole and true inheritors. Even as Wibeau begins to be able to identify more with Werther and uses him more as a point of reference for his emotions and the assessment of his own development, some of the early critical flavour remains. The reader remembers the excesses of Goethe's hero, especially as the parallels with Plenzdorf's work increase. But Wibeau's negative presentation of German culture in comparison to American is not present only in the discussion of literature, but also in his musical preferences. In expressing his love for jeans, Wibeau says "Für Jeans konnte ich überhaupt auf alles verzichten, außer der *schönsten Sache* vielleicht. Und außer Musik. Ich meine jetzt nicht irgendeinen Händelsohn Bacholdy, sondern echte Musik, Leute" (26). Later he identifies this "echte Musik" as jazz, an American movement, and most particularly, the sound of Louis Armstrong or Satchmo, a black American musician (30). Here again, Wibeau ridicules the German and European tradition, this time of classical music, openly showing his admiration of a more modern, Western cultural option. While this choice is not in itself political, in the East German state which has placed so much emphasis on the classical tradition and the German heritage, it is tantamount to a protest against the government. Furthermore, whether jeans are representative of practical work clothes, and so a tribute to the everyday, or are a symbol of rebellious teenage loafing, they too carry an undeniable link to the United States and again are represented as most

positive. "Jeans sind eine Einstellung und keine Hosen" (27), a code to like thinkers and youthful people with a different world view; they represent non-conformists. But at the same time, Plenzdorf does not present an entirely positive view of Western popular culture; the lyrics of Wibeau's cherished "Blue Jeans Song" are in fact empty and void of real meaning.

> Oh, Bluejeans
> White Jeans? — No
> Black Jeans? — No
> Blue Jeans, oh
> Oh, Bluejeans, jeah
>
> Oh, Bluejeans
> Old Jeans? — No
> New Jeans? — No
> Blue Jeans, oh
> Oh, Bluejeans, jeah (30)

The song, its words, and Wibeau's attitude show an unquestioning reverence and obsession for jeans that is markedly absent in Edgar's treatment of tradition and the classics. The simplistic, superficial words of the Bluejeans song function both as a criticism of Wibeau's own song writing ability and even his thought process, as well as a means to mock the content of Western pop music and lyrics. If this is an indication that not all Western culture is worthy of emulation, it is a small and subtle one which is nonetheless worthy of consideration. Certainly, however, it shows Wibeau's perception of what would constitute a valid contribution to that culture — a contribution which contrasts sharply in its simple emptiness with socialist art packed with propaganda and

'educational' value. Furthermore, for as much as Edgar admires Western culture and language, he does not reject his own background, despite his criticism of it. He strives to emulate the West and craves the freedom it offers, but he remains within his own society and tries to reform it rather than attempting to escape over the border.

Also interesting is that, for the most part, Plenzdorf is not presenting abstract images of the West and America which he has created, but is using actual Americans and literary figures: Satchmo and Holden Caulfield. Although the "Amerikabild" exists in German literature as both dreamland and warning (Galinsky 174), in East German politics the United States only exists as a menacing and negative countering force to the benefits of communism (Zipes 334), making the positive representation of the West here clearly controversial even without the criticism of the classics and the German heritage. GDR authors use America "bewußt und unbewußt dazu, die Innen-, Außen- und Kulturpolitik der DDR zu begründen oder zu kritisieren" (Zipes 334). When criticism is permitted, the degree to which the presented image of the United States differs from the official state dogma is a signal of how open and permissive the GDR is at that time (Zipes 335). Plenzdorf is not presenting the stereotypical view of a United States without culture, but rather of the progressive West as the way of culture (Galinsky 178). The fact that Plenzdorf's favourable representation of the West, the US in particular, passed through the censors shows that it was part of a more lenient, post-Ulbricht era of the GDR. It does not matter that Plenzdorf avoids mentioning tricky political relations with

the US except to express outrage at the situation in Vietnam, in which he comes out in support of the communist side: "Ich dürfte keine Vietnambilder sehen und das...[dann] hätte ich mich als Soldat auf Lebenszeit verpflichtet" (77). Even the fact that Plenzdorf turns to the West for a cultural model is political and controversial in a state with a very narrow view of culture as primarily based on German tradition and socialist ideology.

Part of the problem with this positive presentation of the Western world and the critical or absent view of German, and specifically socialist German culture, is that critics expect that a work true to the GDR principles will have a beneficial effect, and this assessment is not necessarily true of Die neuen Leiden (Brenner 21). Critics complain that there is no positive role model in the book, citing the mockery made of Dieter and the exceptionally affirmative presentation of Edgar himself (Biele 209). If there is any positive figure it is Zaremba, and even his patriotism and ideology seem strange since he bursts into socialist party songs at the sign of conflict (92). Nonetheless, Zaremba not only manages to be a constructive part of the collective, he is also exactly the type of strong individual and non-conformist which Edgar would like to be. But even when a piece of GDR literature does refer to an outsider, such as Edgar has chosen to be, authors are expected to show the errors of the protagonists in order to highlight what they have done wrong and to prevent any negative influence the character might have on social behaviour (Neubauer 73). The very issue of work, for instance, is a contentious one in this book. Although "Arbeit" is a key concept for communists and socialists, it is not

clear here that Edgar has a very positive attitude towards it, or that his convictions are even based in ideology rather than in personal opinion or his adoption of Werther's confused relationship to work. While Wibeau does not have a negative attitude to work as such, he certainly believes that the "Arbeitsmoral" in the GDR is too rigid (Brenner 35) — a position counter to official state policy and not presenting a socialist ideal to the readers of the novel. Wibeau works because he wants money, friends, and entertainment; he works for himself and not for the benefit of society (Plenzdorf 47, 66).

Addressing the concern of the GDR state that Wibeau may set a poor example, Neubauer considers the assumption that literature could have any kind of substantial influence over public behaviour "an overestimation of the social power of literature" (73), but if he examines literary history, he will find an example of precisely such a situation in which life imitates art in the history of Werther reception. In the period following the publication of Die Leiden des jungen Werther, countless young men committed suicide wearing the trademark yellow vest and blue waistcoat of Goethe's hero and with copies of Emilia Galotti nearby. This copycat behaviour in the public reached such epic proportions that it prompted Goethe to add a line of advice to later editions of his work: "Sei ein Mann und folge mir nicht nach!" (Brandes 116). Even Wibeau's story itself is largely governed by the literary; he not only identifies with Werther, but also imitates him. Literature can have an enormous influence on its reading public, and it is in recognition of this power that GDR authors were pressed to use their art for a

"Bereicherung der geistigen Welt sozialistischer Persönlichkeiten, zur allseitigen Entwicklung ihrer individuellen Kultur" (Schregel 254).

It is also a tribute to the power of literature that commentators in the East were wary of Die neuen Leiden and careful about its interpretations, especially given its phenomenal popularity. Plenzdorf's use of the literary tradition may indeed be secondary to his concern for GDR reality (Neubauer 71), but his "Werther-Pistole" is certainly an effective weapon of social criticism in highlighting the overregulation of East German society. While there are many parallels and similarities between Robinson Crusoe, Werther, The Catcher in the Rye and Die neuen Leiden, it is also significant that on a more political level, these novels exist not as models but as "paradigm[s] of all that is found wrong with contemporary cultural policy" and society (Herminghouse 278). The mixture of hope, creativity, and decadent individualism that is Edgar in his life is stifled in a society with such a mistrust of originality and without room for such an inventive spirit (Zipes 348). Considering the extensive criticism Plenzdorf aims at his society, even though indirectly, it is no surprise that his opponents should feel that "eine gewichtsmäßige Verfälschung unseres sozialistischen Seins und Werdens ist vorhanden in dieser Arbeit" (Plate 228; Kaul in Girnus ed. 153). Perhaps the point of Edgar's death is to expose such attitudes as unrealistic and prove instead that there are in fact many more like him in the GDR who must be accommodated and appreciated in socialist

society (Neubert 220). Socialist society and its propaganda may instead be a "gewichtsmäßige Verfälschung" of the individual, his/her needs and desires.

Even if Plenzdorf is not condemning communism as an ideology but chastising his own society, as it exists, for straying from its founding principles (John 37), the political angle of the critical message has no less impact. The severity of these attacks is mediated, however, by the humorous attitude of the narrator from beyond (Brandes 118). In fact, Girnus discounts much of the critical aspect exactly because of this humour, suggesting that Wibeau is meant to be laughed at, but that Western critics cannot appreciate the joke because laughing would mean admitting the victory of socialism, since a humorous Edgar could no longer be classified a protest figure (191). But perhaps Die neuen Leiden actually represents a new "Lustigkeit" which the GDR feels it can afford when addressing an audience that was born into socialism and after twenty-five years of building (Schneider 289). Do Plenzdorf and Wibeau actually even stand together with respect to the system, or is the fact that Wibeau never becomes a "Vorbild" in his individualism and rebellion an indication that Plenzdorf stays within the confines set up by the state (Schumann 160), even if his protagonist does not? Wibeau is certainly presented as a likeable figure, but also a very absurd one, for he is subject to many of the same excesses and irrationalities as is Werther, even though his are not based in emotion. The *Leiden* which Wibeau specifically mentions are ridiculous and relate to hair growth and bowel movements, but his true sufferings are revealed in the broader perspective of

the story about an outsider seeking himself. Like Crusoe, Werther, and Caulfield or Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger, Plenzdorf and Wibeau have criticisms of the society in which they live, but they never question its fundamental existence or seek to undermine it; they all comment on society as it exists in order to demonstrate the need for reform and improvement. By questioning the present through the use of the past, Plenzdorf also asks what kind of socialist person is desirable, or even ideal for socialist society: "Wie muß und kann in den siebziger Jahren die Erziehung junger Menschen aussehen?" (Schönemann in Weimann, "Diskussion" 180). In fact, Plenzdorf admits to confronting these issues directly when he says, "Sicher ist es so, daß Literatur mehr oder weniger gesellschaftsverändernd wirken kann. Ich selbst tendiere allerdings immer mehr dazu..." (Plenzdorf in Zeindler 313-314). Thus, although Plenzdorf is here emphasizing the individual over his/her social responsibility (Plate 226), he does not see it as the fault of the individual, but rather of a society which does not accommodate such personal development and should change to do so. In the programme notes to the play, Plenzdorf clarifies himself: "Schuld ist da niemand. Das soll vorkommen...Wir wollten das Stück spielen als Warnung an alle, die es angeht, so mit Edgar und seinesgleichen umzugehen" (Plenzdorf in Nössig 146).

Plenzdorf is not a subversive, radical critic of socialist ideology, but rather a fervent supporter of the theory of the political system, questioning its application and practice. Based on an evaluation of Wibeau's flight from society, his attitude to work, his

obsessed drive to invention, and even his death, a multitude of interpretations are justifiable, none to the exclusion of any other. It is impossible to prove that "Er war unser, weil er etwas Nützliches tun wollte" (Schütte 279), or that Plenzdorf suggests that "Schöpfertum und Persönlichkeitsanspruch nur in der Gesellschaft möglich seien" (Schmitt 271) to the exclusion of other possibilities. Even what could be one of the strongest, most obvious manifestations of Wibeau's identification with his own society can also be taken ironically as a criticism of society and its precepts. Wibeau says that he thinks Salinger/Holden Caulfield and Werther should come to the GDR because they would feel at home there (Plenzdorf 34,37). Although this statement may be an expression of confidence in the East German system (Tate 203), it also serves as an ironic condemnation of it, because clearly he himself is not comfortable with his society as it exists. If Edgar cannot develop within his own society and must create an alternative existence for himself, can he really expect those with parallel problems to his own to be at ease or accepted in a world which he rejects?

These questions and the debate which followed the publication of the book and play show that the "Meinungsunterschiede und Abbau der Tabus" (Schregel 256) which are Plenzdorf would not be possible without Honecker and the (temporarily) more lenient East German state. Although Wibeau refuses to let himself be "eingereiht" in society, Plenzdorf has never departed, despite his criticism, because of his mastery of communication within the system. As critical as this novel is of the GDR, Plenzdorf

obviously knew exactly how far he could go as a social commentator while still entertaining the public and remaining acceptable to the system. The content of Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye makes their use as intertexts poignant, but their very distance from Plenzdorf and the GDR also functions as provocation beyond the level of language and plot, because in their new context in East German literature they have become political statements. Wibeau does not admire any of these novels as literary masterpieces, but rather as expressions of the independence and the seeking spirit which he himself represents, and is not permitted in his society. In this way, even Plenzdorf's intertextuality is implicitly political in nature.

By suggesting comparisons between other social orders and his own, Plenzdorf does not, however, equate them. The fundamentally open nature of this novel and his juxtaposition of different characters and time periods show that "he questions all tendencies to harmonize existing contradictions" (Brandes 119), suggesting that learning occurs by analyzing the differences. Do literature and reading facilitate emancipation or function as weapons for Wibeau? (Karthaus 114). In typical Plenzdorf style, the answer is both. Knowing the stories of Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and Holden Caulfield allows Wibeau to appreciate other ideas and see more of the world than he is permitted, but at the same time this knowledge functions as a weapon of social and systemic criticism for both character and author. Through his escape from society and his discovery of Werther, Wibeau learns to formulate and express his criticisms, as well as to question

society in a way that was not permitted when he was in Mittenberg and "wollte nie Ärger machen" (22). The greatest function of literature as a weapon, both on an intertextual level and with respect to Plenzdorf's novel and its impact alone, is that it legitimizes questions and unavoidably stimulates discussion on literary and larger public levels. While the issue of youth and the creation of an understanding for their problems is key to the novel, Plenzdorf refused commentary on which aspects are most central. "[Ich halte] es für zu früh, da zu verallgemeinern...Im Moment bin ich einfach in der Situation, dazusitzen und zu sammeln und glücklicherweise auch Dinge interpretiert zu hören, von denen ich nicht dachte, daß sie drinstehen" (Plenzdorf in Weimann, "Diskussion" 178). In this way, Plenzdorf anticipates the post-modern prescriptions of Umberto Eco when he writes: "The author should die once he has finished writing. So as not to trouble the path of the text...The author must not interpret. But he may tell why and how he wrote his book" (Eco 7-8). What is called for, then — in fact required — is interpretation by readers and communication on all issues: youth, cultural norms, as well as society and its character.

After 1973 the debates over Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. continued, although more on a literary level than a cultural-political one (Brenner 46). What Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. proves in its challenges and questions is that not every book published in East Germany that is of worthy of merit is written by the opposition anti-socialists. This book was praised by the political powers in East Germany, but is

nonetheless an innovative, successful, and fascinating novel worth reading; it is significantly supportive of the East German system and yet not propaganda or a dutifully constructed story subscribing only to socialist political ideals — it has charm (Michaelis 282)! It has so much charm, in fact, that similar to the Wertheriaden, or Werther stories which appeared after the publication of Goethe's book, at least four novels and stories were published after Plenzdorf's which actually imitated Die neuen Leiden or used it as an intertext (Schregel 241). There was some resistance to the novel in the West by critics who claimed to need commentary to understand what was so funny for the East Germans, and who decided that "Es betrifft uns leider nicht" (Moser 302; Luft 272), but others countered that since there were thought patterns and emotions behind the words and actions, and not just politics, the West does not have the luxury of divorcing itself from the problems depicted (Raddatz 306). Even the critic who states that "Plenzdorfs Buch [ist] meiner Meinung nach alles andere als eine große literarische Tat" concedes that this issue is not even important considering the success of the novel and its effectiveness in raising questions and promoting discussion (Karasek 250). The debate over whether or not the novel is of superior literary quality in fact refers back to Wibeau's own discussion of how impossible it is for anyone to decide definitively whether or not art is good. For the most part Plenzdorf's story and technique have been admired and respected by all readers even if his politics have been questioned. The very openness which makes the impact so extreme, the politics so subtle, and the literary angle almost impossible to

determine — which, in short, allows the book to survive censorship and side-step strict literary-political codes — is what makes interpretation so challenging and frustrating and causes its reception to be so diverse and confrontational, in fact guaranteeing the place of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. in any discussion of East German literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Consequences: Thematizing the Literary and the Intertextual

The literary aspects of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. may not be what make it popular, but they are certainly a large part of what makes it unique. The literariness of Plenzdorf's novel does not consist only in a recasting or reworking of earlier literary models, for it is also a confrontation with literature and art itself. Wibeau specifically asks the question of how to determine whether art is good, and proclaims his own judgements and opinions of the quality of music and art, but running through the entire novel is also the question of what makes literature good, or pleasurable, and who can decide. Die neuen Leiden des jungen W., Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye each contain passages which are as much *about* literature as they *are* literature. It is not just that "Man schreibt unter Aufsicht alles bisher geschriebenen" (Botho Strauß in Hoesterey 166), but that all authors also comment on the literary past, directly and indirectly.

Werther's closest literary relationships are with Homer and Ossian. He discusses both of these works at length with Lotte, who is equally passionate about literature, and in fact, the two closest moments between them occur over literature. The first time Werther and Lotte recognize each other as kindred spirits is at the dance during the thunderstorm.

The two both look out the window to appreciate the serenity and beauty of nature, and with great emotion turn to each other and recall the poet of the *Empfindsamkeit*, Klopstock (Goethe 30). While they often discuss literature after this first meeting, there is another time when their emotions are mirrored in literature, and that is near the end of the novel when Werther is reading Ossian to Lotte during their emotional final visit. In the passage immediately preceding their frenzied passionate exchange, the editor describes: "Ein Strom von Tränen, der aus Lottens Augen brach und ihrem gepreßten Herz Luft machte...Die Bewegung beider war fürchterlich. Sie fühlten ihr eigenes Elend in dem Schicksale der Edlen, fühlten es zusammen und ihre Tränen vereinigten sie" (Goethe 138). Their own feelings overflow and can only be expressed through an identification with literature. Even at the end of the novel, Werther can attend to all the details of his death and even write his farewells, but he expresses his worldly frustration by leaving the copy of Emilia Galotti on his desk.

More significant even than this type of identification with literature, is the implicit statement Goethe makes about what kind of literature is good. In a letter to Eckermann in 1824, decades after Werther was published, Goethe himself wrote: "Es müßte schlimm sein, wenn nicht jeder in seinem Leben einmal eine Epoche haben sollte, wo ihm der *Werther* käme, als wäre er bloß für ihn geschrieben" (quoted in Wapnewski 340). This assertion is carried into the book through the Editor's note: "Und du gute Seele, die du eben den Drang fühlst wie er, schöpfe Trost aus seinem Leiden, und laß das Büchlein

deinen Freund sein..." (3). Clearly, Goethe expects the reader to enjoy the book primarily because s/he identifies with it and its characters, just as Werther does in the literature he reads. Lotte too states: "Und der Autor ist mir der liebste, in dem ich meine Welt wieder finde, bei dem es zugeht wie um mich, und dessen Geschichte mir doch so interessant und herzlich wird, als mein eigen häuslich Leben..." (24-25).

The lack of these qualities of identification causes Wibeau to reject Werther at first, but it is the discovery of parallels between his own life and literature that brings Wibeau so close to Goethe's hero. At first he says "Das war nichts Reelles. Reiner Mist..." (Plenzdorf 37), but as he realizes the value of the Werther parallels, he admits, "Ich hatte wirklich nie im Leben gedacht, daß ich diesen Werther mal so begreifen würde" (124). But even though Wibeau, like Werther with his Homer and Ossian, does not just read but also lives his literature, there is a key difference, because while Lotte shares Werther's passion, there is no indication that Charlie is interested in books. One of the things which gives Wibeau's use of Werther so much impact is the fact that no one understands what he is saying, or why he is speaking in this archaic style. Even when Charlie has the book in her hand, "Sie blätterte drin, ohne zu lesen...Ich wäre mir reichlich blöd vorgekommen, wenn sie alles mitgekriegt hätte. Sie fragte, was das ist" (70). Charlie does not care and takes no interest in books, and even Dieter, the German student, seems to have a very distant relationship to literature, arranging his books in height order (80) and having to force himself to write. Although Charlie makes the

arrangement of the books more appealing, there is no indication that she is any more interested in their content, and it seems that Charlie and Dieter are symbolic of a greater social loss. Plenzdorf uses these characters, especially in their contrast to Wibeau, who reads voraciously and lives his literature, in order to show that society has lost both the tools to comprehend and interpret literature as well as the passion for it; only Edgar, the outsider, still has intimate contact to literature. The novel and its reception have certainly raised concern among GDR critics and educators alike about the readers' interest in the classics and even their ability to understand them (Scharfschwerdt 258).

In Plenzdorf's novel, only the protagonist is interested in literature. It is surely no accident of narration that Wibeau, in fact, even equates drugs and literature when Plenzdorf writes in a misunderstanding for the reader centred around the word "Stoff." When Wibeau first arrives at the *Laube*, he stops to analyze himself and determines that he wants to read, but he cannot because he does not have any books. By referring to reading material as "Stoff" Plenzdorf and Wibeau create a double meaning, requiring Edgar to clarify for the reader that the "Stoff" he lacks is something to read, not "Hasch und das Opium" (31). This parallel certainly highlights the subversive, rebellious potential of literature, but also the inherent escapism of reading. If reading and literature are drugs, then Wibeau is not just an occasional user — he is an addict; reading is an essential activity for him. So while we saw literature as both emancipation and weapon in the previous chapter (Karthaus 114), Plenzdorf's own lexical game narrows these terms

to escape and rebellion — both of which could be serve as a weapon or lead to emancipation. Literature can certainly function as a weapon, and Wibeau's "Werther-pistole," like culture, can be used for or against the system. But reading books in his head when "ich einer gewissen Frau Wibeau mal wieder keinen Ärger machen wollte" proves that it is also an avoidance of reality for Edgar (34). The fact that Wibeau defiantly refuses to enjoy recommended or required books shows that he is rejecting the prescriptive aspects of literary education. "Meine Erfahrungen mit empfohlenen Büchern waren hervorragend mies. Ich Idiot war so verrückt, daß ich ein empfohlenes Buch blöd fand, selbst wenn es gut war" (33). Although by his own admission he is limiting himself, he is also asserting and exercising his critical privilege, which can only be beneficial, especially in an oppressive regime in which the personal becomes political.

Significantly, it is the very same potential for identification, a sense that the story is real, coupled with an intense admiration for the characters which make Wibeau consider The Catcher in the Rye and Robinson Crusoe his two favourite works. In contrast to his opinion of Goethe, Edgar compliments Salinger, saying, "*Das* ist echt, Leute! Ich kann euch nur raten, ihn zu lesen, wenn ihr ihn irgendwo aufreißen könnt...Leiht es euch aus und gebt es nicht wieder zurück" (37). What is even more interesting is that Holden Caulfield's own literary criteria are very similar to Werther's and Wibeau's — identification, admiration, and an ability to clearly visualize the events of the story. Although he tells the reader, "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot" (18), he is

well-read and expressive. Caulfield classifies his taste in literature, saying, "I like a book that's at least funny once in awhile...What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it" (18). However, where Wibeau can identify with Caulfield to the point where he is sure he can solve the other's problems (34), Caulfield does not share this intimate relationship with the characters in the novels he reads. He may like or dislike them, but it takes Mr. Antolini, his former English teacher, to point out the potential personal significance of literature.

> Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them — if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. (Salinger 189)

Caulfield has indeed given what he has to offer and Wibeau has seized it. By transporting this narrative about the search for self-discovery to East Germany, Edgar and Plenzdorf alter the context of the message in The Catcher in the Rye, thus expanding and politicizing the story of an individual in conflict with society.

While Wibeau identifies with all of these characters — Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and Caulfield — and their predicaments, his situation and his fate are not identical to any one of them. He chooses to learn from their accounts of their troubles and experiences in creating his own life and self. But the intertextuality of Die neuen

Leiden des jungen W. does not only provide overt models for Edgar Wibeau, it also has an effect on the reader. The interreferentiality of all of these books and their internal focus on literature cause the reader to reflect on novels in general while reading and interpreting one specific novel (Schregel 240). For the reader, literature is not just a story which confirms or illuminates personal experience, but it is also literature about literature itself. "Der Roman wird zum Diskussionsforum über die Aufgaben und Ziele der Literatur" (Schregel 240), because it implicitly comments on other novels, whether or not they are specifically mentioned in the text.

Part of the discussion of where literature stands and what its goals are has to include its position with respect to the other arts, and in Die neuen Leiden this position is a particularly revealing one. Edgar is not free to express his creative impulses through art, first because his mother will not permit him to pursue this avenue of interest, and then because he is not accepted to the art school in Berlin. Both of these reasons stand independent of any judgements of Edgar as a "verkanntes Genie" or as an "Idiot" who cannot paint at all. Even in music and dancing, although Edgar is not directly prohibited, he says, "Ich konnte nicht besonders gut tanzen, jedenfalls nicht öffentlich. Ich meine: Dreimal so gut wie jeder andere konnte ich es immer noch. Aber richtig warm wurde ich nur in meinen vier Wänden. Draußen störten mich die ewigen Tanzpausen" (59). But the shortcomings of the arts other than literature as possible mediums for full expression are most particularly evident in the discussion of film. Wibeau criticizes the so-called

educational films which actually consist mainly of propaganda, and in one example relates a scene in which the hero of the movie is wounded and sent to hospital. "Aber im Krankenhaus, auf seinem Zimmer, lag so ein Agitator oder was das sein sollte. Jedenfalls redete er so. Als ich das sah, wußte ich sofort was kam. Der Mann würde so lange auf ihn losreden, bis er alles einsah, und dann würden sie ihn hervorragend einreihen..." (40). Such films are not about entertainment, as Edgar feels cinema should be, but are about providing and consolidating the socialist ideology in the viewers' minds. The power of Plenzdorf's political message is strengthened in the representation of the filmmaker who seems to concur with Wibeau's assessment "daß ein Film, in dem die Leute in einer Tour lernen und gebessert werden, nur öde sein kann. Daß jeder gleich sieht, was er daraus lernen soll, und daß kein Aas Lust hat, wenn er den ganzen Tag über gelernt hat, auch abends im Kino noch zu lernen, wenn er denkt, er kann sich amusieren" (42). Edgar reports that the filmmaker agrees and says "daß er sich das schon immer gedacht hätte, aber daß es nicht anders gegangen wäre" (43). This admission of the limitations of production and publication possibilities mirrors Plenzdorf's own confession that he had been unable to do what he wanted for several years (Weimann, "Diskussion" 178), but is also telling in its reflection of the situation within the narrative confines of the novel. Through Wibeau, Plenzdorf shows that it is in literature and literary language that there is the most freedom because Wibeau's own story, with all of its consequences and

implications, is finally told in writing. The subtleties and open-endedness of writing provide Wibeau with a voice he could not find in other arts.

However, Wibeau only gains his voice through the insights and experience provided by life and death. How does Plenzdorf find his own form of expression in an age when "Literatur beginnt wenn einer sich fragt: wer spricht in mir wenn ich spreche?" (Octavio Paz in Hoesterey 166). Fascinating is Pinsker's summary of the advice on education Mr. Antolini gives to Holden Caulfield: "Education is...an offer, an opportunity, but one that requires the imagination first to be tempered by voices of the past, and then be disciplined by the writer who wishes to add his or her installment to the larger saga of how a self wrestles with the claims of society" (79). Without intending to, Pinsker has summarized the intertextual challenge which faced Plenzdorf in writing this work, for what Pinsker called education is also the reality of being born into literary history and having to work with all of what already exists in order to create the personal and the unique.

Personal achievement is a challenge, and although Wibeau's urge to be independent and create something of his own is certainly admirable, the fact that he chooses a "nebelloses Farbspritzgerät" as his goal casts a questionable light over his endeavours. The goal that he chooses is Addi's goal, and not his own. For someone with so much interest and quite possibly even talent in art and music to suddenly become obsessed with the invention of a technical device for which he has never personally felt

the need, there clearly must be other reasons, other motivation for seeking achievement. By taking Addi's goal as his own, Edgar is in effect competing with his foreman, although Addi himself does not know it. Edgar Wibeau wants to prove himself by succeeding at a task at which all others have failed in order to show his world and his construction crew that he is indeed a "verkanntes Genie" and that they have underestimated him. This attempt to invent an "NFG" may satisfy the spirit of Wibeau's ambition and his search for recognition, but certainly not the genre, for he does not seek to demonstrate his technical skill but rather to astound them with his creativity. A significant point of reference here is Goethe's novel, because when Werther first rejects Wilhelm's suggestion of work, he says "Alles in der Welt läuft doch auf eine Lumperei hinaus, und ein Mensch, der um anderer willen, ohne daß es seine eigene Leidenschaft, sein eigenes Bedürfnis ist, sich um Geld oder Ehre oder sonst was abarbeitet, ist immer ein Tor" (Goethe 46). In effect, by not choosing his own goal and striving for it, Wibeau is acting as the fool Werther describes. Interestingly enough, Brenner uses this quotation from Goethe in the introduction to his compilation of critical essays as proof that criticism of the bourgeois politics and lifestyle existed even in the eighteenth century. But he erroneously credits it to a later period in Werther's story — the letter of the fifteenth of March (80-83) when he is complaining of the situation surrounding his employment (Brenner 28). The fact that this quotation actually occurs much earlier in the novel shows that it pertains not to bourgeois society at all, but rather to Werther's own

individual pursuits; he feels that for him to go to work at that time would be foolish because it is not his own desire or compulsion.

Wibeau needs to create and contribute something of his own, but he does not know where or how to begin. In Mittenberg, as a model student, he follows the guidelines and rules of his mother, school, and society, and acts as is expected of him. When he finally does rebel by speaking up against Flemming, it is because he is frustrated with following others' regulations and not causing trouble when he clearly disagrees with the rules and the philosophy behind them. After telling of the confrontation with Flemming, the narrator Edgar comments from beyond, "Das wollte ich Flemming schon lange mal sagen. Das war nämlich nicht nur sein blöder Wahlspruch, das war seine ganze Einstellung aus dem Mittelalter: Manufakturperiode. Bis da hatt ich's mir verkniffen" (13). For Edgar to create something of his own he must overcome the limitations of obsolete attitudes. By running from Mittenberg and trying to achieve his own goals in Berlin, Wibeau starts the search for self and goes through phases which can be defined largely in his relationship to literature. Initially, Edgar relates primarily to Holden Caulfield and Robinson Crusoe, and there are references to him exploring Berlin culture and his new surroundings much as these two characters discovered the environments of their withdrawal — both eagerly and tentatively. Next, Wibeau adds the reading of Die Leiden des jungen Werther to his dancing, drawing, self-designed and self-determined existence, and initially rejects it. Goethe's novel is incomprehensible to

him until circumstances in his own life begin to correspond with events in the novel, and eventually he even imitates the book. However, although Wibeau goes through phases of imitating and identifying with each of these books, the parallels are never satisfactory or complete. Finally, Edgar chooses to follow the goals of the construction crew, and Addi in particular — he decides to try to invent. It is this last attempt to achieve others' aims which defeats him, for here not only is he a "Tor" by Werther's definition, but he also sacrifices his life.

It is only through this death that Edgar discovers that all of the identities he has tried on, all of the goals and characteristics of others he has assumed in an attempt to find himself, are not right for him. Here he gains perspective on his life and finds his identity. No critic has connected Werther's definition of a "Tor" with Edgar, and only John gives the interpretation of Wibeau as a fool substantial consideration. He classifies Wibeau as the typical incarnation of the "ironic comic fool" — "an outsider who at the same time provides a penetrating commentary on the society that cannot accept him" (38). Although it is likely true that "In society's eyes, Edgar lived as a fool and died so" (40), this conclusion is not sufficient; nor is it enough to reveal that since no one in the novel or play can recognize what kind of fool Edgar truly is, it is the reader's or audience's responsibility. While it is true that most of the onus of interpretation is placed with the reader, simply calling Edgar a fool does not account for the dual perspective which is achieved through the narrator figure who tells the story from an informed, more educated

position after death. Edgar may live and die as a fool, but he does not remain one, for through the magic of literature he finds himself and his voice, and tells his story after death. Edgar is an individualized combination of all influences on him and all things he tries to imitate. He is a product of the slang and the socialism of his time; of his youth; of Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and Holden Caulfield; of Satchmo and jazz and "Händelsohn Bacholdy"; of his mother and his absent father; of Mittenberg and Meister Flemming; of Addi, Zaremba and his fellow construction workers; and he is a product of countless other influences which the reader can only begin to catalogue.

As an author, Plenzdorf too is such a composite of different influences, and also finds himself through a survey of models and precepts, accepted and rejected. In Edgar's search to discover himself among various challenges, models, and standards, is mirrored Plenzdorf's own quest to discover his narrative voice, to overcome friends and ghosts of the past to create his own literary voice and future. Just as Wibeau begins as a model student and citizen of the system with an ideal socialist upbringing, Plenzdorf himself begins with a strong base in literary tradition, with direct and overt titular and textual references to Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werther most substantially, but also to Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye and Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. Plenzdorf also proceeds from a foundation in his contemporary world, incorporating the slang, youthful attitude, and the politics which govern his existence into the environment which he provides for his novel. The immediate impetus for Edgar's clear break from this world

are the archaic methods and assignments at his school, although he emphasizes the fact that he ran away because "*er das schon lange vorhatte*" (16); Plenzdorf's development as an author, however, does not include such a definite rejection of the status quo. Firstly, he cannot pretend that literary history does not exist and simply run away from it, because even were he to ignore it, it would still exist within him, as Wibeau himself states: "Sowieso sind meiner Meinung nach in jedem Buch fast *alle* Bücher" (36). Furthermore, because Plenzdorf's departure from tradition is more of a subtle progression, it is therefore more difficult to detect and comprehend. "[Es] liegt mir eigentlich immer daran zu sagen, daß Literatur ja auch für den gemacht wird, der sie schreibt. Ich spreche ja aus eigener Erfahrung, denn speziell Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. sind in einer situation geschrieben worden, in der der Text für mich ganz wichtig war, wo er mir erlaubte, meine Identität wiederzufinden..." (Plenzdorf in Zeindler 314).

While it may appear on the surface of Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. that Plenzdorf merely imitates and compiles other sources, we can see through analyzing the text and its implications that this is not the case. Not only does he make subtle changes, such as altering the genre from Goethe's epistolary novel to use a montage of narrative effects and modernizing the method of communication between Werther and "Old Willi" to the cassette tape, but he is also critical of the past to which he makes reference, especially the German literary past. One of the most powerful things about the past is its effect on the present, and for Wibeau that means that his "Werther-pistole" is effective

precisely because its relevance is no longer appreciated — no one understands it. For Plenzdorf it is an overvaluing of the past without examination of its implications which makes it a demon to be overcome, even if it cannot be defeated. "So wäre es denn erlaubt, von der heutigen [1975] Jugend als einer Werther-Generation zu sprechen?" asks Peter Wapnewski (340), answering his own question with a resounding no by considering the technical age. Wibeau and his followers are truly not part of a Werther-Generation, but for reasons Wapnewski did not contemplate — because they do not want to go under to the world and "gib den Löffel ab" and instead demand to change and improve it.

Changing and improving the world is also what Plenzdorf's novel is about, and he provides key critical insights into East German society for those who are reading for them. His overt inclusion of the past in his novel is part of the pointed commentary he sees is necessary for society, and part of this criticism is of course the two-sided presentation of Werther, first as ridiculous, then as something to be embraced. By questioning the merits of Goethe, as well as suggesting the need for an open, critical reexamination of Die Leiden des jungen Werther and providing a forum for it, Plenzdorf went against the strict doctrine of the East German state which demanded loyalty to the classics. Furthermore, Plenzdorf's positive outlook on the works of Salinger and Defoe, and indeed much of modern western culture, shows that he is looking outward to find new models, the implications of which are not accidentally political since they each assert the primacy of individual and his needs. In this way, although he is anchoring his work

in the past, he is contributing to the formation of a new East German tradition, rebellious in its inclusiveness. Plenzdorf's achievement is innovative and unique because he does not simply copy, but borrows and adapts. His work is a combination of contemporary politics and socialist theory; of slang and youth culture; of Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger; of Robinson Crusoe, Werther, and Holden Caulfield; of Satchmo and jazz and Händel and Bach and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy; of American culture; of artistic conventions; of intertextual thought; of social regulations and social rebellions; and Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. is a product of innumerable influences of which even Plenzdorf is not fully aware, and which no critic can determine.

Because Plenzdorf does take a new direction, he does not fall into the trap that initially plagues his character. Wibeau shows the absurdity of subscribing to others' dreams and goals, but remains true to the spirit of potential achievement of individuals who strive and try their own methods. Edgar realizes that his invention must be totally different from Addi's, and even feels personally challenged, but the fact remains that he directs his talents to Addi's goal and not his own; he lacks not only the ability and the materials to create an "NFG," but also his own reason for doing it. His death as a result of this attempt shows the absurdity and futility of obsession, and of striving and dying for recognition or for something others want. This criticism of those who merely copy or adopt the goals of others contains its own political message in an East Germany whose policy was guided, if not substantially governed, by the Soviet Union. Wibeau's

achievements are affirmed by Plenzdorf, however, because in the end, his work on the "NFG" will likely be used by Addi in developing the machine. "Edgars Apparatur läßt mich nicht los. Ich werde das Gefühl nicht los, Edgar war da einer ganz sensationellen Sache auf der Spur, einer Sache die einem nicht jeden Tag einfällt" (148). So just as Edgar's — the copier's — ideas influence those of the creator, Addi, Plenzdorf's work influences the interpretation of the works which form its foundation and indeed the literary tradition. The active Edgar who seeks reform and dies in a flurry of activity undermines and is critical of Werther's suicidal surrender and even acts an implicit critique of Caulfield's probable successful reintegration with the society he could not accept. Plenzdorf's narrative and creative style cause the reader to consider literature and its purpose while interpreting one novel in particular; Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. requires the reader to recognize the inevitability of literary borrowing, and to rejoice in this different kind of creative originality.

CONCLUSION

What began as a piece written "für die Schublade" became the centre of both a cultural-political debate and a literary discussion. Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. pushed the limits of what was permitted in the East German state and challenged readers, critics, and politicians to think beyond restraints, and thus has become "synonymous with the GDR cultural thaw between 1971 and 1976" (Fox 128). As a social commentary which takes a strong position in favour of the individual, the book was politically progressive, and as a novel which borrows openly from other literary sources, it is controversial, but *Sinn und Form* emerged on both fronts as Plenzdorf's promoter and defender in the face of substantial turmoil (Ahlers 62). Today it is not just in defense of Goethe and his legacy that readers and critics can celebrate Plenzdorf's revolutionary creativity and conclude that the novel serves as a "Paradigma einer Schreibweise...die intertextuelle Bezüge gezielt einsetzt" (Ahlers 61). Die neuen Leiden des jungen W. is innovative not *despite* its borrowing but *because* it is an imaginative compilation of so many other influences — literary, cultural, linguistic and political. Plenzdorf shows that within the text and in the writing process, it is necessary to confront and engage the past in order to recognize the present and constructively form the future.

Plenzdorf's book about a teenage boy who rejects society and tries to create his own life and develop himself contains echoes of other stories whether or not he chooses to acknowledge them, and it is his decision to artfully establish complex and subtle relationships with these other texts in the full consciousness of the reader that makes this novel so inventive. There are a great many adaptations and variations of both key moments and small details from each of Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye, but all adoptions are modified. At times a direct quotation, at times a reference, often indirect but never simple, Plenzdorf's use of the intertexts is always playful, always repetition with a difference and the reader usually remains uncertain whether this imitation, this borrowing, is meant to be a flattering pastiche or a mocking parody, knowing only that both are implied. To begin to understand and interpret Plenzdorf, the reader must excavate the intertexts and integrate them into any reading. As pieces of the past and fragments of an alternate present, the reader must also examine the relevance and connection of these intertexts to the present and future of literature and society, for it is not only Plenzdorf's intertextuality that is overt, but also his fictionality and his social commentary. He makes it impossible not to realize that all of these — intertextuality, metafictionality, and social commentary —are not exceptions found only in his novel; rather they are unavoidable and necessary. All writing is based on other writing, and so too is about writing; all writing, furthermore, is a commentary on the world of which it is a part. The similarities between the novels, the

cultures, and the issues are what form the timeless aspects of Die neuen Leiden, and it is the differences that point to it as a product of its time. The meanings and the messages of each of the intertexts contribute to the wealth of meanings and breadth of possibilities that characterize Die neuen Leiden and its necessarily open-ended interpretation.

It seems that Plenzdorf is in fact speaking through his character when Edgar Wibeau says, "Es hat keinen Zweck, alles zu sagen...Mann kann auch nicht alles sagen. Wer alles sagt, ist vielleicht kein Mensch mehr" (85-86). As an author, Plenzdorf refuses to say everything. He declines, indeed rejects the opportunity to explain himself and his intentions to his readers, choosing to force them to explore and explain his novel to themselves. In fact, by making his novel so multifaceted and open-ended, he is also preventing his readers from saying everything, for no conclusion, no interpretation is ever final and indisputable, and thus discussion both about the novel and about society itself is provoked. Society too is a compilation of past and present, politics and culture, individuals and groups, freedoms and restrictions, perspectives and influences, with no single interpretation, no one true conclusion or overriding truth by which to judge. By provoking discussion about the novel and society, Plenzdorf clearly demonstrates his belief in the potential of literature to stimulate reform. He does not question and confront the past in order to destroy it and to leave only emptiness where there were previously geniuses like Defoe, Goethe, and Salinger, or masterpieces like Robinson Crusoe, Die Leiden des jungen Werther, and The Catcher in the Rye; instead, Plenzdorf dissolves

traditional notions of originality, authenticity, coherence, and an extreme reverence for the past, all of which have hindered the realization of the impossibility of determining meaning conclusively and have prevented progress toward a celebration of the interreferentiality and "Vieldeutigkeit" of all literature. Because he wrote about an isolated non-conformist and individualist without presenting one clear meaning or conclusion, and because he ambiguously represented the past, Plenzdorf did not conform to the demands that socialism placed on art, but by "revising, replaying, inverting and 'transcontextualizing'" (Hutcheon 11) his intertexts, he has answered the call for originality.

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