

Weimar and Buchenwald - a Focus of German and European History *(unpublished manuscript, version A , April 25th, 2000)*

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Preliminary remarks:

The relationship between Weimar and Buchenwald, their relevance for Germany and Europe in a wider context would require a lot of separate studies from various perspectives (historical, political, cultural and literary, for instance). Since this cannot be sensibly done in such a paper by a non - specialist, I would like to concentrate on just a few objectives:

This paper is meant to

- briefly inform our partners and the participants of the course of the main historical, political and cultural lines of development of the Weimar - Buchenwald complex,
- help to explain why Weimar and Buchenwald - as a twin pair - can be regarded as a momentous focus of German history and culture, thus contributing essentially to the development of collective German identity,
- briefly inform our partners and perhaps the participants of the COMENIUS 3.2 course of the wide range of possibilities for 'European studies' in this region and demonstrate why Weimar is a 'lieu de memoire' not only for Germany but also for Europe as a whole,
- perhaps lay the foundation for the collection of material and evaluation for both course and project, and
- offer points for discussion and thus help prepare the course in Weimar.

To organise the vast amounts of materials and possibilities, I originally imagined to describe the historical - political developments separately from the cultural dimensions. This, however, has not proved to be a sensible approach, since it could even prolong the myth of Weimar as a cultural centre irrespective of its political background. The vicinity of Buchenwald and Weimar forcefully demonstrate that both aspects have to be treated like two sides of one coin.

Let me hasten to add that just a few months ago, I confessed to be rather ignorant of this topic, with very little knowledge of both the Weimar traditions and the events around Buchenwald, not to mention such vast study areas like the Bauhaus, Nietzsche or Franz Liszt. Hence I have to approach this subject with a high degree of modesty, all I can hope is to contribute material and ideas for those newcomers who would like to venture on the same trail. At the same time I hope to benefit from the comments of more experienced scholars.

Furthermore, this paper simply reflects a current state of knowledge only, it is, of course, unfinished and kept under revision.

Culture and Politics in Classical Weimar:
a few remarks on a famous site

Introduction:

Such a combination of memorial sites is indeed rare in Europe: Weimar as a centre of cosmopolitan humanity (classical culture) and democracy (Weimar Republic), Buchenwald as a symbol of barbarism, totalitarianism and murderous suppression. Down in the valley of the Ilm, we become witnesses of the heights of German or even European culture, on top of the mountain Ettersberg, we have to face the depth of national-socialist inhumanity.

It is not difficult to find quotations from celebrities pointing out the symbolic place Weimar has acquired in German history and culture:

The German writer Anna Seghers, for instance, argued that Weimar was the best and the worst place of German history. The most famous of all German writers, Goethe himself, wrote that 'Hier ist Deutschland!' - a phrase later misinterpreted under nationalist auspices.¹ And he continued

"Und Weimar, das ist Deutschland wiederum,
 Deutschland, das endlich seiner selber froh,
 Deutschland, das nicht mehr blind, das nicht mehr stumm..."

(And Weimar, this in turn is Germany, Germany, finally happy of herself, Germany, no longer blind, no longer mute...).

Goethe was right in many different ways. Weimar, as will be demonstrated below, has been a little Germany in a nutshell, quite a few national myths have been created here and the study of the Weimar - Buchenwald region can teach a lot about the formation of identity and its political usage.

Roman Herzog, the Federal President of Germany until June 1999, took the opportunity of reminding us that 'without Weimar the history of German culture cannot be imagined', which also meant that it was a home not only of culture, but also of barbarism.²

Many Germans have celebrated the 'miracle of Weimar', a tiny 'Fürstentum' in a rather impoverished area (Thuringia) becoming a cultural capital, a town with the image of a German Delphi, almost a holy grail for the German intelligentsia. All this has helped to forge the cult of geniuses, in many ways typical for the German understanding of art and artists.

Many famous names have been connected with Weimar, not only Goethe and Schiller, but also Johann Sebastian Bach, Johann Gottfried Herder and Christoph Martin Wieland, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Franz Liszt, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Paul, Madame de Stael, Walter Gropius, Adolf Hitler and Jorge Semprun, ... to name but a few.

Fichte's idealism was developed in this region, Herder taught the belief in humanity, Schiller proclaimed the poesis of moral sentiments. On the other hand we are reminded of Weimar as the centre of nationalism rearing its ugly head, with the concentration camp called Buchenwald and the use and abuse of all this by totalitarian and democratic states.

Is this not a truly German, European, if not universal lieu de memoire?

Let us investigate.

¹ Vgl. Prolog zum 'Tell' für die Eröffnung der Weimarer Nationalfestspiele für die deutsche Jugend am 6. Juni 1909. In: Deutsches Schrifttum. Betrachtungen und Bemerkungen von Adolf Bartels, Bogen 3, Juli 1909, S. 45:

² Roman Herzog: „Ohne Weimar ist die Geschichte der deutschen Kultur nicht denkbar. Weimar ist Deutschland in nuce. Das heißt aber auch, daß es eine Stadt ist, in der nicht nur Kultur und Geist, sondern auch Unkultur und Barbarei zu Hause waren. Das nahe gelegene Konzentrationslager Buchenwald ist und bleibt eine schreckliche Erinnerung.“

Bundespräsident Roman Herzog in his official proclamation of Weimar as 'cultural city of the year 1999'.

(Anlässlich des Staatsaktes im Deutschen Nationaltheater Weimar zur Eröffnung des Europäischen Kulturstadtjahres. Die Zeit Nr. 9, 25.2.1999)

The political framework until the end of the 18th century

Many historians recommend to begin with the Reformation and Martin Luther to explain the typical atmosphere of Weimar, as Peter Merseburger does in 'Mythos Weimar - Zwischen Geist und Macht'.³ The role of Protestantism would have to be explored for German culture, for the ideals of petty bourgeois family life, for the relationship to German Jews etc. Can Weimar be understood without the Wartburg, the symbol of German protestantism? It cannot be denied that the development of a modern state-church, the alliance between throne and altar, took place first in the area around Weimar, providing the ground for a new conservatism or even Puritanism in culture, society and politics so representative for Germany and perhaps for many parts of Europe. Luther and his followers emphasised the right of the 'Obrigkeit' (ruling authorities) to determine the fate of their subjects. Luther deliberately argued against any Calvinist or revolutionary influence, which would have strengthened community life, of local resistance and regional developments. In this respect the political - religious traditions seem to differ from those in Western Europe, where Calvinism developed deeper roots.

For whatever reason, Luther explicitly wrote against 'the Jews and their lies' in a pamphlet in 1543, not on racist grounds, but based on theological principles. But the effects proved to be intolerably fateful in the long run. For Luther, the living side by side of Jews and Protestants was almost unthinkable, even though not extermination was his aim but expulsion. In this way Luther had helped to promote an anti-semitist tradition which had existed in Europe since the Middle Ages. It should be added that the Roman Catholic Church, their representatives and theology, must accept at least some responsibility in this respect. This is to a large extent a European problem the origin of which dates back to at least the time of the Crusades: the latent and still unresolved relationship with fellow people and religions from the Near East, Arabs (Muslims) and Jews.

But this has to be left for other investigations.

Personally I would argue that these aspects of more distant centuries are not as relevant for the understanding of the Weimar - Buchenwald enigma today, even though historians can give some good reasons for such research. But the course of German history, as far as our topic is concerned, was not decided in the days of Martin Luther. Even until late in the 19th century, liberal - humanist and nationalist tendencies co-existed and it was not before the second half of this century when - in conjunction with imperialist policies elsewhere, an increasing number of Germans began to accept nationalism and anti-semitism as parts of their ideology. It was then when German culture, like many other nationalist varieties in Europe, more and more often became a feeding ground for chauvinist propaganda.

With these considerations kept in mind, we have to take a look back and consider the typical German structure of politics until the beginning of the 19th century.

There was a Kaiser in Vienna with little to decide in policies related to Germany, who reigned in a split, diverse and often regionalised Empire. The small centres of power and culture usually imitated absolutist French examples, including influences directly connected with the Enlightenment and classical European culture based on Greek and Roman antiquity, the Renaissance and Humanism. Despite all the wars being waged, there was an awareness of a lot of distinctly European features shared by people in Paris and St. Petersburg, London and Warsaw, Stockholm and Rome, at least for the educated classes and those who were permitted to travel.

And these traditions common in many European and German cultural centres have left their traces in Weimar.

In the 18th century, after a few regional divisions of the Thuringian land, Weimar became the official residence town of a territory barely larger than a modern administrative district. This was one of the what Churchill once sneeringly called the 'pumpnickel principalities' of Germany. From the point of view of world politics, such a minute state could be regarded as a morsel in a cake. For many Germans especially in the coming centuries, the divided and regionalised German Empire was something like a 'German curse' (Heinrich von Treitschke, the historian and preacher of German nationalism). But there is a lot to be said in favour of this state of affairs, which left enough room for specific cultural developments, especially when graciously patronised by a benevolent family of rulers.

Marital links between the rulers of German states accompanied political, cultural and other alliances, like the one between the Dukes of Saxony-Weimar and August in Wolfenbüttel, supporting the largest library in Europe at that time and giving employment for such important people like Leibniz

³ This is, as far as I can see, one of the most comprehensive and enlightening books about this issue and it deserves to be mentioned at the beginning: Peter Merseburger: 'Mythos Weimar - Zwischen Geist und Macht.' Stuttgart 1998

and Lessing. He was Anna Amalia's father in Braunschweig. After her wedding with the Herzog of Weimar, at first sight a cultural step down, she immediately became very active on the cultural scene there.

New buildings were erected, including palace and public buildings and burgher houses, gradually changing the rural character of Weimar into a more civic place.

There had been forebodings of such advancement even before: The famous artist Lucas Cranach left a few traces in Weimar (1552/53) and there were distinct signs of a cultural development. In 1613, the 'Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft', also called the Order of the Palm, was founded in the Palace, the first language society north of the Alps. The school system was improved with the help of new regulations. Printing works, art collections, a court orchestra, a court opera company - they all helped to acquire a certain name for baroque culture in the area. Johann Sebastian Bach was employed at the court as organist or Kapellmeister from 1708 to 1717.

This development was not a very steady one, however, quarrels, mismanagement and other courtly or town affairs played their part - and this controversial trend has continued unabated, many would say, until today.

Classicism and Romanticism:

The development of Weimar as a centre of classical culture

Even if people are unaware of the political (historical) complications, they will be able to identify Weimar as a centre of classical 'cultural' Germany. Most nations cherish their literary and cultural heritage and revere it to buttress their quest of identity - and Germany is no exception to this rule. Even the crudest of politicians and most brutal dictators either imagined themselves to be part of this tradition or at least tried to abuse it for the purposes of manipulation.

Why did Weimar, this town of minor importance, develop in this way?

Let us first look briefly at the political framework at the end of the 18th century again:

We pointed out that Weimar belonged to a typically small state, something defined in German history books as a 'Duodezfürstentum' (in English usually translated as 'duchy'). The town consisted of a few thousand citizens, but without anything like a self-confident bourgeoisie. This situation, as will perhaps be demonstrated in the course of this paper, proved to be a very favourable backdrop for development, but at a price.

Shortly before Goethe arrived in Weimar, most of the city had burnt down. The valuable library, however, was saved. When **Duchess Anna Amalia** (1739-1807), who reigned in the tradition of enlightened absolutism, became the regent in 1758, new plans were made and carried out, as mentioned above.

Within less than a hundred years, Weimar turned into a fertile ground for many scholars, artists and philosophers and acquired the name it has kept ever since.

The royal house of the politically insignificant Duchy of Saxony-Weimar, from 1815 on the Grand Duchy of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach, became the focal attraction for men of letters and scholars from all around Germany and Europe, something that the citizens of Weimar, less than 10000 in all, were probably unaware of. It may also be added that Weimar despite of its cultural fame, did not keep pace with the beginning industrial revolution, thus developing and ageing at the same time .

From time to time the history and treatment of the Jews have to be mentioned as well. During Anna Amalia's regency and under the influence of enlightened philosophies, a few Jewish families were allowed to settle in Weimar. It is remarkable, however, that until 1807, the Jews from other regions of Germany had to pay a special kind of 'Leibzoll' in Weimar, a toll which was similarly raised on cattle, for example.

Anna Amalia herself had engaged the then famous **Christoph Martin Wieland** (1733-1813) to educate her infant Karl August, especially in literature and philosophy. Wieland was a confessed adherent of the enlightenment and as such he was appointed by Anna Amalia.

He was the one **Johann Gottfried Herder** (1744-1803) met most often, publishing the widely read monthly magazine 'Der Teutsche Merkur' together with him, containing articles on famous Europeans like Savonarola, Reuchlin, Hutten and Kopernikus, for instance. This magazine helped to shape the literary and cultural tastes of this age in Germany but it clearly had a European if not universal outlook.

Wieland, in his turn, brought Knebel to the court of Weimar for the education of prince Constantin. Knebel, again, established the first contacts between Carl August and **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749-1832), who called in Herder and later received Schiller: this snowball - effect produced what was called the German classical era.

Anna Amalia's 'round tables' or 'salon talks' ('Tafelrunden') became the centres of literary and liberal conversation, just like their models, the French salons, like those around Mme Roland or Mme Goeffrin in this enlightened age, and they were held in the Wittumspalais from 1775 on. The free exchange of opinion was enjoyed by artists of various backgrounds and social standings, by both sexes and by adherents of conflicting beliefs. Without too much courtly etiquette, the participants were allowed to feel uninhibited by too much social constraint. After Anna Amalia's death in 1807, the 'tea parties' ('Teeabende') of Johanna Schopenhauer, for instance, continued this tradition.

All this developed into what the Germans called a 'Musenhof', a court for the muses or fine arts and refined entertainment. Music and dance were cherished just as literature, plays performed in gardens, garden architecture and paintings were favourite topics just like political issues..⁴ Often such meetings took place on the Ettersberg, just a few miles north of the town. The Park on the river Ilm was created as a landscaped garden, many baroque houses were built, in 1779 the Comedy Theatre was erected and a Free School of Drawing was opened in 1781: All these activities show how intensely the local rulers tried to give life to an extensive cultural life (cp. the comments on the castle Ettersberg below).

Considering the people and traditions mentioned, Buchenwald, the name that later almost became a synonym for Ettersberg, seems to be inconceivable at this point. But we should not forget the undercurrent of the Weimarian 'subculture', the tendency to obey rather than resist, the institution of 'Obrigkeit' as opposed to 'Untertanen' (subjects). The petty bourgeoisie of Weimar was probably unable to comprehend the nature of the culture celebrated within their city walls (or around Weimar). Their social and trade connections generally stretched to a few other cities in the area, but hardly farther than that. Thus Weimar and its citizens probably remained fairly provincial and in many ways conservative, whereas the 'cultural summit' continued to exist without much interference.

When Goethe accepted the call to come to Weimar, he was aware of leaving a city of considerable proportions (Frankfurt) and of moving to a provincial town. Weimar had nothing of the glamour of Dresden either. But neither was it ruled by a urban patrician nobility like Frankfurt, which Goethe also disdained.

After his arrival, Goethe almost instantly became a friend of **Count Carl August of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach** (1757-1827), spending many boisterous days riding through the country, revelling and shocking the people of Weimar with antics.

Such a connection was by no means an ordinary one, quite the contrary, the relationship between the nobility and the rising bourgeoisie had always been a strained and uncomfortable one in the 19th century, dominated by feelings of contempt and aspirations by the respective classes. The Prussian King Frederic II rejected Goethe's 'Goetz von Berlichingen' (perhaps even Goethe himself, in his later years, became more reserved about his early play). Goethe was one of the rare examples of someone from a less privileged social standing being promoted to the rank of a minister at a court like this. This typical alienation between the nobility and the (politically powerless) German bourgeoisie was the political backdrop of German idealism. And exactly this, in a kind of microcosm, occurred in Weimar. The universal outlook in philosophical literature on the one side juxtaposed by a backward-looking provincialism as regards society and politics: This was a breeding ground for middle class anxieties, prejudices and resentments.

As can be noticed in everyday life, the degree of such anxieties normally increases with the extent of subjection and control from above. Resentments against people who are considered inferior or different tend to grow under such circumstance. In every social system, we find other outlets for such tensions, too, ways of escape, opening avenues for personal relief and orientation. From this (limited) social perspective, philosophical and cultural activities can serve the purposes of relief and offer arguments of self-justification.

Arguably, the intricate interdependence of the spheres described is or was especially complicated in Germany, generating highly sophisticated philosophies and sciences and universally accepted pieces of literature and music on the one hand, and on the other despicable or at least very problematic forms of social and political submission. But it may be too early to speculate about this at this point.

Back to Goethe who respectfully served his 'Landesherr' (sovereign), the Count Karl August, helping to survey political suspects, signing decrees for public executions and without remorse sending unfortunate Germans of the lower orders as soldiers to America. And yet it would be

⁴ Gabriele Busch-Salmen, Walter Salmen, Christoph Michel: „Der Weimarer Musenhof“, Stuttgart 1998
Jochen Klauß: "Weimar - Stadt der Dichter, Denker und Mäzene", Düsseldorf/Zürich 1999

ridiculous to draw a direct line, say, from Goethe to 20th century militarism, as in fact some people have tried to do. Goethe even used his influence to bring about a high degree of disarmament in Weimar, reducing the military expenses to a minimum bringing the number of infantry soldiers down by half to only 523 men, thus saving valuable resources for purposes more worthwhile.

Many observers claim that Goethe's influence in politics was altogether marginal, just like the influence of his Count in German or European politics. At the same time Goethe, as an influential member of the Secret Council ('Geheimer Conseil') played a very ambiguous and by no means progressive role.⁵

When Schiller approached him in the early phase of their acquaintance, Goethe replied to his letter politely and at the same time he opened a political file for Schiller's observation. Goethe certainly used the liberties offered to him very sensibly, too. He studied humanity and nature in many different ways and thus became what was called a universal mind ('ein allseitig gebildeter Weltbürger').

Without denying Goethe's prime importance for German literature and culture, Daniel Wilson in his new book underlined Goethe's inclination to support the authoritarian state ('Obrigkeitsstaat') and his mistrust or even disdain of any movement organised by the common people. Nothing **by** the people: this message united Goethe (in this respect probably a representative of the German bourgeoisie in general) with all the repressive systems in Germany, even the GDR. It is not necessary to blame Goethe for later developments, which would sound ridiculous, but we may be permitted to dissect the distant connection recognisable, a development certainly not yet foreseeable during those classical or romantic years.

Goethe explicitly rejected the ideals of the French Revolution and partly admired Napoleon as a hero who subjugated this revolution (more about this later).

Concerning Goethe's cultural activities, it was especially Anna Amalia who protected Goethe in most aspects. With her help, he was able to double the number of books in her library, for instance.

The Ettersberg has to be mentioned in this context, a hill 12 km away from Weimar with an old castle, used as a summer residence for Countess Anna Amalia. In the late years of the 18th century, this was the site of classical performances in music, literature was read and discussed, philosophers and scientists met with courtiers and statesmen. This was the place where Goethe conducted philosophical conversations with his secretary Eckermann and composed his (in Germany) famous poem 'Wanderers Nachtlied'. Schiller finished his tragedy 'Maria Stuart' on this hill and until the 19th century, this castle remained a meeting place for the elite of the Weimar court and high society.

From 1776 until his death in 1832, Goethe certainly dominated not only the literary scene in Weimar and imposed a powerful influence on the literary landscape and drawing other energetic intellectuals into the area like a giant magnet, Herder and Schiller, among others, both very influential themselves for the development of German cultural identity.

As indicated in the paper on the German quest for identity, **Herder** was in many ways a literary pacemaker of German culture. His linguistic, literary and folkloristic studies have determined the way Germans have learned to view themselves. Actually Herder was the Superintendent General for the Lutheran church and educational system in Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach for 27 years while publishing his most famous works. As a collector of folk songs, historian and philosopher, a lover of music and art, he belonged to the classical 'species' of men with a truly universal outlook. Herder also promoted democratic ideas and human rights in a state governed by a monarch. He criticised abuse of Christian rules and values and, in addition to all this, he was a well-reputed pedagogue. As a genuine classic in the best sense of the word, he tried to educate the young in a broad and practical sense, avoiding the pitfalls of 'quantitative' learning for the sake of knowledge. Man, as Herder saw it, should overcome brutality and beastliness, so that he would be able to become a master of his history as a son of God.

The bells of the Stadtkirche in Weimar have borne the names of 'Luther - Bach - Herder' since 1922, representing a harmony of Christianity, music and culture in general, which is fairly typical for the classical ideal that Weimar stands for.

Many uniquely European issues played an important role in the salons and meetings around Weimar. This can be demonstrated by the disputes around the events in France after 1789. There can be no doubt at all that especially Goethe always maintained a conservative attitude towards social and political changes, perhaps in some ways like Edmund Burke, even though both were engaged in completely different contexts. Goethe hoped that the old order of things could be preserved, at least in Germany. In this respect he stood in opposition with many intellectuals of his age, Georg Forster, for instance, the famous German republican. Both looked at each other in

⁵ W. Daniel Wilson: "Das Goethe-Tabu", Protest und Menschenrechte im klassischen Weimar, München 1999

admiration as far as their scientific and artistic achievements were concerned. But Goethe expressed his alienation quite often, when Forster turned out to be an active supporter of revolutionary campaigns in Mainz. Typically, reform movements and revolutionary changes originated more in the South - Western corner of Germany than in the conservative East.

Goethe's attempts to cope with the French Revolution in literature (for further comments see below) are not regarded as outstanding, perhaps he was unable to come to terms with the many faceted spectrum of challenging events and theories. The rise of a mass society - this is what disconcerted Goethe, just like Burke.⁶

'Hermann und Dorothea' (1797), a much revered epic classical drama by Goethe, may be a case in point and an answer to a new age threatening Goethe's universe: In 2000 pentametre blank verse lines Goethe tells the story of a petty bourgeois engagement between the young lady, Dorothea, who tries to escape in a trek of refugees from the revolution, and, arriving in a little German town, falls in love with Hermann, the son of a domineering landlord of a pub. Goethe himself admitted to have constructed a bourgeois idyll, singing the praise of middle class virtues in an age of turmoil. The blank verse, shaped according to a classical ideal, helped to create the impression of soothing harmony. Imitating models from antiquity, Goethe created middle class character 'types' assuming heroic qualities cherished by the 19th century bourgeoisie in Germany. Because of its warm-hearted humanity and the promises of classical elation, 'Herrman and Dorothea' became part and parcel of the bourgeois cultural heritage like Schiller's 'Die Glocke' which has been learnt by heart by probably millions of school children.

Plays like 'Herrman and Dorothea' or 'Iphigenie auf Tauris' became just as popular in the 19th century as the novel 'Werther', which once had won public acclaim for the younger Goethe and were associated in Germany with Weimar and the Ettersberg, establishing a curious and perturbing link to the Buchenwald concentration camp later built on the Ettersberg (cp. below).

To illustrate this connection, many scholars have also analysed Goethe's most famous work, 'Faust'. Thousands of comments, theatre and film productions and interpretations warrant the importance of this drama not only for the Germans. 'Faust', like many other magnificent masterpieces, is incredibly rich with philosophical and practical allusions but, unavoidably, it also served as a quarry for citations in many contradictory directions. But as far as I can see there is no convincing evidence for anything 'national', 'racist', not even for the justification of dictatorial power politics. The hero Faust is not redeemed **because of** his partially gruesome quest for enrichment and knowledge but **despite** of it.⁷ The question is not what Goethe intended to say but what the reception in the second half of the 19th century interpreted into it. And here, indeed, we have some striking comments to make. The following quotation may be self evident:

'Die bange Frage, ob es denn wirklich aus sei mit dem alten Deutschland, lag auf Aller Lippen; und nun, mitten im Niedergange der Nation, plötzlich dies Werk - ohne jeden Vergleich die Krone der gesammten modernen Dichtung Europas - und die beglückende Gewissheit, dass nur ein Deutscher so schreiben konnte, dass dieser Dichter unser war und seine Gestalten von unserem Fleisch und Blut! Es war wie ein Wink des Schicksals, dass die Gesittung der Welt unser doch nicht entbehren könne, und Gott noch Großes vorhabe mit diesem Volke.'⁸

Besides, the same happened to Shakespeare's 'HAMLET' which was claimed by German literary nationalists as a peculiarly 'Germanic' play. It is no surprise at all that a statue of Shakespeare was erected in Weimar. Both writers were seen as expressions of a Germanic 'Volksgeist' (spirit of the people), like the misinterpreted Siegfried in the German epic 'Nibelungenlied'. At the root of such 'Germanness' many detected the readiness to pursue an unending struggle against incredible odds, the willingness to 'try the last', even death, and in defiance of destiny. It also reflected the struggle within one's soul, a deep look into the innermost recesses of the human mind.⁹

⁶ Peter Merseburger: "Mythos Weimar", 101 ff.

⁷ Mephistopheles: "Doch werden sich Poeten finden,
Der Nachwelt deinen Glanz zu künden,
Durch Torheit Torheit zu entzünden." (10190)

Faust's quest is defined here as 'Torheit', a kind of folly or foolishness.

⁸ Quoted from Hans Schenk: 'Faust und das Faustische. Ein Kapitel deutscher Ideologie', Stuttgart 1962, p. 158 ff.

The quotation celebrates the appearance of 'FAUST' as a genuinely German tragedy at an age of national decline, promising that God intended the Germans to play a decisive role. 'Only a German could write like this', the writer suggested.

⁹ The following books were named to me for further analysis of this aspect:

At first sight this is certainly puzzling: Goethe's literary explorations of human predicaments and the possibilities of human commitments in an existentially challenging world being incorporated and falsified by nationalists in their attempts to justify their superior qualifications even in a racist sense. What this reveals, it seems, is not Goethe's clandestine nationalist afflictions, but

- a) the powerful and manipulating influence of a nationalist spirit in demand of cultural justification,
- b) the dangerous features of a bourgeois idyll if coupled with a non-committal attitude in politics, the glorification of conservative beliefs and a desire for individual and collective elevation and
- c) the lesson that in history some strands of apparently minor importance can be turned and twisted into a tragic rope binding a whole nation or, metaphorically, becoming a hangman's tool.

These may be some preliminary conclusions, but further investigations are necessary. Let us consider another intriguing aspect: the influence of the French Revolution in Weimar and Germany.

Most of the other German philosophers and writers not only in Weimar responded to the French Revolution with keen interest and wonder, nobody could be left untouched by this epoch-making experience. Herder, Wieland and for some time **Friedrich Schiller** (1759-1805) seem to have acclaimed the revolutionary changes, at least until the so-called 'September Massacres' in 1792. 'La Terreur', then, marked the turned point in German public opinion - like in most parts of Europe. Schiller was honoured with the French citizenship, arranged by Danton and his followers, especially for his play 'Die Räuber'. Later, Schiller's attitude was ambiguous: whereas he expressed his horror of the terror in France, he also never gave back his French citizenship diploma¹⁰ although he criticised the means used by the revolutionaries and he described this as a return to barbarism. This, Schiller imagined, was the hour of the Germans, since the French had given up their dominant place in the cultural development of Europe.

These are just side remarks alluding briefly at the various responses across Europe and in the Weimar area. I would underscore, however, that these responses contained the seeds for future debates in many different directions, progressive and conservative. This may hold true for most European nations, was it also true for Weimar as an example for larger Germany?

Nobody can be absolutely certain about this, but to all appearances Goethe, Schiller, Herder, Wieland and all the other Weimar classical scholars should be praised for their universal and European outlook, there is nothing decidedly nationalistic about them, despite their occasionally conservative outlooks. Schiller considered it as small-minded to write just for one nation alone.

If we want to comprehend the fateful combination Weimar - Buchenwald, we will have to look at other sources. Certainly the so-called German classics have been utilised in the following centuries for purposes they would have regarded as totally alien to them.

'Klassiker in finsternen Zeiten, 1933 - 1945', eine Ausstellung des deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schillernationalmuseum Marbach am Neckar, Hg. v. Bernhard Zeller, Stuttgart 1983.

Wolfgang Leppmann: 'Goethe und die Deutschen'. Der Nachruhm eines Dichters im Wandel der Zeit und der Weltanschauungen. München 1982

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¹⁰ P. Merseburger, *ibid.* p. 103 ff.

The 19th century until the Weimar Republic

Already before the French Revolution, a watershed for the whole of Europe, cultural ties between Weimar and other European centres were very close. Napoleon went out of his way to come to Weimar, meet people like Wieland, convince **Count Ernst August** of the necessity to join his alliance (which was not very difficult, considering his powerlessness) and use the image of Weimar to his advantage.

Interestingly, the cultural exchange with France was especially underscored by a famous French woman, who helped to proliferate the reputation of Weimar: **Madame de Stael**. She tried to utilise Goethe's fame against Napoleon in France, which is another case in point how images of Weimar were launched in the European cultural arena. Madame de Stael praised Germany as a fatherland of thinking, but she had already detected one worrying factor: The desire for freedom, she said, was not developed among the Germans.¹¹

After Napoleon's defeat had become obvious even to the cautiously unsuspecting, many German rulers joined the new political trends: the powers of the future were Great Britain on the seven seas (the policies of splendid isolation keeping her aloof to some degree) and Prussia, the power that later was to unite Germany. The empires of Russia and Austria - Hungary were less close to the dukedom of Weimar, even though Metternich imposed his compelling influence on the whole of Germany for quite some decades.

Ernst August pursued his (undefinable) political course flexibly, offering Weimar as a military headquarter for the monarchs of Prussia, Russia and Austria, before they moved on to Frankfurt. The winning partner graciously acknowledged the difficulties Weimar was in under Napoleon and perhaps also the fact that Weimar was such an important name culturally. During and after the Napoleonic wars, the first clear signs of national outlooks entered the scene of Weimar. The term 'deutsches Vaterland' was used for the first time by the regent in a public decree. In many ways French hegemony and oppression had helped to forge nationalist attitudes in Germany (cp. the paper on 'The German Quest of Identity'). Patriotic spirits had to be demonstrated ('vaterländische Gesinnung') and this imposed a reactionary grip even on the arts and literature - until 1945. To help the Fatherland for many people also meant to favour 'Teutsche Art und Kunst' (German manners and way of life and German art). Every year on October 18th, the 'Falkenorden' (Order of the Falcon) celebrated a 'Nationalfest' in memory of Germany's liberation. Goethe, as a critical observer, distrusted and even disdained the wave of 'Soldatentollheit' (literally 'soldier - folly') and ridiculed the patriotic gentlemen around him. The manifestation of a new nationalist age were, for most of this century, strongly supportive of the regents in Weimar. Ernst August jumped on the bandwagon, so to speak, and even arranged the award of the 'Falkenorden' to Goethe, who had little claim for such a nationalist honour.

In this context we may remind ourselves, that Goethe had presented the state and the emperor in a very rude and satirical way, being bankrupt, wasteful and unreliable, in FAUST II, ostracising the fashion of titles and honours in the society of his age.

Karl August was one of the first regents in Germany to offer a (very conservative) constitution to his people (in 1816). It is not irrelevant to mention that the Jews were refused full citizenship, and the 'Oppositionsblatt', a local opposition newspaper, recognised this as lawful and correct. In 1823, a new 'Judenordnung' was announced, significantly less progressive than a similar one in Prussia. This new decree permitted Jews to marry Christians - and Goethe rejected this measure. Goethe had never been anti-semitic in this sense, but this rejection was later used by the Bayreuth - Wahnfried circle and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the prominent racist, in their claim for Goethe as a national hero. But Goethe, not a democrat himself, did not think highly of the struggle for German unity and national pride, he preferred the principles of the Holy Alliance:

'Zur Nation euch zu bilden, ihr hofft es, Deutsche, vergebens;
Bildet, ihr könnt es, dafür freier zu Menschen euch aus.'

(In vain you Germans hope to form a nation; you should rather develop into freer human beings instead, and you can do it...)¹²

While more and more Germans dreamt of a unified nation, often as a constitutional, sometimes republican state, our classics remained detached. They also mistrusted the look back to medieval myths as a forging element for national identity. The Wartburg, for instance, was restored and redecorated in this fashion (under Carl Alexander's reign after 1853) and continued to serve as a national lieu de memoire. Neither Goethe nor Schiller have ever written a so-called national epic or

¹¹ Merseburger, *ibid.* p. 356

¹² Quoted from the 'Xenien' in Merseburger, *ibid.* p. 153

contributed to anything like national heroism. Only through far-fetched re-interpretation of certain passages out of context could the German nationalists hope to claim both for their cause.

After Goethe's and Schiller's departure, observers witnessed a gigantic cultural interment of cosmopolitan attitudes, with Weimar thriving peacefully on national reminiscences, memorials and pilgrimages. The town people seem to be content with their rulers, they even defended them during the 1930 and 1948 revolutions against republican fervour. The successor of Karl August, **Carl Friedrich**, personally a conservative in politics, still allowed his wife to pursue her own cultural ambitions. It was **Maria Paulowna**, daughter of the Tsar, married to Carl Friedrich in 1804, who did anything in her power to revive the cultural life in Weimar. Under her wings a new 'silver age' of Weimar, as Merseburger calls it, developed, this time highlighted by **Franz Liszt** (1811-1886), the famous composer and conductor. He managed to bring back the charm of cultural refinement and a warm breeze of a more cosmopolitan Romanticism. Helping **Richard Wagner** in his escape from Dresden, he almost managed Weimar to become the musical capital of Germany. Had the new Festspielhaus been built as a special stage opera for him, Wagner might have stayed there. Liszt understood the national idea in a far more liberal and democratic way, and this is what the town people around him would not agree with. Moreover, his 'scandalous' relationship with Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein made the common people very suspicious.¹³ As a result of this, the Weimarer Altenburg became the centre of musical Europe, but remained an island amidst a sea of mistrust. Like Goethe before him, Liszt entertained his own court, one might say, priding himself with guests like Hector Berlioz, Smetana, Franz Grillparzer, Bettina von Arnim, Alexander von Humboldt, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Clara Schumann, Moritz von Schwind and many other. But when Liszt left Weimar in 1861, after continuous trouble, this elitist group disintegrated and Weimar was left to its own people.

Goethe, Schiller and the others were now incorporated into the culture as the people imagined. They were national commodities with Weimar as a central market place.

Since 1853, **Carl Alexander** (1818-1901) was the Grand Count ('Großherzog') in Weimar, and even though he again reigned in a conservative manner, appreciated by most of his subjects, he still had connections to St. Petersburg and spoke fluent French according to the traditions of European aristocracy. But slowly but surely this background merged with the nationalism of his age. Prominent local groups sprung up in support of colonial and imperialist politics, taking part in the armament craze and acclaiming the building of a strong German fleet, in defiance of Britain.

This was the spirit of the age, the classics were 'Germanised', like 'Hamlet', as we said, whom many writers claimed as a 'truly German character' like Faust. Such were the characteristics meant to give courage to the average German, bolster up his national feelings and preparing him for sacrifice:

'Von Schiller geblüht,
Von Goethe geklärt,
Hast du, deutsches Stahlherz,
In Not dich bewährt.'
(Forged by Schiller, purified by Goethe, you, German steel-heart,
have proved yourself in times of need...)¹⁴

Let us interrupt the almost chronological description of the history of Weimar with a few economical and sociological background observations.

Towards the end of the 19th century many new housing estates were built on the outskirts of town. Some industrial firms were established in the north, a factory for railway equipment, for instance (1898), and steam tile-making works. The number of employees in industry-related businesses was around 3000, still a low proportion of the town populace. The majority still belonged to the middle classes. Perhaps it is safe to say that industrialisation in a proper sense passed by, leaving only a minority of working class people in the area.

The attempts of the German middle classes to actively influence the political developments in the 19th century were more or less doomed to failure (as exemplified by the 1848 / 49 revolution). The unification of Germany was enforced by Bismarck and the Prussian military, not by any liberal bourgeoisie. As a result of this, the dependence of the middle classes, including the rich entrepreneurs of that age, on the traditional ruling class persisted far into the 20th century, perhaps until the 'brown revolution' of the Nazis.

¹³ As a brief reference, one might mention that a similar 'scandal' had happened some time before that, when Goethe even dared to marry Christiane Vulpius.

¹⁴ Quoted from a poem by Rosegger, in Merseburger, *ibid.* p. 239, free translation by R.K.

When comparing the German bourgeoisie of the late 18th with the last decades of the 19th century, one may, as Norbert Elias points out, recognise a considerable difference: Cultural values and achievements, like in the fields of literature, philosophy or in the sciences, were high up on the scale of value systems, serving as an indication of their relevance and identity. This was the time when questions of morality and universal humanitarianism were debated and posed in contrast to the traditional ways of life of the aristocracy. During the following century, the middle classes had taken in the values of the ruling classes more and more, incorporating or imitating courtly behaviour. Humanity, morals and cultural achievements, something that Prussian officers had little regard for, declined on the scale of values.¹⁵

There is no denying that even more harmful but nonetheless very prominent theories, attitudes and public clichés played important roles in the shaping of a racist background: the curious mixture of Darwinism, new developments in medical sciences and 'racial sciences', for instance. As Justus H. Ulbricht illustrated in his paper on "Französische Krankheit" oder: Politische Gefahren am "Deutschen Volkskörper", medical-biological vocabulary encroached the language of pseudo-academic talk and influenced popular assumptions, linking ideas of health and hygiene with human 'races' and characteristics.¹⁶ Such influences are hard to grasp but it may be permissible to presuppose a feeling of superiority (attached to cleanliness and health) among many Germans. In a fateful and clandestine way such feelings were probably (subconsciously) related to assumptions of cultural superiority. Many simple-minded Germans were led to the conclusion that their cultural-racial relatedness to geniuses like Goethe and Schiller may be proof for their own distinction. Weimar, as a focal point of German cultural consciousness, thus may have served the evil purpose of demonstrating such superiority and 'healthy attitudes' in the minds of those who least deserved it. The Nazis deliberately played on this tune, viciously attacking political opponents, Jews, minorities etc. as 'unhealthy elements' that should be eliminated. This must then have appeared to be enough legitimisation for the establishment of 'cleansing institutions' like the concentration camp Buchenwald.

Admittedly, the application of Darwinist theories for racist ideologies was not something uniquely German, quite the contrary, perhaps after the comments above, it becomes more evident that the peculiar Weimar-Buchenwald history can really be seen as a kind of extreme focus for something that could have happened elsewhere in Europe. Prejudices and hatred under a magnifying glass? This is more a question to be discussed than a statement, obviously the particular 'German' historical characteristics have made the extreme development possible.

Perhaps it is time now to dedicate some part of this essay to another controversial figure connected with Weimar: **Friedrich Nietzsche**. Undoubtedly Nietzsche, as all complicated characters, has often been misjudged or misrepresented, especially by the deliberate manipulations of his sister and later by many nationalists. Yet it is true that he expressed many of the bourgeois predicaments in Germany in clear and powerful words: 'What is good? - Everything increasing the feeling of power, the will to obtain power, power itself in human being. What is bad? - Everything resulting out of weakness... the weak and the 'misdeveloped' should perish; first sentence of our humanity...' ¹⁷

It is true that Nietzsche often expressed his disgust of nationalist fervour, even disdain against the Germans in general (many would say as an illustration of his hatred against himself).

In essence, then, Nietzsche has to be acknowledged as a European, especially in his admiration of the Renaissance. One time he admitted that he preferred to be a Pole rather than a German and he resisted attempts to bring him into line with the official ideology of the Bismarck-regime. In many of his works, Nietzsche tried to make people aware of the 'blind spot Europe' that had to be made

¹⁵ Norbert Elias, Studien über die Deutschen, p.151 ff.

¹⁶ Justus H. Ulbricht: „Französische Krankheit“ oder: Politische Gefahren am „deutschen Volkskörper“, Diskurse über die Krankheit der Epoche im weltanschaulichen Schrifttum des Wilhelminismus. In Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Technischen Universität Dresden, 47 (1998), Heft 3

¹⁷ Translated in parts and quoted from N. Elias, Studien über die Deutschen, p. 154:

„Was ist gut? - Alles, was das Gefühl der Macht, den Willen zur Macht, die Macht selbst im Menschen erhöht. Was ist schlecht? - Alles, was aus der Schwäche stammt. Was ist Glück? - Das Gefühl davon, dass die Macht wächst - dass ein Widerstand überwunden wird. Nicht Zufriedenheit, sondern Macht, nicht Friede überhaupt, sondern Krieg; nicht Tugend, sondern Tüchtigkeit... Die Schwachen und Misstratenen sollen zugrunde gehn; erster Satz unsrer Menschenliebe. Und man soll ihnen noch dazu helfen. Was ist schädlicher als irgendein Laster? - Das Mitleiden der Tat mit allen Mißrathen und Schwachen - das Christentum..."

prominent. He had no doubts that European culture was something uniting all Europeans. In this sense he can be considered a European philosopher and a philosopher of Europe.

But in many ways he put into words typically bourgeois sentiments of his age, ready to be exploited by interested circles. His sister had practically put him on display in this petty bourgeois town of Weimar for people ready to adore a 'German genius', and ever so many intellectuals flocked to this place in order to be taken in by the ceremonious presentation of an impressive elderly man in a Roman toga, with a heavy moustache, sitting in an armchair behind a curtain until his sister decided to withdraw it so that the object of their awe could be seen in person. Perhaps there is something frustratingly 'German' in this, the cult of this country as a 'land of poets and thinkers', the worship of geniuses - a heritage of German Romanticism in particular. The German bourgeoisie, in their quest for something eternal, in their avoidance of really pressing political issues, developed this peculiar mixture of a nationalism, Romanticism, imitation of the nobility and escape from an industrial world. The rosy glasses of such cultural visions made the world look more agreeable and they gave the members of these classes the assurance of their superiority - and this is how they interpreted Nietzsche, too.

Of course, Nietzsche cannot really be held responsible for Mussolini¹⁸ and Hitler, who adored the philosopher in their own narrow-minded way. Nevertheless, the suggested combination of Nietzsche, Wagner and Goebbels has proved to be a most worrying one among the German public. In many ways this was the result of a propaganda victory of the Nazis, who, with the help of Nietzsche's sister providing the required material, were able to make most Germans see this philosopher as a national icon. Still today, it may be assumed that many young and old right wing pseudo-intellectuals would eagerly read Nietzsche as their first and sometimes only philosophical reference for their ideology.

All in all, this is another case study proving how the writings and teachings of famous people can be misread, manipulated and abused once principles of objectivity, fairness and logic are disregarded. It permanently raises the question how this can be avoided - a key question also for European studies. European traditions of research alone do not seem to be enough safeguard, but they certainly are a great asset, perhaps one of the most important gifts for the future of mankind. But they have to be protected against many social, political and cultural forces and they require constant sharpening of scientific tools, creating the necessary awareness of methodological and practical complications. But there may be time to discuss this somewhere else. Weimar and Buchenwald, however, demonstrate the urgent need to consider all this. In connection with this, it may be of interest to discuss how the ideals and conceptions of 'genius' and 'Gemüt' (mind, nature, disposition) etc. could be compared with similar notions of other European nations, the Anglo-Saxon idea of art as something more practical, something that can be taught, for instance, or the connotations around the French 'raison'.

How did this little bourgeois town called Weimar continue to develop? Weimar remained a conservative town, people setting new trends were hardly encouraged. Election results prove the tendency towards the right and concurrently artistic taste tended to be 'traditional', based on those mediaval myths (much liked by the Kaiser) and pseudo-classical values depicted above.

Into this well-ordered little oasis of 'things-as-they-should-be' was transferred the well-known Belgian architect **Henry van de Velde**, who became the director of the Kunstgewerbeschule since 1902, much against the will of many people in Weimar. The functional simplicity of the Bauhaus school did not appeal to the people of this region. The typical flat roof was even considered „un-German“, mistrusted like Bolchewism. Like the Altenburg during the era of Liszt, the Bauhaus was regarded as a painful piece of dirt in a precious oyster and they hardly recognised the potential pearl. This almost sensational new spirit of experimentation, the exhibitions and lectures, the revolutionary structure of this architectural wonder - how could the people in this province appreciate all this? The diplomat and writer **Harry Graf Kessler** (1868 - 1937) was called to supervise the Weimar museum and he was probably the most influential modernist within the Bauhaus tradition. His opposition to the Wilhelmian artistic tastes, however, ran counter to public expectations and many opponents made life very difficult.

Weimar during Republican Years and the transition to the NS-Regime

Weimar after the First World War, chosen as the symbol of a new democracy and humanitarian ideals, away from the hurlyburly of revolutionary Berlin, began under a stage of siege. Several thousands of soldiers faithful to the Republic had to protect the parliamentarians - not a promising sign. Harry Graf Kessler himself ridiculed the pompous atmosphere and highbrow speeches during the inauguration

¹⁸ Elisabeth Förster in her attempt to interpret her brother's (Nietzsche's) Zarathustra as a prophet of Mussolini and the Third Reich.

ceremonies on August 21st, 1919 in the Weimar Hoftheater, where the German National Assembly convened first (later in the German National Theatre). And the people in town certainly did not welcome the politicians at all, quite unlike the welcome of the National Socialists a few years later. Weimar, after the revolution in 1918/19 was a bourgeois island in the red socialist sea of Thuringia at that time. Only during the revolutionary November days of 1918 did the working people with socialist affiliations join together in workers' and soldiers' councils, demanding the abdication of the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach. But socialist influences did not last.

In 1920, Weimar became the capital of the newly formed state of Thuringia, acquiring the character of an administrative town, strengthening the (upper) middle class proportion of the population.

During this period, many serious and laudable attempts were made to turn away from the nationalism and imperialism of previous regimes. **Friedrich Ebert and Stresemann** represented this new Germany, welding a new public image of Weimar. Ebert evoked the 'spirit of Weimar' in his speeches before the national assembly in 1919, the spirit of philosophers and poets which should fill the minds of Germans again. But the choice of Weimar as a host city for the newly elected parliament was only an escapist one... not in harmony with what the people there really desired.

It has been argued that this evasion of Berlin may have been a political blunder, since democracy had no roots in this part of Germany. A republic without republicans - this standard phrase is certainly true for the city hosting its parliament: Weimar. The name Weimar became synonymous to gerrymandering, party bickering and the inability to reach sensible conclusions.

Most Germans still desired to have some form of authoritarian rule, perhaps someone like the old Kaiser. The spirit of Potsdam, the ancient Prussian symbol of greatness, superseded what the democrats expected of Weimar as a place of cultural brilliance.

In April 1919, under new governmental guidelines, **Walter Gropius** (1883-1969) was appointed director of the 'Staatliche Kunsthochschule' and immediately the bourgeois opposition mobilised their troops against him. He was slandered as a promoter of communist beliefs and 'alien art' ('fremdstämmige Elemente') and until the end of his stay in Weimar he had to fight rearguard battles against nationalist and conservative blackmail. Later Gropius talked of Weimar as a 'rückständiges Bierdorf' (backward beer-village), and many even say that this is still true today. The Bauhaus dreams of turning Weimar into a European centre of modern art, architecture and literature was bound to fail.¹⁹

In this province, more than in any other, the conservative - fascist alliance was forged in the early Twenties which later achieved domination in the later years of the Republic. Disturbingly open anti-semitism and reactionary politics probably contributed more towards Hitler's successes than mass unemployment and the marching columns of the SA. This is a theory that needs investigating and if it proves true then we have dug at another root of popular misconceptions about this period. This is what most Germans in the past and today have failed to understand.

It should not surprise us after what was said that Weimar acquired the dubious fame of hosting the first National Socialist minister: **Wilhelm Frick**, minister of the interior and education ('Innen- und Volksbildungsminister'). Weimar changed into a parade arena for the new forces in Germany, with the Nazis sneaking into power.

1924 seems to be a turning point in the history of Weimar: the Bauhaus was expelled (moving to Dessau), nationalist delegates moved into Parliament and on January 18th, the people were able to witness a martial parade on their market place, in favour of 'law and order'. By now the nationalist parties won comparatively more votes in Thuringia than in other regions of Germany, and in Weimar voters were even more supportive of the political right.

The nationalists had no problem of pumping up support, for their politics and their interpretation of classical culture. The town of Goethe and Schiller as a feeding ground for their ideology. The World War general **Erich Ludendorff and Gregor Strasser**, both Nazis, marched through the streets of Weimar in 1924 and Hitler called in the first 'Reichsparteitag' (party rally) of the NSDAP. The Nietzsche - archive opened their gates for them, too, twisting the philosopher's ideas into a patriotic - heroic assumptions with his sister, **Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche**, as a high priest of a chauvinist Zarathustra.

In Weimar, Frick began his campaign for 'purified art' and against the freedom of cultural expression. In the conquest of the national soul, Weimar was used as a strategic turnstile. A few voices, like those of **Thomas Mann and Hermann Brill**, remained isolated callers in the desert, one might say, while Goethe was lionised as the most German of all Germans. Classical Weimar - a perfect national shrine to gloss over the brutality of the new leaders and the emptiness of their ideology.

¹⁹ Cp. Merseburger, *ibid.* p. 295 f.

Adolf Hitler, according to his own comments, loved Weimar, and this city of the muses was readily thankful. 1924 Weimar opened its gates, while Hitler was still imprisoned after the 1923 putsch, for a military display of national-socialist power among adherents and henchmen, led by the infamous general Erich Ludendorff, who was announced by the local press as 'Feldherr der Weltkriege' ('military leader of the world wars'). Many notables of Weimar helped the NSDAP to win seats and influence in the city council, which in turn made an impact in Thuringian regional politics. Two years later, in July 1926, these groups in Weimar opened the holy of holies, the Nationaltheater, for the first official party rally ('Reichsparteitag') of the NSDAP. This was, many have claimed, the beginning of the climb to power after the setback in 1923.²⁰

In these lights, Weimar offered something like a trial run, the stage for preparatory attacks on the Republic that bore her name. The Nazis were easily persuaded to tolerate the right wing government of the Thuringian 'Ordnungsbund', inaugurating a kind of trial run of all parties in opposition to the official democratic Weimar government. Thus besides Bayreuth, Coburg, Munich and Nürnberg, Weimar became a centre of the Nazi movement.

This, as Volker Mauersberger points out, can easily be illustrated by the general interplay between national- socialist and conservative Weimar elites.

A brief look at the Bauhaus traditions may prove this point:

Under **Walter Gropius**, the Bauhaus embarked on a revolutionary journey into a new artistic land. New forms of art and active participation of the members of the Bauhaus - such a mixture was alien to the people of Weimar and thus the Bauhaus was almost an extra-territorial sphere within the city boundaries. No wonder Gropius was ousted in the mid - Twenties already, when the Bauhaus had to move to Dessau. Henry van de Velde and Harry Graf Kessler were substituted by brownish conservatives and provincial despots like Fritz Sauckel, Baldur von Schirach and Wilhelm Frick.

Weimar and Thuringia turned right wing or Nazi very steadily, swastikas were displayed sooner than elsewhere and in Weimar the 'Hitlerjugend' was founded. In the 1929 national elections, the NSDAP votes leaped to 11.3 per cent and the Thuringian Nazis suddenly enjoyed their position as the decisive party in this state, since the traditional bourgeois parties had lost their former majority. There are depressing parallels to similar situations on a national scale in 1933 or in Thuringia in 1924 when such a political alliance, depending on the Nazis, took shape. This is, at first sight, surprising, because the Nazis had openly declared their animosity to any parliamentary system and their determination to ban any other political party once in power. Being aware of such a threat, most of the parties in the centre and to the right paved the way for the Nazis, mainly owing to their conservative mistrust of social democrats.

Hitler, residing in the famous hotel 'Elephant' in Weimar, immediately requested two of the most influential ministries in Thuringia, the home ministry and the ministry of culture and education ('Innen- und Volksbildungsministerium'), and he got them. Since then, an open enemy of the constitution had become a super-minister, and within his 14 months' term in office, Wilhelm Frick, loyal vassal of Hitler, put into practice his plans for a dictatorial rule: the civil service was gradually 'cleansed' of 'democratic elements', important posts were occupied by Nazis, Erich Maria Remarque's novel 'Nothing New on the Western Front' ('Im Westen nichts Neues') was forbidden in schools and libraries, a new decree against 'dangerous, alien forces hostile to the people' ('gefährliche Einflüsse art- und volksfremder Kräfte') was passed. A new prayer was introduced in schools including remarks against contamination of the Germans by alien, uncultured races ('Verseuchung deutschen Volkstums durch fremdrassige Unkultur'). Frick organised what was called a 'Bildersturm' in the Weimarer Schlossmuseum, preventing the exhibition of works by artists like Otto Dix, Lyonel Feininger, Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee. All this occurred already in 1930, clear warning signals for what was to come.

There was hardly any resistance from the conservatives, even though the coalition burst due to an emotional outburst of Fritz Sauckel against members of the coalition. But in 1932, the elections turned out as a triumph for the NSDAP: They received 42 per cent.

Forgotten was the humanism of the classical age which Weimar was formerly famous for. In 1932 the last 'free' Goethe commemorative week was held with international participation, marking the 100th anniversary of the writer's death.

²⁰ Cp. Volker Mauersberger: 'Hitler in Weimar', Der Fall einer deutschen Kulturstadt, Rowohlt Berlin Verlag, Berlin 1999.

Interestingly, Mauersberger himself is the son of a SS - Scharführer, who had controlled the marching groups of inmates at Buchenwald to their compulsory working sites until 1941. His father had always refused to talk about this. Since it was impossible for the parent generation to critically understand their own past, the next generation had to do the urgent work of acknowledgement.

The NS - Regime

Literature and art soon were weapons in the propaganda war against every opposition after the Nazis slipped into power. 'Das Buch - ein Schwert des Geistes' was printed on a poster for the 'book week' in 1935. Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda, moved the annual book fair to Weimar to utilise the myth behind this city. Goebbels invited pliant artists to Weimar for poetry gatherings of a curious kind. The classical tradition was shamelessly exploited for Nazi propaganda. A book in one hand, Goebbels proclaimed, the sword in the other, these were the symbols of his age.

In a speech on June 13th in 1937 at the opening ceremony of the Weimar-Festspiele (cultural festivities) of the German youth, Baldur von Schirach ('Jugendführer des Deutschen Reiches') called Goethe's 'Faust' "**the** German book as such" and Goethe "**the** German poet". The German soul, he proclaimed, could not be separated from Goethe, appealing to the German youth to be prepared for sacrifice for the fatherland and Adolf Hitler, who personified the good spirit of the nation. The German youth was called upon to incorporate the content of 'Weimar and Goethe', so that everyone knew what fighting for Germany was all about.²¹ It is still, from our point of view today, phenomenal and unbelievable how such propaganda worked, how indeed it helped to instil a spirit of superiority or faith in something like 'cultural identity', even in those who had nothing in common with Goethe. And finally this belief was mobilised to sacrifice everything for a relentless tyrant, Adolf Hitler.

The Gauleiter Sauckel was on the forefront of a prosecution of what they called 'entartete Kunst' (mutilated / unnatural / non - Aryan...) and modern Jazz had long been prohibited.

In hardly any other German city, Hitler claimed he felt as 'at home' as in Weimar. All this reveals the double identity of Weimar and German 'society' at that time. While making use of the reputation of 'Dichter und Denker' ('the land of poets and thinkers'), the true spirit of Goethe's humanism and Schiller's idealism were bluntly betrayed. The much quoted spirit of Weimar did not offer any resistance to the Nazis, chauvinism and xenophobia. It was misused as an aggressive fighting term against so-called Western decadence, instrumentalised by reactionaries and a justification of existing power structures.

In 1938 the SA and SS stormtroopers demolished the last non - Aryan shop in Weimar, which was selling toys and dolls and the well-known 'Puppenfrau', Hedwig Hetemann, disappeared to Theresienstadt in September 1942. There was no protest, as far as I know.

The citizens of Weimar were not even alarmed when in 1937 the concentration camp on the near by Ettersberg was built. Originally, the name 'Konzentrationslager Ettersberg' was planned for this terrible institution. The NS-Kulturgemeinde Weimar refused to accept this name, since 'Ettersberg' was connected with Goethe and the esoterical 'Iphigenie', especially. On 28, June, 1937, the dignitaries gave in and re-named the concentration camp 'Buchenwald', not without purpose, since the immediate vicinity to the classical traditions the Nazis wanted to show, how the regime was determined to 'defend itself' against their enemies. An age-old oak tree, protected by law, remained as

²¹ „Nenne mir, Deutscher, das deutsche Buch schlechthin, es ist der 'Faust'. Nenne mir den deutschen Dichter, es ist Goethe. Es ist meine Pflicht als der über alle deutsche Jugend gesetzte verantwortliche Jugendführer und Erzieher im Namen dieser Jugend feierlich zu bekennen, daß auch wir uns von unserem deutschen Wesen und damit von Goethe nicht trennen können... Goethe ist nach Nietzsches Wort nicht nur ein guter und großer Mensch, sondern eine Kultur. Wir dienen dem Genius unserer Zeit. Wir sind zutiefst glücklich darüber, die begnadete Generation sein zu dürfen, die dem Führer von Angesicht zu Angesicht gegenübersteht. Adolf Hitler ist es, der uns in dieser Zeit die Ehrfurcht lehrte. Er verpflichtet uns dem Opfer des großen Krieges, so daß wir die Fähigkeit erwarben, aus eigener Reihe dem Vaterland zu opfern. Der Führer ist es, der die guten Geister der Nation beschwört, die gegenwärtigen und die vergangenen.

Jugend Adolf Hitlers! Auch für dich gilt heute und immerdar das Wort, daß du nur erwerben mußt, was du dereinst besitzen willst. Das Deutsche Reich hat dich hierhergerufen, damit auch an dieser Stätte sich dir die Größe, Weite und Tiefe Deutschlands offenbare. Du handelst im Sinne des Mannes, dem du dienst, wenn du den Inhalt alles dessen, was der Begriff Weimar und Goethe umschließt, in dich aufnimmst und in deinem treuen und tapferen Herzen einschließt, damit du immer weißt, worum es geht, wenn du für Deutschland kämpfen mußt.“

Baldur von Schirach, Goethe an uns. Rede v. 14. Juni 1937 zur Eröffnung der Weimar-Festspiele der deutschen Jugend. Goethe CD ROM, Stiftung Weimarer Klassik.

the only tree on the site of the concentration camp, called the 'Goethe Eiche', since Goethe was reported to have written 'Wanderers Nachtlied' on or at this tree. In 1944 this tree was finally felled by inmates after an allied bombing raid had burnt it.

The inmates were opposing political party members, Christians, Jews, social misfits and other groups. About 56,000 people are reported to have been killed on that infamous hill... More than 250,000 prisoners from 35 nations were exposed to the brutality of the Nazis. Many were tortured, killed or used for the sake of medical experiment.

It still seems hardly comprehensible that something like this could happen near a town with such humanitarian background. And there can be no excuse: no concentration camp existed without an elaborate infrastructure behind it, hundreds of people were involved in the administration of such an institution. Prisoners were sent as cheap labour force to various factories around Weimar. No, most of the people were aware of the concentration camp, may be not of the dimensions of cruelty, and perhaps they did not really comprehend what they knew, as Imre Kertész suggested, a former inmate of Buchenwald.

What other explanations can be offered?

Traditions were mobilised to justify cruelties: the Thuringian regional church referred to Martin Luther when they, together with six other Protestant churches, welcomed the introduction of the yellow star to mark Jews in public (December 17th, 1941).

In a speech in the plenary assembly in Bonn on January 27, 1998, professor Yehuda Bauer argued that 'this was not only terror, ladies and gentlemen, that was a consensus based on the promise of a wonderful utopia... the vision of an idyllic and universal community of the people, functioning without frictions and parties, served by slaves...'²²

We all know how easily human beings can be turned into monsters, but still the mental adaptation of a majority to such a terror regime was horrifying. Under the conditions described, many people were able to refuse to accept the realities of a modern, industrial society. It also signifies a collective identity crisis and an offensive against the undefined and menacing demands of a new age. The cultural elite was particularly vulnerable in this context, since they had to expect social and cultural upheavals, with their influence waning. Perhaps Hitler's success can be partly explained by the attempts of this elite to cloak their conservatism with a new ideology in order to resist fundamental changes.²³

Weimar and Buchenwald after 1945

When General Patton's army spearheaded into Weimar on April 12th 1945 and liberated Buchenwald they also forced 1000 citizens of Weimar to file through the buildings of the concentration camp and face the victims and other remains of atrocities. The people were genuinely shocked. The horror was legibly written on the faces of those who should have known.

Patton, like the Russians after him, paid tribute to classical Weimar. They fired salute in front of Goethe's house and began to organise a more civil life.

By the way, the self-liberation of the camp by their inmates, allegedly led by the communist 'KAPO', a self-organising committee controlling the camp under Nazi control, has been proved to be a myth, created by the communists for obvious reasons.

On July 4th the Americans transferred occupier status to the Red Army, which also took control of Buchenwald. And now the history of the Buchenwald camp continued - with inmates of different political background. With astounding directness, the Soviets kept critics of their regime in the same compounds the Nazis had used before, and again hundreds of people died. Perhaps the sort of cruelty had changed, there were no medical experiments or public shootings, but people suffered and died of hunger and the cold all the same. All this had to be kept secret, of course, from the German communists, Buchenwald soon became an important myth legitimising their existence, a kind of foundation myth.²⁴

²² 'Das war nicht nur Terror, meine Damen und Herren, das war ein Konsens, auf dem Versprechen von einer idyllischen, weltbeherrschenden Volksgemeinschaft, die ohne Reibungen und ohne Parteien funktionieren sollte, allen von Sklaven bedient. Um dies zu erreichen, musste man sich gegen alles aufbäumen. Gegen bürgerliche und jüdisch-christliche Moral, gegen individuelle Freiheit und gegen den Humanismus, gegen das ganze Gepäck der Französischen Revolution und überhaupt - gegen die gesamte Aufklärung!', quoted from V. Mauersberger, Hitler in Weimar, p. 30f.

²³ This is how, especially, V. Mauersberger argues in 'Hitler in Weimar'

²⁴ Manfred Overesch, 'Buchenwald und die DDR oder die Suche nach Selbstlegitimation', Göttingen 1959

Regardless of the misery of the continued internment practices, the SED tried to present their 'alternative Germany' as the only genuine representative of classical traditions. The resistance myths created helped to repress the experiences of the Nazi past and prevented a true confrontation with this side of the German past. The relationship between culture and power and the role of the intelligentsia in Germany remained obscure. In addition, a new myth evolved - the myth of an 'unbroken spirit of culture and unblemished values' being transformed into a new age. The nation of poets and thinkers ('Land der Dichter und Denker') was supposed to persevere, able of regeneration and consolation. Goethe and Schiller provided useful alibis in the struggle to deny any sense of guilt. As Professor John has been able to illustrate, the representatives of culture, under the wings of a new ruling party, regarded themselves as purified, even as victims themselves.²⁵ Now Goethe's and Schiller's rejection of any nationalist stance was, in combination with a few other comments taken out of context, interpreted as evidence for pre-socialist attitudes, a bizarre example for the abuse of the German classics by politicians. This way both classical writers were useful for the Germans to rehabilitate themselves for the whole world. The direct contrast with the utilisation of German classical writers by Baldur von Schirach, for instance (quoted above), reveals in horrible clarity that literary achievements can be abused for almost anything, unless special precautions have been taken. But how could Goethe have imagined what happened many decades later?

And the propaganda war around the German classical writers went on. In 1949 the SED invited to attend the Lenin - memorial in Weimar. As early as July 1944, the leading communists (Ulbricht and Semjonow) had chosen Weimar as a basis for further political activities, aware of its symbolical value.

Even Thomas Mann, returning from exile, became part of the 'classical campaign'. In 1949 he delivered a speech in Weimar (organised by the SED) and depicted Goethe as a defender of unity and freedom. Perhaps he was too innocent and did not realise how his appearance was simply arranged to produce a train of associations from the classics to democracy and socialism.

Later the FDJ ('Freie Deutsche Jugend', the youth organisation of the Communist SED) staged a torch parade at the 200th anniversary of Goethe's birthday. For the ruling party, the classics were also used to demonstrate their being different from the capitalist world, the American way of life being superimposed on the people in Western Germany. The German Communists as defenders of classical values - a rather ridiculous assumption. The then most influential leader of the Politburo, Walter Ulbricht, suggested that Schiller would have been a citizen of the GDR and that the newly formed GDR was the realisation of Goethe's visions. Needless to say, Goethe's ideas were based on principles contrary to anything socialist: on private property, for instance, on a cosmopolitan and humanist tradition.

But all this were only a few incidents among many to utilise this location as a 'holy place' to celebrate Communist resistance during the previous regime of terror. The more this resistance could be foregrounded, the better this could be used to legitimise the existence of the GDR and camouflage real events. For the ruling party, the memories of Buchenwald were a cornerstone of their anti-fascist ideology²⁶.

The Buchenwald memorial was built as a pseudo - sacred site in Stalinist monumental architecture, disguising the new mass graves hiding the victims of Communist terror after 1945.

Weimar and Buchenwald during the GDR

From the dictatorship of a 'race' to the dictatorship of the proletariat? As we mentioned, the officials of the GDR built a monstrous memorial as a cathedral of their faith. Interestingly enough, this Stalinist style differed little from the Nazi Gauforum also built in Weimar. Buchenwald became a legend, a symbolic realisation of a socialist promise. The new faith was celebrated and re - enacted like a ritual in Buchenwald very frequently. The old internment camp buildings were demolished, any memory of sufferings were undesirable. The resistance of the Communists against Fascism was at the centre of attention, with no room allowed for other historic occurrences.

As we all know, Communists of all countries have dedicated a lot of time and money on the education and training of their youth. In Germany, further studies easily reveal that the socialisation of young people in kindergardens, schools, universities, youth clubs, youth camps and other

²⁵ cp. Prof. Dr. Jürgen John's studies of the 'spirit which had been kept pure' (der Mythos vom 'rein gebliebenen Geist'), paper about the case study of Jena 1945, delivered in Weimar on May 9th, 1998

²⁶ Manfred Overesch: 'Buchenwald und die DDR', oder 'Die Suche nach Selbstlegitimation', 1995

organisations were not very different from what had happened during the Nazi period. All totalitarian regimes vary the same principles. It is thus quite worrying to become aware of an obvious unbroken continuity of such educational principles, perhaps from the empire of Kaiser Wilhelm II on until the breakdown of the GDR after 1989. This poses a vital challenge to the educational system in the Eastern states of Germany today since certain traditions named above have remained alive under the surface. And this, in turn, is also a European problem on a wider scale.

Meanwhile, in the West, 'Goethe - Institute' were founded, the equivalents of the British Council or similar institutions. Goethe, the name of this 'innocent' classic was chosen to represent cultural Germany in foreign countries.

After re-unification, new roles were attributed to Weimar and the burdens of the past - and finally in 1999 this town was proclaimed 'cultural city' of Europe.

Now various institutions try to establish new and rejuvenate old links, for instance with Eastern Europe.²⁷ Their ambition is to integrate Weimar into an East - West framework, promoting Weimar as a possible place to link European cultures 'under new management'.

For many scholars like Prof. Gérard Schneilin, Paris, Weimar as a classical centre was and is far more important than Buchenwald. Even former inmates of the concentration camp like Jorge Semprun find it difficult to regard both halves as one world. Or can they be separated?

The meaning of Weimar and Buchenwald today

Nobody can deny the importance of Weimar as a place where classical German literature was allowed to thrive for a considerable length of time. But what about it today? Is it little else than a 'Dead Poets Society'?

Every political system in the past, as we have seen, has tried to utilise the notion of Weimar. In most cases simply by relating their ideologies to the classical age, they camouflaged their own practical political objectives. In this sense, the spirit of Weimar contributed to cover up reality, building a 'false consciousness' as Marx said to define the term 'ideology'.

In April 1997, a small group of extraordinarily competent cultural experts came together for a hearing on the perspectives of 'foreign cultural policies' ('Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven der auswärtigen Kulturpolitik'). Among others, they were discussing 10 theses issued by the 'Auswärtiges Amt' and the then minister of foreign affairs, Klaus Kinkel. Thesis no. 7 explicitly demanded a link between state and the economy in the interest of an active safeguard of Germany as an industrial site ('aktive Standortsicherung'). Arend Oetker, the chairman of the 'Kulturpreis der deutschen Wirtschaft', spoke of culture as a supporting element of economic politics. This means that cultural policies, Goethe and Schiller and the rest, are still being degraded as ambassadors of trade. The Goethe Instituts, like the British Councils, have to adapt to these requirements.

Like all monumental sites around the world, Weimar and Buchenwald have been very ambivalent in their meaning for the Germans. Creating dubious layers of identity, exchanging them with others (often contrary ones) and adding new dimensions has always been the ambition of politicians of all sorts, intellectuals of various quality, nationalists and socialists alike. It is no surprise that the need for a commonly accepted, collective culture is still high on the agenda of people interested in influencing the consciousness of people.

This, of course, does not only apply to Germany. Robert Phillips has demonstrated this excellently in his book 'History Teaching, Nationhood and the State' for Great Britain.²⁸ 'Great history debates' are being waged in many national and international conferences and such debates have proved to be necessary for Europe, too, including the connections between curriculum, culture and nationhood.²⁹

Can there be another, more ethereal meaning of Weimar for people in the 21st century, far away from Romantic conceptions of man and nature? Theoretically, many German classical scholars strove to substitute worldly power by art as a means to educate human beings and elevate them towards a lofty humanist ideal. Petrarca, Thomas More, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Martin Luther, William

²⁷ The 'Stiftung Weimarer Klassik', the Jugendbegegnungsstätte in Buchenwald, or 'Via Regis', a project of Thuringian cultural institutions.

²⁸ Robert Phillips: 'History Teaching, Nationhood and the State'. A Study in Educational Politics. London 1998

²⁹ R. Phillips, *ibid.*, p.128

Shakespeare and Voltaire were all considered as representatives of such a European humanist tradition.

Goethe has translated the message of Rousseau into his own picture of the world: Modern man was seen as alienating himself from nature. Prof. Konrad Wiedemann (Berlin) even called Goethe the 'greatest member of the green movement of all times'.³⁰ And Schiller's philosophy of aesthetic advancement of humankind also falls into place here.

Rightly or wrongly, for many people around the world Weimar stands for this, a symbol of universal understanding, of a softer, ethereal human condition. To move in this direction is an uphill struggle, often depicted as the true path to the spirit of Weimar. Hence the approach of Weimar, in such a context, implies the experience of a creative silence or delicate detachment (keeping apart) from physical reality (the physical world of appearance).³¹

Personally speaking, such a view seems rather remote at an age when the globalised capitalist world has to come to terms with less esoteric problems like mass unemployment, questions of violence, civil wars, corporate and private crime, increasing pressure on social and educational institutions, questions of how to save our environment and secure sustainable development etc. etc. Yet the debate about the contributions of philosophy, culture and the arts has been a continuous and necessary one and the traditions of Weimar may be regarded as a brilliant stone in this bizarre mosaic.

At the same time, this debate has always stood within the framework of certain social, political and economic conditions. In all these respects Weimar has remained within the traditions of German bourgeois culture (the German 'Bildungsbürgertum'), usually in connection and contrast with the contemporary political circumstances. The Weimar culture, as has been demonstrated, cannot be detached from these worldly influences. It provides, in fact, a challenging background for the discussion of these issues, it may even serve as a 'European case study'. The coalition of ideas between, sociologically speaking, the petty bourgeoisie and nationalist politics is certainly not only a German phenomenon. As we can observe currently in various European countries, right wing parties offer 'remedies' for social, economic and political tensions on the basis of prejudices and fear. Some politicians or groups even imply a racist consensus, often camouflaged or pre-supposed within the framework of clandestine mutual understanding. In some cases, this happens under a populist blanket which makes it difficult to pin a politician down to some clear commitment. On one party rally, a party politician may praise the achievements and values of the Waffen - SS (as Jörg Haider did), in a television broadcast soon after he may eloquently deny anything fascist behind such statements. Strict laws against asylum-seekers may be demanded on one day, and soon after we may hear that the idea of European integration and 'culture' was supported wholeheartedly. It is the fear of losing one's position, of having little chances in modern, competitive society, which breeds radical prejudices used for popular demagogues.³² Weimar and Buchenwald can, as a case study, illustrate how such a mixture can be turned into an evil scenario.

Weimar and Buchenwald, in their own precarious way, can also be regarded as symbolical meeting places between two former parts of Europe, divided by the iron curtain. On a larger scale, they may represent two political and cultural hemispheres on common ground, in one country called Germany. In this respect, they are memory sites challenging two different ways of looking at Europe, the Western one, based on the policies of economically prosperous capitalist states, busy with the perfectioning of a Maastricht - Europe, the introduction of the Euro and such things. This Europe has been pre-occupied with an understanding of "central or western Europe" (the connotations of the German term „Mitteleuropa" are even more telling) previously used either as an instrument of the Cold War or as a term to develop a new centre against the Communist and the American world. Opposite this Western club stood the rather alien Eastern countries, having become increasingly estranged from Western cultures during the period of Soviet domination. This was probably a major factor, as T.G.Ash claims, for the indifferent if not ignorant attitude of EU - nations towards the Balkans and the delayed integration of countries east of the iron curtain.³³ Ash elaborates on the possibly fateful danger of Western politicians using the concept of 'central Europe' as a rallying cry for a

³⁰ in a TV broadcast, ARTE, Feb. 18th, 1999

³¹ Lienhard (1905) in Ulbricht: 'wo liegt Weimar', p. 11:

'Verständigungszeichen für einen feinermenschlichen Zustand: und zu diesem den Aufweg zu versuchen, ist der wahre Weg nach Weimar. Demnach ist der Weg nach Weimar ein Weg in die schöpferische Stille ... ein feines Abstandhalten von der Körperlichkeit der Erscheinungswelt.'³¹

³² This has again been demonstrated by this year's Shell youth study (Jugendstudie 2000).

³³ Timothy Garton Ash: 'History of the Present', in German 'Zeit der Freiheit', München 1999

division from the former East. Perhaps this is less than a conscious policy, perhaps it is the result of economic anxieties. In the former East Germany, or more precisely around Weimar and Buchenwald, such power lines merge, representing classical, romantic, national or national-socialist, and communist traditions. Can a promising Europe of the 21st century be imagined without linking the Eastern and Western parts?

Weimar and Buchenwald

Thesis statements

- (1) It has to be documented why Weimar and Buchenwald together form an inseparable pair, both exemplifying essential developments of recent German history. Many scholars find this hard to accept, since the achievements of a universal, classical culture can hardly be reconciled with the incredible brutality of the NS - system. But it will have to be proved that the separation of both 'cultures' is not a solid basis for a promising discussion. The roots of 'the German question' especially reach more deeply in the historical grassroots.
- (2) However much I agree with the attempts to scrutinise our national (in this case German) past to comprehend the complexities of our histories and the present (thesis 1), I do not think that the classical age of Weimar can be **directly** linked with the atrocities of Buchenwald, as some scholars more or less suggest. As far as I can see now, the decisive age which ushered in a nationalist and chauvinist period in German (and Weimar) history was the last part of the 19th century, the age when imperialist powers competed with one another on nationalist and racist terms. Until then, various different developments still seemed to be possible, after the turn of the century, especially Germany (politically and culturally) gradually moved towards more and more radical 'solutions' for a cultural, political, social and economical crisis most Germans did not understand.
- (3) The suggested approach of 'digging deep' (thesis 1) is not only a German, but certainly also a European challenge. In many ways, Weimar and Buchenwald, as two contrasts in one, are a universal or European phenomenon. These sites may then serve as a good basis for a discussion on how serious investigations of historical contradictions can be led and how this can be translated into educational endeavours.
- (4) This discussion can contribute toward not only a better understanding of one's collective identity on the national level but also of the requirements of European integration. If the peoples in the individual member states become aware of their conflicting myths and contradictory political realities, for instance, they will become aware of the complexities of the European dimensions as well.
- (5) Weimar, as can be demonstrated on the spot, has been a place and notion of truly European dimensions. As an important town on one of the trans-national trading routes across Europe (Straßburg - Frankfurt - Weimar - Leipzig - Berlin / Dresden / Prague - and Eastern Europe, practically the old 'Reichsstraße' or Via Regia) it, at one curious stage in history, attracted a lot of women and men of European cultural importance. Many European traditions have crossed their influences in Weimar and thus a tour through Weimar can prove how the notion of Europe is not only an artificial political idea. Traces of some genuinely European characteristics may be discovered.
- (6) The remarks just made immediately require a dialectical interjection: For many millions of Germans (or Europeans, for that matter) Europe indeed was conceived as an 'artificial', i.e. politically constructed scheme after about 1948. After 1946 at least, the realisation dawned on the Western allies that the Western sectors of Germany had to be integrated into the geo-political strategies against the Soviet hegemony in the East. After considerable pressure by the Americans and the British had been applied on the French, the latter submitted to the idea of a partial re-armament of the Federal Republic of Germany, with the intention of forging a new military alliance. In this context, French leaders like Maurice Schumann launched the ideas of a European community. This had the double advantage for the French that a) their first defence line was situated inside Germany and b) that they had mutual control of the Rhine - Ruhr coal and metal industries. For most Germans, led by Konrad Adenauer, this idea of European integration was greatly welcomed for many reasons, one of which was the opportunity to open new political dimensions, to become an accepted partner in international politics again and to suppress the considerable feelings of collective guilt and shame. The idea of European integration has since then not lost much of its popular appeal in Germany, even after unification. Whether such background is enough fertile ground for the 'natural growth' of a modern, democratic conception of Europe in Germany, has to be seen. It does not seem to be irrelevant, however, to take into account that 'Europe' has also acquired the role of a popular myth in Germany, a myth linked subconsciously with the repression of a half forgotten past.
- (7) The combination of both, the cultural 'European' character and the example as a contradictory mix of national myths (with shocking practical proportions) constitute the fascinating challenge we are about to face.

Rüdiger Kraatz, April 2000

The myth of Weimar and the reality of Buchenwald

Ausgewählte bibliographische Vorschläge zur Vorbereitung des Kurses
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A few practical considerations for educational projects:

(in key-words...)

A suitable place to work for peace and understanding...

to investigate the causes of dictatorial rule,
questions of authority and obedience...

international endeavours: workcamps,
Jugendbegegnungsstätte

the use of the archive:

After the war, the Americans took most of the documentary material away, especially for use in political trials. Later this was stored in Arolsen, West Germany, other parts were kept in Berlin or in the Thüringer Staatsarchiv in Weimar. Little original material had remained in Buchenwald itself, the documentation centre (since 1971) there has mainly preserved copied material and microfilms, isolated booklets, lists, photographs etc. but not a coherent or comprehensive archive. But the centre is trying to build up a larger stock of material for studies.

Essential: careful preparations

fatal to just come to Buchenwald and let the tour guides lead a group of children around...
dreadful experience of pupils laughing at the sight of certain exposition materials...
a simple stroll through the area could be detrimental to educational objectives...

Suggestions for school visits:

Involvement of pupils in a larger project, studies both at home and in Buchenwald:

- first a general preparation in a plenary assembly, then workshops
- a suitable introduction: photographs, presentation of various dimensions, development of questions, comparisons
- connections to personal and family history can be established and investigated
- teachers of various subjects should be integrated (history, politics, arts, music, geography, social sciences, literature, languages ...)
- for the actual tour, one should allow the pupils to take their time, no rush
- first a general tour is recommended as a gradual approach, the visit to the museum should follow afterwards
- the pupils should be given enough time to verbalise their experiences and express grievances etc.
- the crematorium should be visited on the second day
- living in the Buchenwald compound could be useful so that studies at the various locations can be undertaken
- one should not expect spontaneous emotions or feelings of guilt, actually those dimensions should be discussed at a much later stage,
- films should not be viewed on the first day, but it helps to see connections, so that the fragments of experiences can be put together. More information is provided for further studies...
- practical workshops can be arranged (writing, painting, craft workshops), even excavations
- pupils can organise various presentations, work in the archive or library
- whenever required, plenary discussions can be arranged.

Topics of investigation:

- questions of resistance and co-operation
- psychological causes of acceptance and obedience
- historical research, images of history, methods of research and emotional responses
- moral questions of guilt and responsibility
- role of art and literature in society
- topical politics: comparable regimes anywhere?

Practical ideas for workshops:

(1) Weimar and Buchenwald: a meeting place of European cultural importance:

Countess Anna Amalia of Saxonia, Jean Amery, Bruno Apitz („Nackt unter Wölfen“), Achim and Siegmund v. Arnim, Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (received by Goethe), Hans Bassermann, (Johannes R. Becher), Giuseppe Bellomo, Musiker Hector Berlioz, Friedrich Justin Bertuch, Bettina Brentano (received by Goethe), Sophie Brentano, Lucas Cranach the Elder (founder and main representative of the Saxonian school of painting in the 16th century, worked on the Cranach altar in the town church), Friedrich Ebert, Johann Peter Eckermann, August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Lyonel Feininger, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Forster, Innenminister Wilhelm Frick, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walter Gropius (founder of Bauhaus in 1919, had to move to Dessau in 1924), Otto Grotewohl, Friedrich Hegel, Heinrich Heine (received by Goethe) Johann Gottfried Herder, Hermanduren, Adolf Hitler, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland, Wilhelm und Alexander Humboldt, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Johannes Itten, Wassily Kandinsky, Karl August of Saxonia, Imre Kertész (transported to Buchenwald, Auschwitz and Zeitz, writer of „Roman eines Schicksallosen“, Rowohlt Reinbeck 1998, 16,90 DM), Harry Graf Kessler (the director of the Museum of arts and crafts in Weimar), Paul Klee, Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, Karl Koch, Eugen Kogon, August von Kotzebue, Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, Max Liebermann (the most famous student of the Weimar school of paintings, founded in 1860), Franz Liszt, (Thomas Mann), Martin Luther (preached in Weimar after publication of his famous 95 theses) Max Mayr (Kommandiertenschreiber im KL Buchenwald), Napoleon, Friedrich Nietzsche (lived in Weimar at the end of the 19th century, last years of his life, in the house of his sister), Novalis, George S. Patton, Jean Paul, Sophie La Roche, Mies van der Rohe, Romain Rolland, Philipp Scheidemann, Friedrich von Schiller, Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel, Oskar Schlemmer, Johanna Schopenhauer, Jorge Semprun, Madame de Stael, Charlotte von Stein, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Sternheim, Richard Strauss (für 5 Jahre), Ernst Thälmann, Ludwig Tieck, (Walter Ulbricht) Henry van de Velde (main representative of art déco, Jugendstil and director of the Weimarer Kunstgewerbeschule, paving the way for the Bauhaus), Christiane Vulpius, Ernst Wiechert (Dichter aus Masuren, 1938 für ein halbes Jahr in Buchenwald), Christoph Martin Wieland, Elie Wiesel...

(list of names from a Weimar - brochure)

... all these personalities had a direct relationship to Weimar or Buchenwald.

Assignment: research about these personalities (biographies)

list up a few personal data for every entry

group the names under appropriate categories

(politics...fine arts... literature ... inmates of B. ...)

creative writing: write parts of a diary, a poem etc. from the point of view of these personalities

Example: Goethe and Schiller in Buchenwald today ...

other creative activities: sketch or painting

role plays, a little drama (people in confrontation)

role play: students play the role of Goethe etc.

others, as citizens of our state today, discuss their experiences and inform the other about their age

discussion group in a salon: meeting of famous people who had been here

Who would you invite for tea:

Select a few famous people from Weimar for an afternoon tea party. Plan the meeting and then describe what really happened.

(2) Essays: Politics and Culture: philosophers and writers and the state

→ Nietzsche, Goethe...

(3) Travelling in different ages: Goethe in his age and now

- (4) Describe and discuss the various monuments in and around Weimar.
Make pictures for documentation
Monuments and meaning:
definition of „monument“ and memorial sites
selected history of a monument
monuments in different centuries: changes in style
the political or ideological function of monuments,
how do they help to create identity
comparison of different national monuments around the world
point out their function for national identity
plan a new monument: select a topic, site, inscription etc.
different groups may do this, compare and discuss their versions
imagine one of these monuments would be built -
and the statue etc. would be unveiled...
how will the public react... today ...
how would they react in 50 years time or
how would they have reacted 100 years ago
- (5) Religions and convictions: questions of tolerance
All three religions originating in the Near East, Muslims, Jews and Christians claim Abraham as one of their most important forefathers...
Where and when have the differences developed?
Describe the circumstances which created these different religions.
Write a little history of how the three religions treated one another in ages of tolerance or persecution.
Under which circumstances were tolerance and persecutions possible?
- (6) Analyse the groups of convictions represented by
a) the people which have visited Weimar,
b) the inmates imprisoned in Buchenwald
Why did the Nazis imprison and prosecute these groups of people?
Why were the convictions represented dangerous to them?
Why did the Soviets continue the traditions of internment camps?
Who was interned after 1945?
- (7) Totalitarian and democratic systems:
European political traditions, role of European bourgeoisie, role of schools and curricula (comparisons between nations), how to safeguard freedom, commitment or detachment, civil courage ...
- (8) Europe: East - West - Centre
different traditions, meeting places, cultural traditions...
humanism and enlightenment, schools and universities, science and communication
- (9) Men and women through the ages...
- (10) Architecture through the ages...
Description of styles, comparisons
living in different houses
Expression of power in architecture
foundation myths of nations documented in buildings and sites
the influence of architecture and landscaping on human beings
- (11) Genuine or fake?
discuss the relevance of preserving or re-producing
‘older’ pieces of art
- (12) Approach to Weimar - Buchenwald and similar lieux de memoire in Europe
through research of ‘family history’: objects, family trees, stories,
oral traditions in families etc.
- (13) Constructions of identity: ‘us’ and ‘them’, insiders and outsiders, formation and dimensions of identity, identity or identification, national myths and symbols,...
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