

ERNST WIECHERT AND HIS ROLE BETWEEN 1933 AND 1945

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In his article "Innere Emigration: Fiktion oder Wirklichkeit", Klaus Thoenelt confirms the generally accepted view that Ernst Wiechert's publications between 1933 and 1945 earn him the right to be considered a representative of that spirit of German intellectual resistance known as the inner emigration'.¹ Thoenelt sees Wiechert, as well as Carossa, as maintaining the Goethean spirit of 'Bildung' and 'Stirb und Werde', as exposing the animalism and rationality behind National Socialism - in other words, as imparting a humanistic and critical message. For Thoenelt, it is clear that Wiechert was consciously in opposition to the National Socialists. Fallada, by contrast, he sees as merely concerned to go on publishing, as indifferent to moral issues and as a result prepared to compromise. Consequently, Thoenelt denies Fallada a place in the 'inner emigration'. Thoenelt's classification is too simple. It overlooks the fact that Wiechert, for all his conscious commitment to resistance, remained in many aspects of his 1933-1945 writings bound to a view of man, nature and modern reality that has much in common with National Socialism. One cannot say the same of Fallada. Fallada, it is true, made a concession to Goebbels by writing a pro-Nazi passage into 'Der eiserne Gustav' (1937), but he remained for the most part in his 1933-1945 novels the all-round arch-cynic he had always been. The National Socialists would have found very little to which they could point as supportive of their ideology. If anything, the tendency in 'Der eiserne Gustav' is anti-militaristic, anti-

Prussian, anti-patriarchal, anti-war, anti-authoritarian. I do not wish in this article to play Fallada off against Wiechert or to assess the accuracy of Thoenelt's distinctions. That would be a too lengthy endeavour. Rather I hope to point out in Wiechert's 1933-1945 writings the more suspect ideological features which Thoenelt overlooks, and to posit the theory that these suspect features severely undermined and perhaps even neutralised the effect of the critical elements.

But first to Wiechert the opponent. Among the writers who remained in the Third Reich, Wiechert was undoubtedly one of the few prepared to engage in public acts of resistance and make official protests. His courageous speech to students in Munich in April 1935 ('Der Dichter und seine Zeit') got him into trouble with the authorities. The speech is a rhetorical masterpiece, repeating the same idea with a gentle insistence in terms which can be described as vague, as the language of aestheticism and symbolism, but which through their accumulation create an ultimately unambiguous impression: namely that Wiechert is condemning the self-deification of the National Socialists, refusing to kow-tow to their demands of the poet for political allegiance and asserting his allegiance to what he sees as the transcendental and eternal values - love, justice - which will in time triumph over the present. In 1937, he held a public reading of excerpts from his anti-tyranny story 'Der weiße Büffel' in Cologne: the reading was stormed by the Gestapo. Subsequently, he angered the authorities again by protesting against the Austrian annexation and against the arrest of Pastor Niemöller. In a letter to the NSDAP, he claimed he would cease giving his support to national charities and give it instead to the wife and children of Niemöller until such time as Niemöller was released.² This was his final act of defiance. In 1938, Goebbels condemned him to a spell in a concentration

camp. These material facts from Wiechert's biography are well-known. Apologists of Wiechert tend to stress them. What they omit to mention - or perhaps are unable to see - is the fact that Wiechert's report of his time in Buchenwald ('Der Totenwald'), which appeared after the war (1946), is not free of a certain chauvinism, a point I will return to later. They also omit to mention that Wiechert was very restrained after his imprisonment. 'Das einfache Leben' (1939) is not the great work for which it is often held. It is over large stretches a flaccid, faint-hearted novel, lacking direction and drive. Between 1933 and 1939, Wiechert and his works advocate resistance, non-aggressive, passive resistance, certainly, but resistance nonetheless. 'Das einfache Leben', written with the effects of Buchenwald fresh in mind and soul, advocates in a tone of valediction withdrawal and resignation. Wiechert, a broken man, has lost his faith in the value of staging any sort of fight. Nevertheless, the pessimism of 'Das einfache Leben' and the few critical elements it does contain got Wiechert into more trouble with the authorities, though opinions as to the novel's message were divided. From then on till the end of the war Wiechert published nothing of what he wrote, burying it in his garden and bringing a flood of publications onto the market in the immediate post-war years.

The message of Wiechert's 1935 speech - love, justice - is the message that informed his three main literary works prior to Buchenwald: the novel 'Die Majorin' (1934) and the two stories 'Hirtennovelle' (1935) and 'Der weiße Büffel' (written 1937, but not published until 1947 as the National Socialists refused to allow its publication). The third of these and the greatest piece of writing Wiechert ever achieved, 'Der weiße Büffel', is in fact almost a rendering of the 1935 speech in literary form. What unites these stories is the idea of helping the

weak, even to the point of self-sacrifice. In 'Die Majorin' it is weakness in the form of spiritual and mental disorder, in 'Hirtennovelle' physical weakness, in 'Der weiße Büffel' weakness in the form of defenceless old age. Wiechert was an out-and-out right-wing writer prior to 1925: Germanic violence and Nietzschean hatred of Christianity were the hallmark of the early novels. With 'Der Knecht Gottes Andreas Nyland' (1925), however, he found a new message of Christian tolerance. In the remaining Weimar years he wrote a whole sequence of anti-war stories counteracting the martial stand of his pre-1925 works. The humane message of the three above-mentioned works written under Hitler was thus not new, rather a continuation of an established direction. But under National Socialism the message of defending debility took on, as Wiechert well knew, a dimension of political resistance. Here was a writer speaking out for precisely the type of virtue scorned by the National Socialists, with their hatred of all things weak and assertion of strength and favouring of the strong.

The defence of the weak is in the stories bound up with other implications which must be construed as contrary to the spirit of National Socialism. Michael Fahrenhorst in 'Die Majorin', cured by the Majorin of the title, is a returning soldier such as the National Socialists never portrayed him - such, perhaps, as Remarque would have portrayed him, namely utterly disturbed and not in the least hostile to the Versailles Treaty or nationalistic. His father and his friend Jonas, both deranged beyond salvation by the effects of losses in the war, incorporate Wiechert's sentimental but genuine sympathy with the devastating effects of war. War is not 'uplifting' as the National Socialists saw it. 'Die Majorin' also portrays, as does 'Der weiße Büffel', the transition from aggression to pacifism, hate to

love, destruction to protection, spiritual developments exactly opposite to contemporary trends and thus attempting to stem the tide by advocating a countermovement. In 'Der weiße Büffel', moreover, Wiechert's belief in speaking out for the weak ends in a dialogue between tyranny, as represented by the despot Murduk, and justice, represented by the villager Vasudeva. The dialogue results in Vasudeva's execution for refusing to bow down to Murduk, but immediately afterwards Murduk regrets having killed Vasudeva, renounces the throne in favour of his son and dedicates himself to a life of penance. The story suggests the susceptibility of tyranny to the message of love and justice. On the one hand such a suggestion is indicative of Wiechert's inability to appreciate the absolute nature of the evil which National Socialism represented. On the other hand it is a suggestion which the National Socialists would have found insidious, since it quite clearly aimed at shoring up faith in the supreme power of humane values. Such a faith was shaken to the core by events after 1933, and only its revitalisation at national level could lead to a communal moral self-assertion capable of providing effective resistance to Hitlerism. The story was in this respect subversive, and it is not surprising that the authorities prevented its publication.

Hitler strove to implement a national self-perception in which blood, bravery, courage and self-sacrifice were important qualities. Wiechert also stresses these qualities, but whereas for the National Socialists they only acquired worth when used in the service of aggression towards the inner and outer enemy, they are only of value to Wiechert when used in the interest of defending weakness and virtue. In 'Hirtennovelle', Michael dies to save a lamb from attacking Cossacks. The lamb symbolises extreme physical helplessness, but also purity, innocence and, being an animal intimately connected with religion, both

divinity and faith; in 'Der weiße Büffel', Vasudeva dies to secure justice for an old man. Quite deliberately Wiechert constructs an alternative frame of reference, or rather asserts the traditional humanistic frame of reference for qualities which the National Socialists attempted to integrate into their own very aggressive philosophy. As such he attempts to rescue these qualities from perversion and misdirection and to prevent the noble ethos that surrounded them being exploited by the National Socialists. His attitude to political issues is comparable. In 'Der weiße Büffel', Vasudeva does not condemn might or one-man rule per se; what he condemns is the abuse of these. Wiechert was throughout his life a portrayer of leader-figures and believed in the political ideal of individual leadership as opposed to democracy. But in 'Der weiße Büffel' and 'Die Majorin', where the Majorin runs a large farm, he takes pains to stress that the leader must lead responsibly, caringly, lovingly: desertion of that responsibility in favour of destructive self-assertion (Murduk) or even of the pursuit of personal romantic fulfilment (the Majorin) is to be condemned as unethical. Leadership for Wiechert is not the imposition of the self on others, but the imposition of a sense of duty towards others on the self.

Wiechert's 'Das einfache Leben' is very often seen as the quintessential work of the 'inner emigration'. This view is only accurate if 'inner emigration' is conceived of in terms of withdrawal. If 'inner emigration' is conceived of in terms of passive resistance, then this novel - unlike Wiechert's pre-Buchenwald writings - is hardly a work of the 'inner emigration'. It may well be true that, in advocating withdrawal, i.e. physical, spiritual and intellectual isolationism, Wiechert aimed to deny the right of the National Socialist state to exercise control over the individual. But there is a considerable distance

in terms of courage and optimism between advocacy of escape and advocacy of confrontation. Vasudeva in 'Der weiße Büffel' seeks out the source of tyranny and challenges it. Michael in 'Hirtennovelle' faces aggression and dies rather than succumb to it. Thomas von Orla in 'Das einfache Leben' however packs his bags and makes for the easternmost outpost of Germany, as far away from hated modern reality as he can get. That arrest and imprisonment broke Wiechert's faith in opposition is undeniable. In his autobiography 'Jahre und Zeiten' (1949), he traces the genesis of the novel back to his experiences in Buchenwald.³ And in 'Der Totenwald', a third-person narrative in which the protagonist Johannes is in reality Wiechert himself, he talks of his imprisonment as the time when he began to ask himself *ob Gott nicht gestorben sei*.⁴ In 'Das einfache Leben' itself, Orla compares himself to someone who grew up with bows and arrows only to discover that the enemy is wearing armour of iron.⁵ The novel is the story of a man who has lost faith in the defiant assertion of Christian values, who has even lost faith in any sort of God and sees the universe as a vast empty macrocosm governed by some inexorable, inscrutable and impersonal law which operates beyond any conscience of good and evil. The law is simply there, as indifferent to the destruction it creates as it is to all the good things on earth. Wiechert's positive, humanistic teleology, his faith in the triumph of civilised values and in the good underlying evil have crumbled away. All that is left for the human being to do is to attempt to preserve his own individual moral integrity, to live in personal accord with notions of love and selflessness.

The striking feature of 'Das einfache Leben' is not only the elements it includes, but also those which it excludes: modern life and politics, the city, industrialism and, most noticeable of all, all representatives of contemporary society.

The novel is peopled by social misfits: a Prussian general with his equally old-fashioned granddaughter, a melancholic count who has not heard the wind of political change, a sailor called Bildermann who cannot adapt to post-war Germany and rejoins his former captain Orla to serve under him just as he served under him in the war, an aged fisherman steeped in memories of Prussian history, etc. That Wiechert concentrates to such an extent on the very old or at least ageing, and on the very young (Marianne von Platen), implies a rejection of contemporary generations. The best people are the older people and the younger people who live in their image. 'Das einfache Leben' is thus a nostalgic novel with a visionary aspect: the only hope there is is a re-instatement of the past at some point in the future. Until then, the individual can do nothing but commit himself to a self-contained, quiet life whose noble introspection might - but equally well might not - have an illuminating effect on others.

This noble introspection might have represented a more forceful rejection of the present had it not been for the almost conciliatory tone of the few critical elements the work contains. Orla's introspection has a laissez-faire dimension to it. Although he does not approve of his son Joachim's military careerism and vengeful determination to make good the shame done to Germany, he balances every criticism he makes with a remark conceding youth the right to behave as it does. Other critical features of the novel, such as the portrayal of the 'Stahlhelm' parade and, earlier, Orla's negative reaction to the inability of certain military representatives to accept defeat in the war also lack punch: 'Das einfache Leben' is not without faith in values, but the loss of faith in God and the inevitable triumph of good often generates a moral listlessness and near-indifference which, together with Orla's awareness of a personal guilt, undermine

the force of Orla's arguments and render him a rather colourless character. One wonders if withdrawal is only possible at the cost of moral intensity. Of course Wiechert had to beware of angering the authorities. In 'Jahre und Zeiten', Wiechert defends himself against the charge levelled against him by Erika Mann in the New York Herald Tribune. She had claimed that, since his release from Buchenwald, Wiechert had been an *obedient lad*. He replies by writing that she would probably have been an *obedient girl* had she experienced the fear of re-arrest which he had to endure for seven years after his release.⁶ Fear undoubtedly led to a restraint, diplomacy and vagueness in 'Das einfache Leben' which weakened the force of what criticism there is.

So much for Wiechert the critic of National Socialism. But what of the other side to Wiechert, the ideologically suspect side? When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they could justifiably point to Wiechert's early works as having much in common with their own viewpoint. And not only to his early works. Wiechert, for all his good intentions after 1925, never managed to shake off the legacy of his youth. 'Der Knecht Gottes Andreas Nyland' is saturated with Christian humanism, yet it is a nationally directed humanism, Wiechert perceiving the German soul as singled out for especial suffering and as deserving of an especial redemption. He writes in many of the short stories written shortly before 1933 against war, but in a tone filled with pathos and mysticism, so that suffering appears as something noble, war as suffused with an admittedly terrible but nonetheless magnificently doleful grandeur. In the novel 'Die kleine Passion' (1928/1929), which defends individuality against external social coercion, the pro-individualist stance has anti-democratic overtones. The same novel, while not having a racist conception of blood, sees in blood a law of being which is

infallibly right. And there is the notion of the land as being a healthier place than the town. In 'Die Magd des Jürgen Duskocil' (1931/1932), which is a plea against ignorance and intolerance, there is a moral defamation of Mormonism (anti-sectarianism) and an elitism in the presentation of the main character Jürgen that are as intolerant as the prejudice Wiechert wishes to expose. The Wiechert of the 1925-1933 period is a muddled man, oscillating between sentimental humanism and right-wing bigotry. When they came to power, the National Socialists of course hoped he would develop the right-wing tendency in his writing. Recognising the attempts by the National Socialists to claim him as one of their own, however, Wiechert embarked on a course of exposing apparent similarities as purely external, as questions of form, not of content. But his attempted dissociation is only in part successful, since the humanism which he preaches as an integral element of his philosophy is often at odds with the elitist and prejudicial, occasionally perhaps even inhumane assumptions on which the principles of this philosophy are based. Out of sheer good will - that one must concede to Wiechert - he is blind to the negative aspects of his own conservatism.

In 'Der weiße Büffel', as I wrote earlier, Wiechert is against the abuse of absolute power, but not against absolute power itself.⁷ 'Der weiße Büffel' is not only far from rejecting authoritarianism, it confirms its right to continue by depicting the replacement of one authoritarian regime by another (Murduk's son takes over from his father). Again and again justice for the people is presented, despite Vasudeva's protest to Murduk (Vasudeva is but a go-between), not as something which the people should secure for themselves, but as a gift dispensed from above by a beneficent ruler. And in the dialog between Murduk and Vasudeva, Wiechert cannot criticise

tyranny without at the same time exhibiting sympathy for Murduk and even generating in the reader a feeling of admiration for this lonely leader secretly plagued by doubts and uncertainties.

In 'Die Majorin', Wiechert praises the Junker-style running of a farm: the Majorin is the absolute head of the 'Gut'. And she is indispensable. When she falls in love with Michael Fahrenhorst, her romantic preoccupation affects her powers of administration, and this in turn affects her workers. Although they continue to work as before, the lack of the Majorin's presence and engagement creates an intangible unhappiness amongst the workers, who thus appear to be psychologically dependent on her. Since they are incapable of spiritual autonomy, they cannot be allowed to fend for themselves, are, in effect, helpless: authoritarianism is confirmed. And it is confirmed in 'Das einfache Leben', where Orla benefits from his self-subjection to the general's authority, while Bildermann happily surrenders his independence to Orla.

That Hitlerism had not taught Wiechert the dangers inherent in authoritarian structures is clear. True, Weimar republicanism had not provided a very effective bulwark against the emergence of Nazism, had, through its vacillations and instability, contributed to the movement's ascent and had, in 1932 and 1933, crumbled before Hitler's onslaught on power. But democracy did not cause Hitlerism: rather it failed to take root deeply enough to prevent the continued identification with the authoritarian imperial tradition, and it is to this tradition that popular sympathies with Nazism and the huge success of the movement must in large part be ascribed. Wiechert's conservatism and his hatred of democracy (note the anti-revolutionary and anti-egalitarian spirit of passages of 'Das einfache Leben') blinded him to the fact that only a radical re-application of democracy - ultimately imposed after 1945 by the

successful Allies - could put an end to Fascism. Instead he clings to the existing political form, wishing albeit a more humane content: this content he naively imagines possible by the making of an appeal to the conscience of the ruler, who will then overcome the evil in himself or pass on his powers to a more humane supreme authority. This vision fails to take account of the historically and, between 1933 and 1945, daily proven fact that authoritarianism leads to abuse. That a benevolent ruler takes over from Murduk is a fairy-tale literary fantasy, the practicability of this solution in the real world is more than questionable. Wiechert's love of authority must inevitably lead one to doubt his professed humanity. His authoritarian sympathies imply a belief in hierarchy, which in turn implies belief in given inequality and a support of rigid distinctions, of controlling superiors and obeying inferiors. In Wiechert's eyes such a hierarchy is an idyllic thing which, ideally, functions in everyone's best interests and with everyone's wholehearted agreement; that it is inherently restrictive, even oppressive, and therefore provides the basis for the abusive and destructive manipulations of a movement such as National Socialism he does not recognise. One even wonders if Wiechert was not, deep down, magically fascinated by precisely that abuse of power he aims to condemn. The criticism he levels at the tyrant Murduk, for instance, is counterbalanced by a tone of admiration and pity for him: Murduk is somehow magnificent despite, perhaps even because of his terribleness. Again and again writers of the 'inner emigration' proved incapable of distancing themselves from a secret admiration for those they claimed to hate: in addition to Wiechert's 'Der weiße Büffel' one could point to Bergengruen's novel 'Der Großtyrann und das Gericht' (1935) or Jünger's novel 'Auf den Marmorklippen' (1939).

In connection with authoritarian sympathies, we must mention the praise of Prussianism in 'Das einfache Leben'. Wiechert here suggests that the best social unit is a hierarchy based on military and war-time structures (the old general even has something of Frederick the Great). This social unit Wiechert conceives of as characterised by a commitment to duty, hard work, simple living, order and gentleness. Such a spirit is undoubtedly meant by Wiechert as a better alternative to the barbaric spirit of National Socialism. But this nostalgia overlooks the extent to which National Socialism is itself a development of the Prussian tradition Wiechert wishes to re-establish. Not only does Wiechert idealise Prussianism, apparently blinded to the more aggressive aspects of this spirit which found their way into the Third Reich. He also fails to recognise that the self-same values he lauds in 'Das einfache Leben' - not least the notion of a military-based socio-political structure, hard work and duty - are as typically National Socialist as they are Prussian. The novel fails to present us with a morally differentiated picture of these values, as a result of which one might be forgiven for seeing in 'Das einfache Leben' an intended panegyric of the spiritual forefathers of National Socialism and thereby, implicitly, of National Socialism itself.

Another important facet of 'Das einfache Leben' results in the novel allowing an interpretation contrary to that consciously intended. Apologist, even supposedly objective critics see the novel solely as a rejection of National Socialism. The fact that it is set during the Weimar Republic is - wilfully or unthinkingly - overlooked. Critics argue that Wiechert could not afford to portray rejection of the National Socialist reality directly: it had to happen indirectly, by implication. But why does Wiechert choose the Weimar Republic for his disguised rejection? Would it not have been better to have done what

Reinhold Schneider did in his novel 'Las Casas vor Karl V' (1938) and transpose the action to quite another place and time which nonetheless bore a resemblance to the Third Reich (South America at the time of the conquistadors)? Wiechert had already tried such a transposition in 'Der weiße Büffel' and the authorities were not deceived. But I do not believe this to be the reason for the choice of Weimar Germany. Is it not more likely that Wiechert's novel is not purely a cipher novel, i.e. one period is not merely meant as a transparency through which another period is to be seen, but rather a novel written as much against the period in which it is explicitly set as against the period it implicitly reflects? Wiechert was opposed to the Weimar Republic from the very beginning - witness the anti-democratic vituperations of 'Der Wald' (1920) - and he never felt at home in the period. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, he did not feel comfortable either. 'Das einfache Leben' is a distancing on Wiechert's part from the whole post-war period. It is quite possible that Wiechert sees in the moral corruption, careerist materialism, reckless selfishness and fast living of Weimar, all attacked in the novel, reasons for what happened in 1933: that he sees, in other words, some sort of link between National Socialism and the Republic. But he fails to make this message clear enough. The reader, well aware of the National Socialist rejection of Weimar republicanism and of the movement's self-perception as rescuer of the nation from moral perversion, might again be forgiven: this time for seeing in 'Das einfache Leben', in total contrast to the apologist literary critic, a work confirming the hostility of Hitler towards the immediate past and thereby, implicitly, supporting the ideology with which this past was swept away and replaced.

It is above all Wiechert's hostility towards the way of life associated with the Weimar Republic and the related wish

for a purification of Germany - characteristics which emerge again and again in his works between 1933 and 1945 - which bring him close to the National Socialist writers and ideologues and thus render his 'alternative' humane conservatism unconvincing. In 'Das einfache Leben', Orla is against the Republic from the start: he describes how he was left clinging to a fragment of the imperial flag when revolutionaries threw him overboard at the end of the First World War. This fragment he takes with him to his island, where he takes over from the previous hunter-cum-fisher, who was a Bolshevist. Is this not a transition entirely consistent with National Socialist wishes? Orla's move from the city to the country may be a move towards socially irresponsible self-indulgence, but it is also a move away from an urban atmosphere that is morally and physically corrupted (Orla's wife is a drug-addict) and spiritually desolate (witness Orla's description of his trip in the underground) to a rural atmosphere which is, by contrast, healthy and pristine and capable of generating moral renewal. This transition is certainly a transition entirely consistent with National Socialist thinking. At the end of 'Die Majorin', Michael Fahrenheit also attains spiritual regeneration when he cuts corn together with the Majorin: working with the soil, as in any National Socialist novel, is presented as the panacea for the woes of modern man. In 'Hirtennovelle', Michael decides to stay in his village and tend his animals, seeing it as a noble task to protect *das Ursprüngliche* at a time of urban and technical development.⁸ In all of these works, Wiechert pursues the back-to-nature line characteristic of his entire oeuvre. The National Socialists not only saw Weimar Germany as the age of asphalt living: they condemned it as a mechanistic era in which technological developments alienated man from traditional bonds. The "mechanistic" thinking of Weimar was also often referred to.

Here Wiechert again strikes a similar note, especially in 'Die Majorin', where recent inventions, from the motor-car to the gramophone, are presented in negative terms. And these inventions are used by people of questionable moral repute (the Majorin's son and his girlfriend), whereby a liking for smoking, drinking, make-up, flirtatiousness and sexual explicitness is seen by Wiechert as the essential ingredient of loose living.

The equation of modernity with moral decline, the belief, in other words, in a contrary movement where external progress advances in exact proportion to internal moral regression, is a conservative defence against change which aimed to halt progress by stigmatizing it. External progress has, in addition to a technological or urban aspect, a social and political dimension. Wiechert's condemnation also extends to these latter areas. In the story of Count Pernein's death in 'Das einfache Leben', Wiechert associates democratic urges with gratuitous barbarism and perversion of the natural order: the defenceless Count is brutally struck down by a worker when he attempts to end a strike on his farm. In 'Hirtennovelle', the figure of Tamara represents Wiechert's identification of female emancipation with sexual and spiritual materialism. Wiechert had already attacked female emancipation in a much earlier novel, namely 'Der Wald'. In 'Hirtennovelle' the criticism is milder, but unmistakable nonetheless. That emancipation meant the chance for constructive female self-expression is not Wiechert's belief: in the case of Tamara, who has short-cropped hair, wears sandals and is a vegetarian, emancipation means rather a grasping, intrusive and ultimately near-destructive self-projection. Her seduction of the guileless Michael is virtually a tale of evil attempting to undermine good. That Tamara has an Eastern name and comes from the city adds an anti-Bolshevist, anti-urban touch to her depiction. Wiechert's

portrayal of Tamara, in whom almost all the evils perceived by conservatism are incorporated, is not much different, in essence, to the National Socialist Hans Zöberlein's portrayal of emancipated woman in his novel 'Der Befehl des Gewissens' (1937). Wiechert, like many a National Socialist, felt threatened by female freedom, and asserted the male prerogative. All his heroes, before and after 1933, are men, and where they have a positive relationship with a woman, then it is with their mother ('Hirtennovelle' and 'Der weiße Büffel' are good examples) or a mother-figure (e.g. 'Die Majorin'). Wiechert's mothers are, admittedly, not always helplessly doting, nor are they incapable of criticising their sons (especially damning is the mother in 'Der weiße Büffel'). But their role is nonetheless predominantly one of service and worship, a self-sacrificial role; and they provide, as it were, a 'womb' into which the heroes can flee after their first rough contact with the world (both Vasudeva in 'Der weiße Büffel' and Michael in 'Hirtennovelle' flee in this manner). Nothing reflects Wiechert's conservatism more than his maternal orientation, an orientation as consistent with Third Reich attitudes as his anti-emancipation stand.

It may seem unjust to stress ideological similarities between a writer and a regime which subjected this writer to imprisonment in a concentration camp. But Thoenelt's portrait needs to be corrected however much one might sympathise with Wiechert. One cannot even completely free Wiechert of the charge of being pro-Germanic or anti-Semitic. True, neither of these elements played even a minor role in his writings after 1933 (anti-Semitism, unlike pro-Nordic thought, is not a feature of the pre-1933 novels). It is a question rather of the occasional touch or implication. But even a touch or an implication is not without significance. Thus in 'Hirtennovelle', Michael has a bull

called Bismarck and a dog called Wotan, a combination of names implying, to my mind, a fusion of the Prussian and the Germanic. In 'Der Totenwald', Wiechert's account of his experiences in Buchenwald, the narrator Johannes refers to the 'evil' faces of two Jews in his cell.⁹ Worse than this is the assertion a little later in the account that the Jews are perhaps *schuldiger...als andere Völker*.¹⁰ Johannes goes on to suggest that they could never be as guilty as the National Socialists, but the fact that Wiechert has him refer to their collective guilt, and the fact of the negligible amount of sympathy extended to Jews in 'Der Totenwald' make this book uncomfortable reading for other than the perhaps obvious reasons. Another unpleasant feature of the account is its intellectual arrogance. Johannes looks down on his captors and refers more than once to their *Unbildung* or *Halbbildung*. While hurt pride is understandable, one feels that Wiechert's indignation is an immature and in part self-exonerative reaction. A more self-critical question might have been: to what extent was 'Bildung' responsible for allowing 'Halbbildung' to come about in the first place. To what extent, indeed, was 'Bildung', in its conservative dimension, itself suffused with 'Halbbildung'?

Wiechert then is a more complicated case than Thoenelt allows for in his article. While his 1933-1945 writings exhibit humane features, their humanism as a whole must be called into question. That Wiechert, in attempting to present an alternative philosophy, seemed in part to be saying the same things as the National Socialists, and that he in some instances totally failed to recognise congruities between his and the National Socialist world view, so that these congruities - above all his hostility to the Weimar Republic - emerged unqualified again and again makes him a sadly schismatic figure. The National Socialists would not have tolerated him for so long had they not seen these

congruities. Nor would Wiechert, one assumes, have stayed in Germany had these congruities not conditioned in him an albeit subconscious agreement with aspects of the intolerant National Socialist philosophy he consciously strove to denounce. That the centenary of Wiechert's birth (he was born in 1887) led to a series of re-publications of his post-1933 novels and stories in Germany (by Ullstein and Langen Müller publishing companies) allowed the public another chance to assess a writer who was slipping into neglect. But this chance must be greeted with caution. Wiechert's lyrical praise of nature, his "back-to-the-soil" philosophy has been seen by some as earning him a right to be considered a forerunner of the contemporary "back-to-nature" trend - it must be stressed that today's back-to-nature trend is the result of an all-too-perceptible, all-too-palpable industrial destruction of our environment, while Wiechert's love of the land is the result of a conservative rejection of a modern moral and spiritual emancipation associated with urban development. That is not the same thing.

Footnotes

1. Klaus Thoenelt, Innere Emigration: Fiktion oder Wirklichkeit, in: Leid der Worte: Panorama des literarischen Nationalsozialismus, ed. by Jörg Thunecke, Bonn 1987, p. 300-320.
2. Ernst Wiechert, Der Totenwald, Frankfurt/Berlin 1988, p. 14.
3. Ernst Wiechert, Jahre und Zeiten: Erinnerungen, Frankfurt/Berlin 1989, p. 374.
4. 'Der Totenwald', p. 33.
5. Ernst Wiechert, Das einfache Leben, München/Wien 1985, p. 281.

6. Jahre und Zeiten: Erinnerungen, p. 373-374.
7. Ernst Wiechert, Der weiße Büffel, München/Wien 1983, p. 83.
8. Ernst Wiechert, Hirtennovelle, München/Wien 1988, p. 90.
9. Der Totenwald, p. 60.
10. Ibid., p. 92