

Original citation:

Allen, S. (2011). Sagt, wie soll man Stalin danken? Kurt Maetzig's Ehe im schatten (1947), Roman einer jungen ehe (1952) and the cultural politics of post-war Germany. German Life and Letters, 64(2), pp. 327-336.

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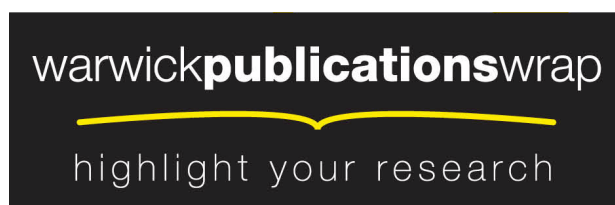
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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2010.01532.x>

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‘SAGT, WIE SOLL MAN STALIN DANKEN?’ KURT MAETZIG’S *EHE IM SCHATTEN* (1947), *ROMAN EINER JUNGEN EHE* (1952) AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF POST-WAR GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

In *Ehe im Schatten* and *Roman einer jungen Ehe* Kurt Maetzig analyses the role of the artist and the changing conceptualisation of aesthetics at two contrasting moments of political crisis. Set during the Third Reich, *Ehe im Schatten* criticises any attempt to separate art and politics, and exposes the limitations of bourgeois classical drama as a form of political resistance. But despite its radical subject-matter, the film’s melodramatic format highlights the difficulties post-war directors working for DEFA faced in breaking with the traditions of cinematography established by Ufa during the 1940s. Five years later, and in a very different political context, Maetzig revisits these issues in *Roman einer jungen Ehe*. Although the later film mobilises concepts of socialist realism in order to redefine aesthetic agendas in the early 1950s, it too relies on moments of exaggerated pathos to achieve its aims. While the film’s idealisation of working-class life in the GDR of the early 1950s was soon undermined by the political events of 1953 and 1956, its presentation of works by, among others, Lessing, Seghers, Zuckmayer, Simonov and Sartre offers a detailed and distinctive perspective on the changing dynamics of cultural politics during the immediate post-war period.

In *Ehe im Schatten* und *Roman einer jungen Ehe* analysiert Kurt Maetzig den sich wandelnden Ästhetikbegriff bzw. die Rolle des Künstlers in zwei kontrastierenden Momenten politischer Krise. Im Film *Ehe im Schatten*, der zur Zeit des Dritten Reiches spielt, wird der Versuch kritisiert, Kunst und Politik voneinander zu trennen, wobei gleichzeitig die Unzulänglichkeiten des klassischen bürgerlichen Dramas als Form politischen Widerstandes aufgezeigt werden. Trotz eines radikalen Themas verdeutlicht das melodramatische Format des Films die Schwierigkeiten für DEFA-Regisseure der Nachkriegszeit, mit den Traditionen des Ufa-Kinos der 40er Jahre zu brechen. Fünf Jahre später und in einem politisch völlig unterschiedlichen Klima widmet sich Maetzig erneut diesen Problemen in *Roman einer jungen Ehe*. Obwohl der Film auf Elemente des Sozialistischen Realismus zurückgreift, um ästhetische Prämissen der frühen 50er Jahre zu revidieren, findet sich auch hier ein übertriebener Pathos, was die erstrebte Wirkung des Films betrifft. Obwohl die Idealisierung des Daseins der DDR-Arbeiterklasse in den frühen 50er Jahren bald durch die politischen Ereignisse von 1953 und 1956 unterminiert wurde, bietet der Film eine detaillierte und spezifische Perspektive in der sich verändernden Dynamik der Kulturpolitik der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit, indem er u. a. Referenzen zu Werken von Lessing, Seghers, Zuckmayer, Simonov und Sartre herstellt.

The year 1952 represents a key moment in the development of aesthetics and visual culture in the GDR: the premiere of Maetzig’s latest film *Roman*

einer jungen Ehe in Berlin's Babylon cinema on 18 January was followed the very next day by a celebration to mark the completion of Hermann Henselmann's 'Hochhaus an der Weberwiese', a prototype building for the new architecture on the flanks of the Stalinallee. The timing of the two events was anything but coincidental, for the construction site of Berlin's first socialist boulevard provided one of the key locations for Maetzig's post-war 'Künstlerdrama' set in Berlin. Of the two, Henselmann's building has stood the test of time rather better than Maetzig's film; while the Stalinist architecture on what is now Karl-Marx-Allee has acquired a certain cachet in the architectural landscape of post-unification Berlin, Maetzig's Cold-War classic, *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, has long been forgotten. But despite its schematic narrative and formal shortcomings, this film (that even Maetzig himself subsequently dismissed as an error of judgement) remains a key historical document for an understanding of the development of cultural policy and film aesthetics during the founding years of the GDR.

Roman einer jungen Ehe was by no means Maetzig's first attempt to tackle the relationship between art and politics on screen. His desire to ensure that discussions on the role of art and culture in the reconstruction of Germany remained in the public eye during the immediate post-war years is evident even in his earliest work as editor-in-chief of DEFA's newsreel *Der Augenzeuge*. The very first edition of *Der Augenzeuge* released in February 1946 included an extended feature on Käthe Kollwitz's sculpture 'Frau als Mutter' under the rubric 'Kunstwerk der Woche', and throughout 1946 and 1947 there was almost always at least one feature on some aspect of the arts. These features fell into essentially four categories: first, reports on exiled artists returning to Berlin such as Wilhelm Furtwängler (1946, No. 3) and Alfred Döblin (1947, No. 63); second, reports on the restoration of sites embodying the cultural legacy of German classical humanism such as the re-opening of the Musikhochschule in Weimar (1946, No. 9); third, reports on exhibitions by artists whose works had been banned as 'entartet' during the Nazi era, such as the exhibition on Unter den Linden staged by the *Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung* (1946, No. 8); and finally, reports on popular culture, including Zirkus Barley's return to Berlin (1946, No. 30). Although from around 1948 onwards the guiding hand of the Soviet Military Administration's censors became increasingly evident in both the presentation and selection of items for inclusion, in 1946 the cultural-political agenda of *Der Augenzeuge* was still underpinned by a belief in the capacity of classical humanist art to provide the impetus for cultural renewal in post-war Germany.

The newsreel's report on the conference of artists held in 1946 at the Berlin Staatsoper under the slogan 'Zu neuen Ufern' – a report in which Ernst Wiechert's observation that 'An der Katastrophe eines Volkes haben die Künstler durch Schweigen oder Tun ihren Anteil gehabt' (1946, No. 3) takes pride of place – offers some indication of the impulse behind Maetzig's first 'Künstlerfilm', the hugely popular *Ehe im Schatten* of 1947.

Based on the life story of the popular actor, Joachim Gottschalk, and his Jewish wife, the actress Meta Wolff, the film attracted large audiences in all four sectors of divided Berlin and was awarded a 'Bambi' for the best film of 1947. However, not everybody was quite so convinced by its quality, for as Maetzig recalls:

When Brecht saw my first film *Ehe im Schatten* — he had just returned from emigration and people told him that there was a film which was a great success, and we immediately arranged a screening of the film for him — when the screening was over he said 'what terrible kitsch!'¹

Maetzig did not disagree fundamentally with Brecht's damning verdict. 'Echte Emotionalität ist zumindest teilweise überlagert von einem ganz unnötig sentimental Spiel der Schauspieler', he conceded, 'Da ist noch viel UFA-Stil drin.'² That this should be so is hardly surprising, for the film's credits read like a 'who's who' of German cinema from the early 1940s: Hans Schweikart, author of the treatment 'Es wird schon nicht so schlimm' on which *Ehe im Schatten* was based, had directed *Das Fräulein von Barnhelm* (1940); cameraman Friedl Behn-Grund had been the cinematographer on Wolfgang Liebenheimer's Nazi propaganda film *Ich klage an* (1941); art director Otto Erdmann had acted as set-designer for Helmut Käutner's melodrama *Romanze in Moll* (1943); and composer Wolfgang Zeller had written the score for Veit Harlan's infamous anti-Semitic film *Jud Süß* (1940).

While Maetzig was relieved to have assembled such an experienced crew to assist him on what was his first feature film, the composition of his team underlines the difficulties post-war filmmakers faced in addressing the formal traditions of Ufa's wartime melodramas. Indeed as Maetzig acknowledged some years later, breaking with the 'Ufa-Stil' of the 1940s was not simply a question of addressing new types of subject-matter but required a radically different approach to cinematography itself:

Uns wurde allmählich bewußt, daß das, was wir 'Ufa-Stil' nannten, immer mit Idealisierung, Überschminkung, Verfälschung der Lebenswirklichkeit zu tun hatte. Das waren Stilmittel der Schönmalerei, die eine illusionäre heile Welt vorspiegeln sollten.

Ich habe dieser Art der Fotografie damals teils aus Unsicherheit, teils aus Rücksicht auf die Sehgewohnheiten der Zuschauer, die ich erreichen wollte, zugestimmt.³

As these remarks suggest, Maetzig's position on *Ehe im Schatten* is often ambivalent: at times he goes as far as to suggest that the pathos in the

¹ Martin Brady 'Discussion with Kurt Maetzig', in *DEFA. East German Cinema, 1946–92*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, Oxford 1996, pp. 77–92 (p. 82).

² Günter Agde (ed.), *Kurt Maetzig: Filmarbeit. Gespräche, Reden, Schriften*, Berlin 1987, p. 36.

³ 'Neuer Zug auf alten Gleisen. Kurt Maetzig über die Ufa-Tradition', in *Das Ufa-Buch*, ed. Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg, Frankfurt a. M. 1992, pp. 470–3 (p. 471).

film was intentional and designed to elicit an emotional response on the spectators' part; while at others he seems to accept the thrust of Brecht's criticism, blaming his own inexperience for his failure to elicit a more controlled performance from the lead actress, Ilse Steppat. Contemporary reviews of *Ehe im Schatten*, however, reveal that what appealed to post-war audiences was its theme, and few were really troubled by any perceived aesthetic shortcomings in its formal composition. Writing in the *Tägliche Rundschau*, Hans Ulrich Eylau spoke for many in both East and West when he praised the film precisely on account of the 'Stärke und Unmittelbarkeit der Gesamtwirkung'.⁴

Spanning the years 1933–41, *Ehe im Schatten* re-rehearses the lives of the Gottschalks in the fictional personae of Hans and Elisabeth Maurer and focuses on their doomed attempt to survive the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime that, among other restrictions, bar Elisabeth from performing on stage. Recent scholars such as Robert Shandley have, quite rightly, objected to the film's treatment of anti-Semitism and in particular to the way in which its 'sentimental tone' allows the audience to enjoy the spectacle 'without [...] having to concentrate on the historical reasons for Elisabeth's persecution'.⁵ However, rather than interpret the film as a failed attempt on DEFA's part to offer a historically critical analysis of anti-Semitism, it is perhaps more productive to see it as the first in a series of East German films exploring the changing relationship between art and politics from an explicitly GDR perspective. For as in so many of Maetzig's subsequent films, *Ehe im Schatten* explores the question of individual moral responsibility generally, and here in particular, the responsibility of the artist at a moment of political crisis. When the troupe of actors goes on holiday in Hiddensee shortly before the Reichstag fire of 1933, Fehrenbach, the fictional director of the successful production of *Kabale und Liebe* utters the fateful words 'Solange wir hier beisammen sind, sind wir schließlich Künstler und können auf jede Politik pfeifen.' As the film shows, however, any such attempt to separate art and politics has, quite literally, fatal consequences, and it is not long before the group is split ideologically and we witness a struggle between two mutually opposed concepts of aesthetics. While the committed Nazi, Dr Blohm, bemoans the lack of suitable contemporary works that would reflect his enthusiasm for Nietzsche's *Wille zur Macht*, Hans, a conventional liberal, defends a concept of 'Humanität' that is, by and large, derived from German classical drama. Inevitably, this clash of aesthetics is focused on the figure of Elisabeth: 'Sie wollen die Lulu in ihr sehen', he tells Blohm, 'Ich sehe die Luise in ihr.'

⁴ Hans Ulrich Eylau, 'Ehe im Schatten. Ein Film aus Deutschlands dunkler Zeit', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 5 October 1947.

⁵ Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films. German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*, Philadelphia 2001, pp. 81–90 (p. 84). See also Fernand Jung 'Das Thema Antisemitismus am Beispiel des DEFA-Films *Ehe im Schatten*', in *Nationalsozialismus und Judenverfolgung in DDR-Medien*, ed. Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn 1997, pp. 45–52.

Elisabeth's Jewish origins mean, of course, that Blohm's projected vision for her can never be realised on stage; however, confined to the domestic sphere as she is by the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis (and, it should be said, by Maetzig's adherence to the cinematic conventions of melodrama) she comes to embody the passivity of Schiller's heroine more completely than at any point during her stage career.

Ehe im Schatten begins with a performance of Act V, Scene 7 of *Kabale und Liebe* in which Elisabeth's words 'ich sterbe unschuldig' anticipate the female protagonist's fate both on and off-stage; and it ends with a suicide that, though played out within the confines of their Berlin flat, is equally indebted to the final act of Schiller's drama. As Hans poisons the tea, Elisabeth embarks on a litany of death-monologues culled from the pages of Goethe, Schiller, and Büchner. At one level, her performance represents an act of release by an artist who, for years, has been denied the opportunity to perform on stage; but at another, it serves as a pessimistic commentary on the failure of classical humanist art to engage with the demands of the contemporary political situation and offer an escape from the impasse in which she finds herself. While *Kabale und Liebe* is conventionally seen as a drama about the obstacles placed in the way of love by social class during the age of absolutism, Maetzig exploits Schiller's bourgeois tragedy as a structural device through which to explore the impossibility of an interracial marriage in Germany during the Nazi period. Yet just as Ferdinand's aristocratic heritage blinds him to Luise Miller's class-bound predicament so too, in Maetzig's reworking of Schiller's play, Hans's Aryan origins prevent him – at least for much of the film – from acknowledging the dangers to which his Jewish wife is exposed. Moreover, in both *Kabale und Liebe* and *Ehe im Schatten*, the loss of personal autonomy that the female protagonists suffer as a result of the male protagonists' well-intentioned (but ultimately misguided) attempts to 'protect' them is underlined by the fact that both Luise and Elisabeth die at the hands of their respective lovers. Seen in this light, it is perhaps hardly surprising that Brecht (whose hostility to Schillerian pathos is well documented) should dismiss the film so summarily.

While *Ehe im Schatten* serves as a warning to those (both Jewish and Gentile) who would see art as a transcendent realm into which it is possible to withdraw from the contingencies of everyday fascism, it contains within it a paradox that, ultimately, remains unresolved. Rather than launch a critique of transcendent aesthetics by adopting a critical perspective on both the action and aesthetic form of *Kabale und Liebe* (somewhat in the manner that Martin Hellberg attempted in his adaptation of the drama for DEFA in 1959) Maetzig's film actively exploits Schillerian pathos in the presentation of its subject-matter. This shortcoming in the conceptualisation of *Ehe im Schatten* is further exacerbated by a combination of Friedl Behn-Grund's emotive camera-work and Wolfgang Zeller's melodramatic score. Indeed Brecht was not the only one to

object to Maetzig's attempt to elicit an emotional response to what was clearly a political problem; for as one viewer, writing in *Die Weltbühne*, noted: 'alle Versuche, durch Mobilisierung des Gefühls eine Verbesserung herbeizuführen, [sind] zum Scheitern verurteilt.'⁶

While *Ehe im Schatten* looks back at the political responsibility of the artist during the late 1930s and early 1940s, similar questions are raised five years later, albeit in a very different ideological context, in Maetzig's next film about an artist-couple, *Roman einer jungen Ehe*: 'Was geht denn uns Künstler die Politik an?' Jonas asks, in an obvious echo of Fehrenbach's fateful remark from the earlier film. Despite the popular success of *Ehe im Schatten*, Maetzig had sought to eliminate sentimentality wherever possible from his subsequent work, and the results are evident in both *Die Buntkarierten* (1949) and *Der Rat der Götter* (1950). But while *Roman einer jungen Ehe* might also be seen as a corrective to the melodramatic style that had so endeared *Ehe im Schatten* to post-war audiences in 1947, ultimately the need to bring it into line with the new doctrine of socialist realism at the start of the 1950s resulted in a work that is equally dependent on the manipulation of human emotion, and in particular, on the cultivation of a form of pathos that reaches its climax in the monumentalist performance of Kurt Barthel's poetic eulogy to Stalin towards the end of the film.

When *Roman einer jungen Ehe* was released in January 1952, contemporary reviewers were initially fairly enthusiastic: 'Ein richtiges Thema, zur rechten Zeit' one critic wrote in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*.⁷ Mindful of the difficulties DEFA was facing because of a chronic shortage of quality scripts, several commentators praised the novelist Bodo Uhse for his involvement in co-authoring the script, and urged others to follow his lead. Just how keen critics in the East were to see DEFA make a genuine break with the past and embrace a new aesthetic approach is evident in one remark to the effect that Maetzig's latest film was quite different from 'allen verkitschten Ehefilmen aus den Traumfabriken' (shorthand for both Hollywood and Ufa melodrama, though it might easily have served as a description of Maetzig's *Ehe im Schatten*); while the more critical observation that 'die Welt der Werktätigen [...] bleibt doch zu flüchtig gestreift' underlined the SED's continuing desire to assign greater prominence in post-war German film culture to representatives of the working class.⁸ Despite a reasonably favourable press, the film's schematic structure and wooden dialogue did not endear it to audiences in either East or West. In a revealing diary entry of 23 April 1951, the scriptwriter Bodo Uhse (now working on a new film project) notes 'unter allen Umständen ein Dialogstück vermeiden, wie es die "Junge Ehe" geworden ist', and made a point of boycotting the film's

⁶ Günter Brandt, 'Gerührte Filmbesucher', *Die Weltbühne*, 5–6 (1948), 136–8 (138).

⁷ 'Ein richtiges Thema zur rechten Zeit', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 26 January 1952.

⁸ Hermann Martin, 'Junge Ehe nicht mehr im Schatten', *BZ am Abend*, 21 January 1952.

premiere.⁹ Perhaps the most telling indictment of the film, however, is that, despite its near exemplary embodiment of socialist realist aesthetics, it is conspicuously absent from the list of films singled out for praise during the GDR's Second 'Film-Kongress' of September 1952.

Roman einer jungen Ehe is, above all, a film which deliberately eschews traditional models of character development and psychological interiority, and opts instead, as John Urang has argued, to make 'the protagonists' love contingent upon their politics'.¹⁰ In his own contribution to a vigorous debate entitled 'Warum gibt es keine Liebe in unseren Filmen?', published almost a year after the release of *Roman einer jungen Ehe* in *Neues Deutschland*, Maetzig displayed some sympathy with those readers who demanded that DEFA produce more films about love and who, dissatisfied with the studio's current output, were turning instead to films imported from the West. In Maetzig's view the problem lay in the tendency of DEFA's scriptwriters to see love solely as an escapist phenomenon rooted in essentially bourgeois attitudes. Starting from the view that 'kaum auf einem anderen Gebiete der menschlichen Beziehungen gibt es so viel Schutt der Vergangenheit wegzuräumen, wie auf dem der Liebe', Maetzig used the platform of *Neues Deutschland* to promote a new 'post-bourgeois' concept of on-screen love:

Unsere Liebe unterscheidet sich schon heute von der der untergehenden Bürgerwelt. [...] In dem großen Kampf, der heute zwischen dem Alten und dem Neuen tobt, hilft einer dem anderen, das Alte in sich zu überwinden und das Neue zu erkennen. Und so findet sich in jeder echten Liebe unserer Tage diese 'dem anderen die Hand reichen, ihn herausreißen auf eine neue Höhe.' Deshalb spiegelt eine echte Liebesgeschichte von heute die Veränderungen unseres gesellschaftlichen, moralischen, körperlichen und intellektuellen Lebens wider.¹¹

In this programmatic statement the ideological underpinning of *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, is clearly discernible. For here, as in so many of Maetzig's other films, it is the female protagonist who guides her male counterpart to an understanding – and acceptance – of a radically alternative social structure. However, as Maetzig was to discover, the subordination of romantic love to the demands of political ideology was an approach that cinema audiences in the East had difficulty warming to; and of the two films he had constructed around the theme of marriage, critics and audiences alike showed a marked preference for the more conventional approach of the earlier *Ehe im Schatten*.

⁹ Bodo Uhse, *Reise- und Tagebücher*, Berlin 1981, 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 27 and 70.

¹⁰ John Griffith Urang, 'Realism and Romance in the East German Cinema, 1952–1962', *Film History*, 18/1 (2006), 88–103 (89).

¹¹ Kurt Maetzig, 'Über die Liebe in unseren Filmen. Eröffnung einer Diskussion', in Agde, pp. 243–6 (pp. 243–4). (First published as 'Warum gibt es keine Liebe in unseren Filmen?', *Neues Deutschland*, 1 February 1953.)

Contemporary reviews also point to a further reason for the film's failure to connect with mainstream cinema-goers, namely its focus on the subtleties of post-war cultural politics in the occupied zones of Berlin. Yet what critics at the time saw as a weakness is precisely what makes the film so fascinating for film historians today. Although *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is often regarded as a symptom of, rather than solution to, the difficulties DEFA was experiencing in the early 1950s, it remains, as Detlef Kannapin has also suggested, a vital source of information about attitudes towards the Cold War in the founding years of the GDR.¹² The rigid East-West binary that lies at the heart of *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is typical of many of DEFA's productions from the 1950s and early 1960s, and reflects Maetzig's claim that its main concern was 'die Zerreiung des Vaterlandes und die Mglichkeit seiner Wiedervereinigung'.¹³ In its scrutiny of the careers of two artists from the East and the West, the film also offers historians a unique insight into the cultural politics of divided Germany during the years 1946–50, but at the same time reflects the development of Maetzig's own conceptualisation of aesthetics or, as he terms it, 'der Weg des Knstlers zum Volk'.¹⁴ As the film unfolds, we are presented with a range of literary and dramatic works, some real, some imaginary, and invited to reflect on the different relationship between politics and aesthetics in the Eastern and Western zones of occupation in Berlin. For while Maetzig went to some lengths to claim (somewhat disingenuously) that *Roman einer jungen Ehe* was not a *drame à clef* ('es ging dem Autor, dem Regisseur und den Schauspielern nie darum, bestimmte Personen aus der Wirklichkeit auf die Leinwand zu bringen'),¹⁵ almost all the works quoted in the film played a key role in the cultural politics of post-war Germany.

The first such work is Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. After Agness is introduced to Jochen at the *Mwe* – the artists' club situated, appropriately enough, on the border between East and West in Berlin Mitte – she is soon recruited for the role of Recha in a production of *Nathan der Weise* being staged in the Western sector of the city. While Maetzig's decision to embed the production of *Nathan der Weise* in the film reflects the director's on-going engagement with questions of Jewish identity, it also has a symbolic function insofar as post-war revivals of Lessing's drama of religious tolerance marked the collapse of National Socialist ideology in the theatre and the start of a new era of tolerance tempered with remorse.

For the cultural theorists of the Third Reich, Lessing's work had occupied an ambiguous position in the National Socialist literary canon. Although plays such as *Die Juden* (1754) and *Nathan der Weise* (1779) disappeared from the theatrical repertoire and school reading lists, Lessing's standing

¹² Detlef Kannapin, 'Am Nullpunkt des Films', *WerkstattGeschichte*, 30 (2001), 87–95.

¹³ Kurt Maetzig 'Unsere Absicht', *DEFA-Pressedienst*, 1/12 (1951), 7–11 (7).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

in the tradition of German letters meant that other works such as *Philotas* (1759) and *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767) were reinterpreted and assimilated into the prevailing ideologies of heroism and nation.¹⁶ But despite the (mis)appropriation of these and other classic works for the stage by the Nazis, in 1945 Johannes R. Becher, the leader of the Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands, had continued to promote a revival of the German classics as a means of bringing about the intellectual and democratic rebirth of Germany in a way that, superficially at least, appeared non-partisan:

Dieses reiche Erbe des Humanismus, der Klassik, das reiche Erbe der Arbeiterbewegung müssen wir nunmehr in der politisch moralischen Haltung unseres Volkes eindeutig, kraftvoll, überzeugend, leuchtend zum Ausdruck bringen. Unserer Klassik ist niemals eine klassische Politik gefolgt. Im Gegensatz, wir haben in unseren politischen Handlungen dem Vermächtnis unserer Besten stets zuwider gehandelt. Wir haben niemals den jenen hohen Kulturleistungen gemäßen politischen Ausdruck gefunden. Aus diesem unheilvollen Widerspruch zwischen Geist und Macht müssen wir heraus.¹⁷

The initial enthusiasm for this type of cultural agenda was reflected in the numerous productions of *Nathan der Weise* in the years 1945–9. Directed by Fritz Wisten and with Paul Wegener in the title role, Lessing's drama was the first post-war production to be staged at the Deutsches Theater on 7 September 1945.

Given the historic significance of the production at the Deutsches Theater in the East it is striking that the fictitious production of *Nathan der Weise* featured in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* takes place in 1946 and is quite unambiguously located in the West (in Möbius's 'Westend Theater'). Maetzig's decision to focus on a production in the West in 1947 rather than the East in 1945 is symptomatic of a growing desire in the East to expose the limitations of classical bourgeois humanism as a means of tackling the legacy of fascism, and to move towards more contemporary forms of drama. As Becher had acknowledged in his speech promoting the Kulturbund, one of the most difficult issues for advocates of German classicism was precisely its failure to combat the rise of fascist politics, and the fragility of such models of tolerance is hinted at in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* when the anti-Semitic film director 'Hartmann' turns up at Möbius's premiere. Based on Maetzig's own experience of the first screening of *Ehe im Schatten* in the West (when Veit Harlan and his wife Kristina Söderbaum

¹⁶ See Ann Schmiesing, 'Lessing and the Third Reich', in *A Companion to the Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing*, ed. Barbara Fischer and Thomas C. Fox, Rochester, NY 2005, pp. 261–80, and Jo-Jacqueline Eckhardt, 'Das Lessing-Bild im Dritten Reich', *Lessing Yearbook*, 23 (1991), 69–78.

¹⁷ Johannes R. Becher, 'Ansprache', in *Manifest des Kulturbunds zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*, Berlin 1945, p. 40.

appeared at Hamburg's Waterloo Cinema only to be thrown out by the manager), this thinly-concealed reference to the director of such infamous Nazi propaganda films as *Jud Süß* (1940) and *Kolberg* (1945) highlights one of the problems with which all those working in the arts were confronted in the immediate post-war years, namely how to deal with those whose careers had been compromised by working for the Nazi culture industry. When Möbius reflects on his rage at discovering Hartmann in the audience – 'auf Toleranz war alles abgestimmt, und da werde ich gezwungen intolerant zu sein' – it is left to the socialist Burmeister to remind him of what lies in store for those whose well-intentioned humanity prompts them to tolerate intolerance: 'Wollen Sie den Anti-humanen gegenüber human auftreten?'

The brief extract from Act 3 Scene 2 of *Nathan der Weise* that is embedded in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* encapsulates the overall structure of Maetzig's film. For it is there that Recha (Agnes) first engages the Templar (Jochen) in dialogue after he rescues her from the burning building. Following this scene, the Templar, a figure whose rescue of the Jewess Recha is motivated by a deep love of humanity in general, is plunged into turmoil by the conflict between his loyalty to his Christian roots on the one hand, and his love for the Jewess on the other. However, by revealing the Templar and Recha to be brother and sister, Lessing brings about a harmonious resolution to this potential conflict. The parallel with the relationship between Jochen and Agnes in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is compelling. Just as the ring parable in *Nathan der Weise* suggests a way in which the religious differences between Jew, Christian and Muslim might be transcended, so too in its post-war context the play might be read as appealing to a shared notion of humanity in which the political differences between East and West might also be overcome. Yet, as the story of the marriage between Jochen and Agnes underlines, this wish remains at best utopian; for Jochen's humanity and well-intentioned (but misguided) sense of artistic freedom are shown to be incapable of resisting the exploitative approaches of the unscrupulous capitalist entrepreneur, Pflisch. And while it is Jochen who initially 'rescues' Agnes (albeit from the snow-covered ruins of Berlin in 1945 rather than the flames of a burning building), ultimately it is *she* who, with the help of her Nathan-like adoptive father, the philosopher-plasterer Papa Dulz, rescues *him*, and persuades him to embrace the Marxist version of humanity to which she and her ersatz family in the East subscribe.

While the inclusion of *Nathan der Weise* highlights the limitations of classical bourgeois humanism in tackling the legacy of fascism, the next project on which both Jochen and Agnes are involved underlines the importance of taking control of the institutions through which cultural values are transmitted. Towards the end of 1947, the young couple are offered parts in Hedda Zinner's radio adaptation of Anna Segher's novel *Das siebte Kreuz* (1942) that is to be broadcast by the Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) from their Heidelberger Platz studio in the British

sector of Berlin. The return of the anti-fascist author, Anna Seghers, from exile in May 1947 had been a major event in the Soviet zone and had featured in one of the earliest editions of *Der Augenzeuge* (1947, No. 53) edited by Maetzig himself. Like most of the cultural references in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* – notably the acquittal of Veit Harlan ('Hartmann') following his trial of March 1949 – this sequence is also based on an actual historical event; on 2 December 1948, Zinner's adaptation of *Das siebte Kreuz* had indeed been broadcast by NWDR's Berlin studio in their series 'Hörspiele der Zeit'.¹⁸ At the time Hedda Zinner had been working freelance for the Berliner Rundfunk which, even though its studios were located in the British sector in Masurenallee, was controlled by the Soviet Military Administration. Like a number of others working in radio and making the daily trip to the city's western sectors, Zinner also freelanced for NWDR where, at the instigation of the politically open-minded head of drama, Ludwig Cremer, she had been commissioned to produce and direct a radio adaptation of Segher's novel. However, as Zinner recounts, despite being approved by the British cultural officer, her production so incensed Hans Haberfeld, the controller of NWDR's Berlin studio, that after the recording he declared: 'Künstlerisch habe ich keine Einwände, aber dieses Stück wird bei mir nicht laufen.'¹⁹ Forced by his superiors in Hamburg to proceed with the broadcast, Haberfeld resorted to the only remaining option available to him, namely prefacing the transmission with an anti-Soviet diatribe. Some flavour of these introductory remarks is hinted at in Maetzig's re-working of the episode in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* when the radio announcer introduces the play with the words: 'Was Anna Seghers gegen die Nazis geschrieben hat, soll hier gegen die Kommunisten gerichtet werden – auch wenn es Frau Seghers nicht passt.' And although the well-intentioned Möbius attempts to pacify the enraged Agnes by appealing once again to the capacity of art to transcend politics – 'Schließlich spricht doch die künstlerische Leistung für sich selbst' – by the end of the film he too is forced to recognise his own error of judgement as the repertoire of his 'Westend Theater' is almost wholly subject to the ideological requirements of Pflisch's capitalist agenda.

The episode revolving around *Das siebte Kreuz* in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* reveals Maetzig's sceptical view of often well-intentioned – but in his view misguided – attempts to promote East-West cooperation on post-war cultural projects. It is also no coincidence that around the time the film was conceived in late 1950, the studio management at DEFA was actively seeking to dispense with employees who continued to live in the West and who, in their eyes, were thus unwilling to commit themselves unequivocally

¹⁸ See Hans-Ulrich Wagner, 'Der gute Wille, etwas Neues zu schaffen.' *Das Hörspielprogramm in Deutschland von 1945 bis 1949*, Potsdam 1997, pp. 251 and 254.

¹⁹ See Hedda Zinner, 'Erlebtes aus den Anfangsjahren des demokratischen Rundfunks', *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Rundfunks. Schriftenreihe des DDR-Rundfunks*, 13/4 (1979), 27–45 (42).

to the East. The impossibility of bringing any such East-West partnerships to fruition is further underlined by the film's reference to the Marshall Plan – a stark reminder that currency reform and the subsequent division of Germany was less than two years away. 'Man lebt in einer Stadt', Jochen remarks, 'und hat das Gefühl in zwei Erdteilen zu leben.' As the Cold War really starts to bite, Jochen and Agnes no longer work together on any joint projects but become increasingly polarised both personally and professionally.

From this point on the film's cultural references are restricted to works that underscore, rather than transcend, the ideological differences between the two emerging states. The first of these concerns Jochen's involvement in a production of Carl Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General* (1947) at Möbius's 'Westend Theater'. Whereas in *Ehe im Schatten* the banning of Zuckmayer's comedy *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (1931) is offered as evidence of the Nazi regime's repressive cultural policies, in *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, the enthusiasm with which Möbius's production of *Des Teufels General* is greeted is cited as evidence of revanchist tendencies in the West: 'Der Beifall gilt des Hitlers General', Agnes pointedly remarks to her husband. It is hardly surprising that Zuckmayer's play should feature so prominently in *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, for during the years 1947–50 it was the most performed drama in the British and American zones of Germany with well over 3,000 performances;²⁰ by contrast, in the East – where the play's positive depiction of Harras and the Wehrmacht provoked outrage – performances were not permitted. No doubt the popularity of Boleslaw Barlog's 1948 production of *Des Teufels General* in West Berlin's Schloßpark Theater was due in no small way to its re-affirmation of 'the good German'.²¹ Yet Maetzig's critique – as encapsulated in Agnes's reproach 'Du hast mir mal gesagt, du würdest dich nie wieder im Leben in eine Nazi-Uniform stecken lassen' – suggests that what mattered most at the time of filming *Roman einer jungen Ehe* was not the play's apologist take on the crimes of the Third Reich – essentially the objection in 1947 – but the rather more pressing question of remilitarisation in the Federal Republic (an issue that was being openly discussed in the press in both East and West following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950).

Agnes, by contrast, opts for a role in Constantin Simonov's *The Russian Question*, (1947), a work that, historically speaking, was first performed in a German version on 3 May 1947 at Wolfgang Langhoff's Deutsches Theater in the East. Directed by Falk Harnack, whose anti-fascist film *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (1951) would become the first DEFA production to be banned,

²⁰ Werner Mittenzwei, Manfred Berger *et al.* (eds), *Theater in der Zeitenwende. Zur Geschichte des Dramas und Schauspieltheaters in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1945–1968*, 2 vols, Berlin 1972, vol. 1, p. 62.

²¹ Kannapin (89) argues persuasively that Möbius is modelled on Boleslaw Barlog, the artistic director of the Schloßpark Theater in Berlin-Steglitz.

Simonov's play constituted a polemical attack on the manipulation of the American press by monopoly capitalism. Described by Paul Rilla as a work which 'den Begriff des politischen Theaters einer kaum noch erlebten Ereignisnähe ins Recht setzt',²² *The Russian Question* was the subject of more than thirty different productions in the East between 1947 and 1949. Staging the play in Berlin was a calculated act of provocation on the part of the Soviets, and both Frederic Mellinger, theatre officer for the American sector, and Colonel Frank Howley, head of the US Military Government in Berlin, lodged protests with the director of the Deutsches Theater, Wolfgang Langhoff, and the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Four-Power Kommandatura respectively. Although, predictably enough, these protests came to nothing, the Berlin premiere of *The Russian Question* – like that of Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General* – came to represent a defining moment in the history of post-war theatre in Berlin, and one which is captured in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* when Agnes's actor-friend Jonas voices his fears that, having performed in Simonov's play, he will never be offered a part on a stage in the West. Nor were such fears unfounded, for in the wake of Harnack's 1947 production, several theatres in the East lost the rights to stage plays by American authors, and black-lists of politically suspect actors soon followed.²³

Just before Agnes is offered a role in *The Russian Question*, she briefly considers taking a part in a production of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les mains sales* (1948). While Zuckmayer and Simonov are situated unambiguously at opposite ends of the political spectrum, Sartre's role in the cultural politics of the Cold War was considerably more complex. Despite Sartre's critical view of the role of the USA and the Marshall Plan in the reconstruction of post-war Europe, the emphasis on radical ethical autonomy in his philosophy (and corresponding rejection of the more extreme versions of Marxist historical determinism) meant that any alliance with more orthodox-minded members of the Communist Party (both in France and beyond) would inevitably be a precarious arrangement. In his essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, serialised in *Les temps modernes* over the course of 1947, he became a *persona non grata* in the East following his assertion that Stalinist communism was incompatible with the honest practice of the literary craft. In the light of his often unpredictable left-wing views, it is hardly surprising that when *Les mouches* (1943) was first staged in German (in a production directed by Gustaf Gründgens in Düsseldorf in November 1947), it became the subject of a polemical discussion in the left-leaning periodical *Theater der Zeit*. Now relocated to a German context, Sartre's play about politically-motivated murder, collaboration, and resistance in Vichy France, acquired an altogether new dimension. Alexander Dymshitz (the Soviet cultural

²² Paul Rilla, 'Die Russische Frage', *Berliner Zeitung*, 6 May 1947.

²³ For a more detailed discussion of the furore caused by the production see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects. The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy During the Cold War*, Oxford 2005, pp. 105–10.

officer with close connections to DEFA) was just one of a number of critics in the Soviet zone who accused Sartre of a reactionary concept of freedom rooted in anarchic individualism.²⁴ Even before the premiere of Jürgen Fehling's production of January 1948 in Berlin's Hebbel-Theater in the West, Anton Ackerman demanded that the play be banned.²⁵

While it might well be argued that – even in Fehling's Berlin production of *Les mouches* – no contemporary reference to Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party was implied, Sartre's portrayal of Illyria and the question of political assassination in *Les mains sales* was a very different matter. Although some years later, in an interview of 1964 with Paolo Caruso, Sartre claimed that the play was never intended to be anti-communist,²⁶ many in the East thought otherwise in 1948. This negative critical reception is mirrored in Agnes's own interpretation of the play when she declines the role offered her on the grounds that 'Es [= *Les mains sales*] ist gegen den Osten gerichtet. . . und es ist gegen alles Gute, Anständige und Schöne im Menschen gerichtet.' However, while Maetzig's film reflects the hostility towards Sartre in the Soviet zone during the late 1940s, it was not long before political events on the world stage called for a revision of such attitudes. In 1952, Sartre mounted a defence of the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions in his essay 'Les Communistes et la Paix' and attended the Vienna Congress for World Peace in December of that year. The following year, in an article entitled 'Les animaux malades de la rage' published on 22 June 1953 in *Libération* he denounced the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the USA as a 'legal lynching' that, in his view, highlighted the Americans' incapacity to assume leadership of the Western world. The execution of the Rosenbergs for conspiracy to commit espionage and for allegedly supplying the Soviet Union with information concerning atomic weapons had also featured briefly in the sixth edition of *Der Augenzeuge* in 1953. Accordingly, in the light of what it termed 'Sartres Eintreten für das Ehepaar Rosenberg und seine aktive Teilnahme an der Weltfriedensbewegung',²⁷ the studio management at DEFA requested some cuts to *Roman einer jungen Ehe* which, though never actually carried out, were designed to make it impossible for the viewer to discern either Sartre's name or the title of the play.

Given the numerous references in Maetzig's film to contemporary cultural and political events and its critique of artistic performances in the western sectors of Berlin, it is tempting to see the film as a forerunner of the

²⁴ Alexander Dymshitz, 'Warum mir das nicht gefällt – Jean-Paul Sartres *Fliegen*', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 30 November 1947. See also David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945–1949*, Stanford 1992, pp. 462–4.

²⁵ Anton Ackermann, 'Die existentialistischen *Fliegen* Jean-Paul Sartres', *Neues Deutschland*, 4 January 1948.

²⁶ Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka (eds), *Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre on Theater*, tr. Frank Jelinek, London 1976, pp. 210–25.

²⁷ 'Aktenvermerk' of 10 December 1952 (BArch Abt. DDR (Kultur) DR I MfK-HV Film 644).

'dokumentarische Spielfilme' for which DEFA came to be so well known. Through its critique of *Nathan der Weise*, *Des Teufels General*, *Les mains sales*, and the co-production of *Das siebte Kreuz* it offers a conventional Marxist critique of bourgeois culture and capitalist modes of cultural production. At the same time, through the device of a film-within-a-film, *Roman einer jungen Ehe* also seeks to define an aesthetic agenda for an alternative and (allegedly) politically progressive conceptualisation of aesthetics. By and large this vision is explicitly articulated in the film by Burmeister who, in an often excruciatingly patronising fashion, attempts to re-educate Agnes towards a new understanding of stagecraft. Accordingly on the film-set of 'Die ersten Jahre' – the fictitious 'DEFA-style' film for which Agnes has been recruited in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* – he castigates her for her out-moded acting-style: 'Die Helga ist kein Gretchen, kein Käthchen. Du sollst ein junges Mädchen von heute spielen.' And when she suggests that the function of art is to distract people from the sufferings caused by the war, he wastes no time in explaining that 'Die Kunst darf doch kein Irrlicht sein, das die Menschen in den Sumpf lockt, [sondern] eine helle Fackel auf dem nebeligen Weg in die Zukunft.'

However, despite the quasi-Brechtian ring of Burmeister's programmatic statement, *Roman einer jungen Ehe* never quite adheres to the aesthetic agenda it appears (at least theoretically) to endorse. Although the master-plasterer Papa Dulz – an idealised caricature of a working-class figure – congratulates Agnes on her contribution to Burmeister's film, and praises it as a work that appeals to both 'Herz und Kopf', the radical potential of such a re-conceptualisation of art is grotesquely undermined by the sequence of the 'Richtfest' where, accompanied by a mass choir in the background, Agnes performs KuBa's (= Kurth Barthel's) eulogy to Stalin before a crowd of approving construction workers. And when this performance reaches its emotional climax with the rhetorical question 'Sagt, wie soll man Stalin danken?' it is she who articulates the equally rhetorical answer: 'Wir gaben dieser Straße seinen Namen.' However, given that *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is often cited as an example of the extent to which the DEFA studio was increasingly in thrall to Andrei Zhdanov's doctrine of socialist realism, it is important to note that this sequence in particular was the cause of considerable disagreement within the studio hierarchy. Maetzig's handwritten record of a discussion on 24 July 1951 with Alfred Wilkening, Falk Harnack, and Slatan Dudow reveals that all three regarded the sequence in question as one of the film's weakest elements, and proposed cutting it radically.²⁸ In addition, Wilkening objected to the negative depiction in

²⁸ 'Diskussion *Roman einer jungen Ehe*. 24. 07. 51', Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kurt Maetzig-Archiv, 245. A record of an earlier discussion held on 28 September 1950 reveals that Maetzig was accused of promoting the division of Germany in his project and was explicitly advised to adopt a more 'neutrale Position': see 'Aktennotiz über die Besprechung vom 28. September 1950

the film of all those who opted for the West, while Harnack argued for a more positive depiction of the politically undecided actor Jonas on the grounds that, in 1951, most actors were moving not to the East but to the West.

That Maetzig should have argued for the retention of the 'Richtfest' sequence with the hymn to Stalin is all the more remarkable given that, less than a year before the film's release, he had publicly condemned such instances of 'Schematismus' in DEFA's output: 'Schematische Darstellungen [...] sind kunstfeindlich und kunstfremd. Solche schematischen Darstellungen finden sich besonders in den Massenszenen unserer Filme.'²⁹ Indeed it is hard to think of a sequence that is more 'kunstfeindlich' than Agnes's address to the massed construction workers at the end of *Roman einer jungen Ehe*. Ultimately, however, Maetzig's desire for 'Parteilichkeit in der Spielfilmregie' out-weighed his fear of 'Schematismus';³⁰ and in attempting to avoid a repeat of the Ufa-style sentimentality that had so coloured his earlier 'Künstlerdrama' *Ehe im Schatten* – 'Sentimentalität' he suggests is the opposite of 'eines kräftigen klar bestimmten und tiefen Gefühls'³¹ – he was to fall into the trap of embracing a new form of pathos, albeit one rooted in a largely uncritical acceptance of socialist realist aesthetics.

It would be only a matter of time before the sentimentalised projection of the relationship between ordinary working people on the one hand, and GDR artists and intelligentsia on the other, would be exposed for the fantasy it was. In the uprising of June 1953 – just eighteen months after the film's release – those construction workers who, in the fictional world of Maetzig's film, had applauded Agnes so enthusiastically, went on strike. And with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes on 25 February 1956 the days of *Roman einer jungen Ehe* were numbered. Although on 21 February 1956, the Hauptverwaltung Film had reviewed the film and concluded that it could continue to be exhibited in cinemas for another year, the political tide was turning rapidly. On 23 June 1956 a letter from the GDR's distribution agency, Progress Film-Vertrieb, reported that a screening in Erfurt had prompted what it euphemistically refers to as 'Stalin-Diskussionen'.³² Just two days later DEFA withdrew the film from circulation altogether on the grounds that 'In der Schlußphase des Films wird das gesellschaftlich Neue fast nur mit der Person des Genossen Stalin

um 13.30 Uhr in der Möwe zwischen Herrn Dr. von Gordon und Dr. Kurt Maetzig im Beisein von Günter Reisch. Thema: Ideen zum Film "Ehe im Westen", Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kurt-Maetzig-Archiv, 166.

²⁹ Kurt Maetzig, 'Probleme des realistischen Filmschaffens', in *Auf neuen Wegen. 5 Jahre fortschrittlicher deutscher Film*, ed. Deutscher Filmverlag Berlin, Berlin 1951, pp. 30–39 (pp. 36–7).

³⁰ Kurt Maetzig, 'Über Parteilichkeit in der Spielfilmregie', in *Agde*, pp. 222–31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³² Letter to Hauptverwaltung Film from VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb of 23 June 1956 (BArch Abt. DDR (Kultur) DR I MfK-HV Film 644).

in Verbindung gebracht. [...] Diese Szenen unterliegen sehr stark dem Personenkult und sind aus diesem Grunde politisch schädlich.³³

Quite understandably, *Roman einer jungen Ehe* has been rejected by many as a crude propaganda film offering an embarrassingly uncritical view of Stalin; likewise, few would disagree that just as Maetzig's treatment of Jewish identity in *Ehe im Schatten* is steeped in pathos so too his portrayal of working-class life in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is irredeemably sentimental. Despite such shortcomings, however, it remains a key work for scholars of East German film history. For in few films of this, or indeed any other, period in DEFA's history is the viewer exposed to such a diverse range of literary works both by German authors past and present, and by contemporary foreign authors actively involved in the reshaping of cultural life in post-war Europe. Seen in this context *Roman einer jungen Ehe* represents a calculated attempt on the part of DEFA to engage with international developments in the cultural sphere, while at the same time creating a new discursive space in which an alternative left-wing film culture could evolve in Germany. Seen in this light, both *Roman einer jungen Ehe* and the earlier *Ehe im Schatten* constitute the first contributions to a series of DEFA films – a series that would include Konrad Wolf's artist films of the early 1970s *Goya* (1971) and *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* (1974) – in which the viewer is invited to reflect on the changing roles of art and the artist in the post-war period.³⁴

³³ 'Zusatzprotokoll zum Protokoll Nr 1956/54' (BArch Abt. DDR (Kultur) DR I MfK-HV Film 644).

³⁴ I would like to acknowledge the help of the following in preparing this article: Herr Karl Sand (Deutsches Theater, Berlin); Frau Ute Klawitter (Bundesfilmarchiv, Berlin); Herr Wolfgang Lux and Herr Nicky Rittmeyer (Akademie der Künste, Berlin); and Dr Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hans-Bredow-Institut, Universität Hamburg).