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The novelist and Bismarck
with special reference
to Fontane, Freytag and Spielhagen

A Thesis Submitted
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Durham

by

W.M.J. GOLDSMITH

Durham 1976

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Abstract

The thesis is an examination of the impact of the personality and policies of Bismarck on three contemporary novelists Fontane, Freytag and Spielhagen and the presentation of Bismarck in their novels. Of the three writers Spielhagen, a radical democrat, was the most sustained critic of Bismarck. Spielhagen believed passionately in individual liberty and held that this would only be fully realised for all members of society in a democratic republic. The political and social order that Bismarck sought to perpetuate was the antithesis of his ideal. Spielhagen's opposition to Bismarck was, thus, fundamental and highly political. He also objected to the demise of humanism and the consolidation of authoritarian attitudes that resulted from Bismarck's despotic regime. In his novels Spielhagen's political commitment is reflected in the considerable space that is given over to the discussion of Bismarck's political aims, methods and influence. Within the detailed panorama of German society that he paints Spielhagen is concerned to gauge the destructive influence of Bismarck on humanist values.

Freytag, a moderate constitutional liberal, was also a life-long opponent and critic of Bismarck. He was in the van-guard of the liberal struggle to remove Bismarck and bring down the monarchical system of government in Prussia in the 1860's and he bitterly resented Bismarck's ruthless defence of monarchical and aristocratic power. None of Bismarck's later achievements, not even the unification of Germany, quite reconciled Freytag to the illiberal Bismarck system and he continued to hope that Bismarck and his autocratic regime would in time give way to a truly liberal system of government. There is no discussion of Bismarck in Freytag's novels: on the defensive after 1866 he resorted to the historical novel in order to propagate values and ideals which he saw threatened by Bismarck's influence.

Fontane confessed to being an admirer of Bismarck as statesman, orator, humorist and personality. Bismarck's despotism

was, in Fontane's view, fully justified by his achievements for Germany. Only later in life - after Bismarck had resigned - did Fontane's dislike of Bismarck's petty autocratic style and growing megalomania escalate into outright rejection of Bismarck. From the more radical democratic view-point he assumed in the latter years of his life he judged Bismarck to be a petty autocrat. Even his achievements were devoid of moral significance for the progress of mankind. Fontane's concern with a detailed evocation of the political and intellectual atmosphere that prevailed in the Berlin upper class of his day resulted in a number of memorable portraits of conservative and liberal opponents of Bismarck, but only in the figure of Innstetten in 'Effi Briest' did he begin to explore the implications of Bismarck's despotic regime for human values in German society.

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Introduction

The impact of Bismarck on three prominent novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century Theodor Fontane, Gustav Freytag and Friedrich Spielhagen - all contemporaries of Bismarck and all very much involved in the political and intellectual life of the Bismarck era - is examined with the aim of exploring each writer's picture of Bismarck and assessment of his influence on German society. The topic is, thus, but one aspect of the much more complex question of the consequences of Bismarck's regime for the evolution of Germany.

The question of Bismarck's influence on the course of German history is the subject of continuing controversy, particularly with regard to the problem of 'continuity' in German history.¹ Was the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the establishment of a fascist dictatorship in Germany an unfortunate malfunction of an otherwise healthy political system, the 'Betriebsunfall' theory? Or was it the culmination of developments - especially with regard to the virulence of anti-democratic attitudes in the Weimar period - that had their roots in earlier periods of German history, above all, the Bismarck era?

During the years in which Bismarck dominated the German political scene significant changes took place in the political climate: ideas and goals which had been axiomatic in liberal middle class circles in the 1860's were controversial in the 1880's and obsolete in the 1890's. By the late 1880's liberalism as a political and social philosophy had been largely discarded as impractical or irrelevant by the middle classes who now, in the main, supported a nationalist conservative platform. This shift resulted from Bismarck's success in integrating constitutional liberalism into a pseudo-parliamentary system by his pursuit of nationalist policies, above all, by his

unification of the north and south German states to create the 'Deutsches Reich'. The one-time conflict between the aristocracy and the middle class gave way to an informal alliance of the two classes united against the fourth estate. As a result of this re-alignment attitudes were drastically revised while new ideas, such as social darwinism, emerged and took hold. The Bismarckian state with its monarchical authoritarian structure seemed to many to represent the political system best suited to the German national character with its need of leadership. Bismarck's success in preventing German liberalism from achieving its goal of parliamentary government preserved in Germany a political system that was largely feudal in structure and helped to perpetuate authoritarian political attitudes, as exemplified in Heinrich Mann's novel 'Der Untertan'. The prestige of Bismarck's autocratic regime - and the Bismarck cult that was associated with it - accentuated and consolidated this trend towards authoritarianism.

How did writers react to political changes of this magnitude in the political and intellectual culture of their age? Did they perceive the changes as problematical? Did they perceive Bismarck as a problem figure and did they regard his achievements and influence as beneficial or deleterious? Were they as writers (as is sometimes suggested) more sensitive than most of their contemporaries to the implications of these changes? Are they, as novelists, able to shed in their picture of contemporary social reality any useful light on the evolution of political values and attitudes in German society in the Bismarck era? Did they regard Bismarck^{as} a significant enough figure to include in their novels? If so, what picture do they present of him and how does it relate to their own private views of Bismarck.² These are the questions and interrelationships that I have attempted to examine.

All three novelists were in middle age when Bismarck stepped onto the political stage and began to exert an influence on the course of events in Germany. All three writers were 'liberals'

of one kind or another and had already established a set of moral values long before Bismarck began to influence the moral and intellectual climate in Germany. The reaction of each writer to Bismarck is, therefore, a reaction to the challenge or threat that Bismarck and the values he stood for represented to the author's own ideals and values.

The extent to which Bismarck was a major preoccupation varies from Spielhagen - who was convinced that Bismarck was exerting a destructive influence on German society and tried to gauge the progress of this influence at every step by painting vast canvasses of German society - through Freytag, who although opposed to Bismarck, dealt only very indirectly with the problem of Bismarck's influence, to Fontane who was broadly in support of Bismarck and his policies and included discussion of Bismarck in his novels as part of his evocation of contemporary Berlin society. Only in the last decade of his life with the onset of a more critical awareness of Bismarck's influence did Fontane depict a specifically Bismarckian figure, the character of Innstetten in 'Effi Briest'.

Fontane and Bismarck

Fontane and Bismarck

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A. Fontane's early life and political development

I : 1819-1847

a. 1819-1842

Theodor Fontane was born in the small garrison town of Neuruppin in the Mark Brandenburg on 30th December 1819, the son of a dispensing chemist of Huguenot descent. In 1827 when he was eight years old the family moved to the small port of Swinemünde on the island of Usedom on the Baltic coast. Here Fontane spent his childhood, so graphically described in his autobiographical novel 'Meine Kinderjahre'. In 1832 he was sent back to Neuruppin to attend the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Gymnasium there, but in the autumn of the following year he went to Berlin where he was a pupil at Klöden's 'Gewerbeschule' for three years. He left the school in 1836 and became apprenticed to a certain Wilhelm Rose, the owner of a chemist's shop 'Zum weißen Schwan' in Spandauer Street, to train to become a chemist like his father. Fontane qualified as 'Apotheker-Gehülfe' on 9th January 1840.¹ He finally qualified as an 'Apotheker erster Klasse' in 1847.

Even as a pupil of the 'Gewerbeschule' Fontane had regularly spent his free time in the 'Lesecafés', where he read mainly literary journals

"...den 'Beobachter an der Spree', den 'Freimütigen', den 'Gesellschafter' und vor allem mein Leib- und Magenblatt, den 'Berliner Figaro'." (2)

Later, as an apprentice, he frequented Stehely and d'Heureuse, reading more weighty political newspapers such as the 'Kölnische', 'Augsburger' and the 'Leipziger Allgemeine'.³ He was also an avid reader of Gutzkow's 'Telegraph für Deutschland', an important vehicle for the ideas and style of 'Jungdeutschland'.⁴

"Ich zählte, so jung und unerfahren ich war, doch ganz zu denen, die das Anbrechen einer neuen Zeit begrüßten, und fühlte mich unendlich glücklich, an dem erwachenden politischen Leben teilnehmen zu können." (5)

Fontane's ^{an} usually keen interest in both political and literary matters - as evidenced by his appetite for newspapers and periodicals - went back to his childhood days in Swinemünde. In his memoirs Fontane describes how his interest in political events was first engaged by the vivid Guckkasten presentation of contemporary events at the local fair; the drama of the wars and struggles of the 1820's and 30's captured his imagination:

"Ich hatte von früh an einen Sinn für die politischen Vorgänge, wie sie mir unsere Zeitung vermittelte. Bis zu meinem zehnten Jahre freilich blieb mir diese Lektüre, wenn nicht absichtlich, so doch tatsächlich vorenthalten, was denn zur Folge hatte, daß mir die geschichtlichen Ereignisse der zwanziger Jahre: die Freiheitskämpfe der Griechen, samt dem sich anschließenden russisch-türkischen Kriege, lediglich durch eine Jahrmarktsschaubude zur Kenntnis kamen. Alle diese augenblendenden, immer wieder in Gelb und Rot und nur ganz ausnahmsweise (wenn es Russen waren) in Grün auftretenden Guckkastenbilder taten aber, trotz aller ihrer Gröblichkeit und Trivialität oder vielleicht auch um dieser willen, ihre volle Schuldigkeit an mir und prägten sich mir derart ein, daß ich über die Personen, Schlachten und Heldentaten jener Epoche besser als die Mehrzahl meiner Mitlebenden unterrichtet zu sein glaube. Griechische Brander stecken die türkische Flotte in Brand, das Bombardement von Janina (mit einer platzenden Riesenbombe im Vordergrund), Marco Bozzaris in Missolunghi, General Diebitsch Sabakanskis Einzug in Adrianopel, die Schlacht bei Navarino - all das steht in einer Deutlichkeit vor mir, als wär ich mit dabei gewesen, und läßt es mich nicht bedauern, meine früheste zeitgeschichtliche Belehrung aus einem Guckkasten erhalten zu haben." (6)

Fontane relates too how he followed the course of the uprising in Poland in the summer of 1830:

"Kein anderer Krieg, unsere eigenen nicht ausgeschlossen, hat von meiner Phantasie je wieder so Besitz genommen wie diese Polenkämpfe, und die Gedichte, die an jene Zeit anknüpfen (obenan die von Lenau und Julius Mosen) ... (7)

It is significant that Fontane should remember the bloody events of that year as described in the poems of Lenau and Mosen. While the spectacle of an enslaved nation rising en masse to throw off the yoke of the oppressor had an undeniable appeal to Fontane's sense of justice and his sense of drama, the combination of the newspaper report and the fiery poem intensified his experience and heightened his imaginative participation in the events. Newspapers were thus a source of high political adventure, even as a young boy of ten he was:

"ein enthusiastischer Zeitungsleser, focht mit Bourmont und Duperre in Algier, machte vier Wochen später die Julirevolution mit und weinte wie ein Kind, als es nach der Schlacht bei Ostrolenka mit Polen vorbei war." (8)

Fontane thus developed into an inveterate newspaper reader at a fairly early age, a habit that he was to continue all his life. As a student at the Gewerbeschule and later, as an apprentice, Fontane was keenly interested in contemporary literature;⁹ his own poems - some of which were published in 1840 in the 'Berliner Figaro'¹⁰ - betray the formative influence of his immense reading of the literature of Jungdeutschland, the dominant style in Germany at that time.¹¹ While in Berlin Fontane was a member of two literary clubs, the 'Platenklub'¹² and the 'Lenauverein'¹³ to which he was introduced by a close friend Fritz Esselbach.

Both societies cultivated liberal and democratic sentiments, the 'Platenklub' with a greater literary emphasis while the 'Lenauverein' was more of a political society. Faucher and Maron,¹⁴ who were prominent members of the 'Lenauverein', were at the same time members of the politically more radical 'Verein der Freien', a group of Junghegelianer, which counted among its members such figures as Bruno Bauer and Max Stirner.¹⁵

Fontane does not appear to have taken the opportunity to extend his contact with the members of the more radical 'Verein der Freien', although he did remain in contact with individual members.¹⁶ Lenau and Platen were the literary models for the young poets, especially Platen, who had celebrated the heroic struggle of the Greeks and the Poles ('Polenlieder' 1830) for freedom, against tyranny and oppression. National liberation was the great issue of the age. Two of the poems written at that time (in the late 1830's) and very much in the flamboyant and strident style of Jungdeutschland, reflect the influence of the political radicalism that Fontane came into contact with in the 'Lenauverein' and also his own pre-occupation with the struggle for freedom in Germany. The first poem 'Frühlingsklage' (1838) is a call to arms; the sword, the symbol of action, is invoked as the only guarantor of liberty. Only by the sword will freedom be established in Germany:

"Und einmal nur das Schwert genommen,
 Das gute Schwert in unsre Hand,
 Da muß der Lenz der Freiheit kommen,
 Und segnen unser Vaterland." (17)

The second poem 'An die Hannoveraner' (1838/39)⁽¹⁸⁾ indicates the extent of Fontane's intellectual and emotional involvement in the political issues of the day.¹⁹ While a poem of protest at the suspension of the Hanoverian Constitution was not in itself a rarity in those heady days, Fontane's poem is unusual in that it concentrates attention, not on the action of the King, but on the inaction of the Liberals of the Kingdom of Hanover. Fontane pours out bitter scorn on them for allowing the King to act in such a despotic manner. His contempt for the liberalism of the German middle classes may have its source in his disillusionment with bourgeois liberalism as an effective force for liberation.

As a radical, he must have felt that the Liberals were too timid, hence his attempts to rouse, his impassioned calls for action. The final verses echo the theme of the re-awakening of nature to life in the spring (as in the poem 'Frühlingsklage') with a cry to take up the sword to secure the 'spring-time of freedom'. The Constitution can only be restored by the 'sword', by some drastic action. The poem takes on a revolutionary tenor:

"Du flehst zu Gott, das Unheil abzuwenden;
Schlag nur zuvor mit guter Klinge drein,
Und alles Übel wird urplötzlich enden,

...
Ein gutes Schwert, nicht Weinen, Händeringen,
Ein gutes Schwert allein macht Völker frei,
Ein gutes Schwert nur kann euch Freiheit bringen,
Den Frühling statt des Winters Sklaverei.
Erfleht ihn nicht vom Himmel, von den Sternen,
Es muß gefochten sein um solchen Lenz,
..." (20)

When Friedrich Wilhelm III died in the summer of 1840, Fontane shared the hopes of the people for a less autocratic system of government; it was for him and Prussia "das Anbrechen einer neuen Zeit".²¹ There can be no doubt that Fontane was exhilarated by the prospect of constitutional advance, of progress towards freedom. In his description of the excitement of those days, Fontane uses the image of spring, as in the poems referred to:

"Knüpften sich doch die freiheitlichsten und zunächst auch berechtigtesten Hoffnungen an den Thronfolger. Die Menschen fühlten etwas, wie wenn nach kalten Maientagen, die das Knospen unnatürlich zurückgehalten haben, die Welt plötzlich wie in Blüten steht. Auf allen Gesichtern lag etwas von freudiger Verklärung und gab dem Leben jener Zeit einen hohen Reiz. 'Es muß doch Frühling werden.' Alle die, die den Sommer 40 noch miterlebt haben, werden sich dieser Stimmung gern erinnern." (22)

On April 1st Fontane took up a post as assistant (Gehülfe) in Dr. Neubert's shop 'Zum weißen Adler' in Leipzig. A year later he spent ten months in Dresden at the 'Salomonis-Apotheke' of a certain Dr. Struve.

In Leipzig and Dresden he came into contact and subsequently associated with young democrats. Two of Fontane's friends in Leipzig, Hermann Schauenburg and Hermann Kriege, joined the 'Verein der Freien' when they moved to Berlin in 1843.²³ The publication of a poem 'Shakespeares Strumpf'²⁴ in the 'Leipziger Tageblatt' soon after his arrival in Leipzig, was followed by an invitation from a well-known Leipzig publisher Robert Binder to contribute to his periodical 'Die Eisenbahn'. Binder also introduced Fontane to a group of young writers who had formed a club, the 'Herweghklub'. The members of the club were, as the name suggests, political radicals in the same vein as Herwegh, who believed that only revolution would bring about freedom, a belief that Fontane himself had given expression to in various poems.²⁵

Herwegh's 'Gedichte eines Lebendigen' were published in Leipzig in the summer of 1841 while Fontane was there; it is clear from Fontane's poem 'An Georg Herwegh' that Herwegh's revolutionary poetry was a major source of political and poetic inspiration.²⁶ Fontane wrote a number of poems while in Leipzig, some of which were published in Binder's 'Die Eisenbahn'; all make use of the same militant imagery^{characteristic} of the poems written in Berlin, emphasising the need for radical, sometimes revolutionary, action to set up the banner of freedom in Germany. In the poem 'Mönch und Ritter' published in September 1841 in the 'Eisenbahn', the battle-cry is freedom, freedom from the oppression of orthodox religion and feudalism, as symbolised in the figures of the monk and the knight. Criticism of orthodox religion was a major concern of the Junghegelianer at this time,²⁷ The figure of Wilhelm Tell becomes a prototype of the freedom fighter:

"Dank allen Rütlimännern, allen Tells,
Die unser Volk vom Drucke so befreit,
Daß vor mir kaum der alte Ritterfels
So tot ist wie der Adel unserer Zeit." (28)

The most forceful expression of Fontane's radicalism at this time is his poem 'Einigkeit':²⁹ in May 1842 a mighty conflagration had razed parts of Hamburg to the ground. This disaster led to action throughout Germany to aid the victims and re-build Hamburg, action which was inspired by the idea that this gave expression to the unity of Germany and in some way actually contributed to the creation of a politically united Germany. Fontane believed that such hopes were futile.

Fontane's poem was not published in Binder's journal, indeed, the poem is a polemic against the sort of poems that Binder had been busily publishing and which gave copious expression to such - in Fontane's view - illusory expectations. Fontane's impatience ('Und Fluch vor allem der Geduld')³⁰ stemmed from his fear that the public might regard the aid given to the victims of the fire as sufficient action and might lull them into the belief that they were achieving something:

"Bei Gott, ihr irrt! des Mitleids frommes Walten
Befreit, erlöst vom alten Fluch uns nicht.
Und Deutschland wird aufs neue sich zerspalten,
Wenn statt der Freiheit nur das Mitleid spricht." (31)

Not by such means was, however, the freedom and unity of the German people to be won, of that Fontane was sure. If such aims were to be achieved, then the only way was to struggle, to fight. The particular weapons to be used, the exact nature of the struggle remains ambiguous; it might be struggle within constitutional limits (though unlikely), it might be revolutionary action, as demanded by Herwegh. The tendency is, however, quite clear:

"Nein, soll die Zukunft uns ein Deutschland bringen,
Da gilt es mehr als eine milde Hand,
Da gilt's ein Kämpfen, gilt's ein mutig Ringen,
Daß Freiheit herrsch in jedem deutschen land.
Wenn überall einst ihre Banner rauschen
Und kein bedrücktes Volk um Rettung schreit,
Dann will auch ich die Zweifel froh vertauschen
Und hoffend baun auf Deutschlands Einigkeit." (32)

In the poem 'Zwei Liberale' Fontane satirises the moderate Liberal whose liberalism consists of innocuous actions:

"Und die Marseillaise pfeif ich,
Wo ich irgend geh und steh,
Nach der 'Leipziger Zeitung' greif ich,
Wo ich sie nur irgend seh.

Auf der freien Straße paff ich
 Ungeniert als freier Mann,
 Und im nächsten Jahre schaff ich
 Mir vielleicht den Rotteck an.

Un nun frag ich, kann es freier,
 Besser sein um uns bestellt?
 ..." (33)

Richter is probably correct in suggesting that Fontane, in his hostility to the timidity of liberalism, was demanding revolutionary action:

"Sein Aufruf zu revolutionären Aktionen erhält durch die gleichzeitige Abrechnung mit der Unentschlossenheit des liberalen Philisters, aber auch mit der politischen Strategie des Liberalismus insgesamt, einen entschieden revolutionär-demokratischen Tenor." (34)

One of the members of the Herweghklub in Leipzig, Ludwig Köhler, introduced Fontane to the poems of John Prince, an English working-class poet, a weaver by trade. Köhler had written an essay published in the 'Eisenbahn' entitled 'Die geistigen Vorläufer des Radikalismus in England' (December 1841); he had incorporated a number of Prince's poems³⁵ which he had translated himself. Fontane was obviously moved by Prince's poems, since he translated a number of Prince's poems while in Dresden (1842). These were intended for publication and Fontane wrote an extensive introduction. In the event only some of the poems were published. Fontane's interest was in Prince's evocation of the conditions of working people in England. What he read confirmed him in his view that political rights, a constitution and parliament were not in themselves enough. Liberalism with its purely constitutional demands did not seek to bring about any solution to the social question, indeed, economic liberalism (known in Germany as 'Manchestertum') with its belief in the 'ehernes Lohngesetz' was hostile to any moves for radical social reform. Yet, freedom to Fontane meant not only freedom from political tyranny but also emancipation from industrial slavery and economic exploitation.

Fontane's intensity of conviction comes over well in the following passage:

"Was frommt gesetzliche Sicherung persönlicher Freiheit, was frommt Unantastbarkeit des Individuums! Derlei Gerechtsame wie hoch sie tausendmal zu preisen - werden zu Floskeln, wenn es im Fall der Not an Nahrungsmitteln fehlt, fehlt - nur um die Säckel einzelner zu füllen. Der Hunger und der Tod stehen über dem Gesetz. Jener packt das Individuum trotz seiner Unantastbarkeit, mit allgewaltiger Kraft, und der Tod erdrosselt es, dem Gesetz zum Trotz, und kerkert es ein sechs Fuß unter der Erde, die Freiheit der Person verlachend." (36)

Conditions in England, where political freedom was already established to some degree, made this evident:

"England gilt als das Land höchster politischer Freiheit, oder doch als Musterstaat wenn es sich anderen Ortes um die Begründung einer freieren Verfassung handelt... Dennoch leidet das englische Volk. Der Vollgenuß politischer Freiheit schützt tausende von Arbeitern zu Manchester und Liverpool oftmals kaum vor dem Hungertode." (37)

Fontane probably read Stein's 'Der Sozialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreich'.³⁸ He refers to it in the introduction he wrote to his translation of John Prince's poems. Stein's book was the first to give a wider public in Germany an exposition of the ideas of socialism in France at that time. Stein's main concern was with the ideas of the French philosopher Saint-Simon. According to Saint-Simon, the nation was divided into two distinct classes, the bourgeoisie and the working-class, who he referred to as the 'industrials'. He contended that the bourgeoisie, having established itself by means of revolution and having conceded political equality to consolidate its power, was now presiding over new economic inequalities more glaring than before. The political ideology of the bourgeoisie, liberalism, although it paid lip-service to the rights of men, was not linked to the emancipation of the working class from exploitation and a subsistence level existence (referred to by liberal economists of the day as the 'natural wage!').

Liberalism was instead linked with laissez faire capitalism, it contained no commitment to social reform on any radical scale.

Such an interpretation of the social evils in society was very close to Fontane's own view of the situation. For Fontane, social reform was the key issue. His anti-bourgeois resentment - already noted in his political poems - was now strengthened by the apparent indifference of the bourgeoisie to the fate of those who worked in their factories.

"Es gilt die Emanzipation vieler Millionen, deren Leben voll Entbehrungen und Sorgen aller Art, einer ewigen Nacht zu vergleichen, während sich die Reichen im Sonnenschein des Glücks ergötzen. Das Gesetz erkennt ihnen Menschenrechte, aber nicht jene Berechtigungen zu, deren Vollgenuß dem Adel, deren Nießbrauch wenigstens dem Bürger wurde, und ihre bescheidenen Ansprüche an Glück und Freude und Wohlleben werden nur zu oft als 'freche Forderungen' unberücksichtigt gelassen." (39)

To Fontane, the ideas of Saint-Simon were the answer to the urgent social problems of early industrial capitalist society. His immediate concern was social; his rejection of moderate bourgeois liberalism led him to the conclusion that only a radical political solution, namely socialism, was likely to 'emancipate' the working class. Fontane understood socialism as a radical reform of the whole structure of society designed to better the living and working conditions of the mass of people:

"England und Frankreich sah seit einem halben Jahrhundert Männer erstehen, denen das Elend der niederen Volksklassen nicht nur tief zu Herzen ging, nein deren Streben auch dahin gerichtet war, rettend hilfeleistend einzuschreiten. Man faßte die riesige Idee, die Gesellschaft zu reformieren, der Sozialismus ward geboren." (40)

Fontane was confident that socialism, representing as it does progress, must sooner or later be realised:

"Gott sei Dank, die Welt ist eine Welt des Fortschritts, und ob auch noch Jahrhunderte vergehen mögen, bevor der große Schritt geschieht, zu dem die Welt bereits den Fuß erhoben hat - ob spät, ob früh, geschehen wird er doch." (41)

John Prince, the working class poet, had described in his poems, in Fontane's words:

"prophetisch das Nahen einer neuen Zeit..., und (war) gleichsam selber das Morgenrot des hereinbrechenden Tages." (42)

Fontane was himself more militant than Prince, indeed, he wrote, almost chiding Prince:

"Fast scheint es mir, als ginge seine (Prince's) Milde, die jedes gewaltsame Einschreiten verwünscht, in ihrer Konsequenz zu weit. Auch ein Staat vermag sich in einem Krankheitszustande zu befinden, der durch Aderlaß oder Amputation beseitigt werden, bei einer langsam einschreitenden homöopathischen Kur aber zum Tode führen kann. Eine Pestbeule ist nicht allmählich zu heilen; entweder - oder; - man schneide sie fort, oder sterbe!" (43)

His involvement in the revolution of 1848 was therefore no isolated episode, but the culmination of a long development.

1843-1847

In the spring of 1843 Binder⁴⁴ invited Fontane to edit a literary journal in Leipzig, whereupon Fontane left Dresden⁴⁵, but "mein Protektor (Binder) war ein Lump und brach sein Wort"⁴⁶, he "sprang plötzlich wieder ab"⁴⁷. Since Fontane seems to have used up what savings he had, he was glad to take a post at his father's chemists^{shop} in Letschin in the Oderbruch. He had

"die tolle Idee, meine Schulstudien wieder aufzunehmen, um nach absolviertem Examen irgend etwas zu studieren. Am liebsten Geschichte." (48)

In the summer of 1843 Bernhard von Lepel, a friend of Fontane's, introduced him as a guest to a Berlin poetry circle which called itself 'Der Sonntags-Verein im Tunnel über der Spree'. Its members were mainly young aristocrats, officers and civil servants.⁴⁹ Most of the members of the 'Tunnel' ~~became~~ prominent figures in Bismarck Germany, either in politics, the diplomatic and civil service, the army or public life as writers and journalists. Fontane became a full member (La Fontaine was his pen-name) a year later (1844) while he was doing his year's military service in Berlin.⁵⁰ Bernhard von Lepel was his company commander.⁵¹ Military service could not have been too strict, as Fontane was permitted to take leave for two weeks to visit England at the invitation of an old Ruppiner friend Hermann Scherz⁵². The two friends stayed in London.⁵³ After completion of military service in April 1845, Fontane once more took a post as a chemist in Berlin (Polnische Apotheke) and began, at the same time, to study for his pharmaceutical examination. He qualified as 'Apotheker erster Klasse' on March 2nd, 1847, and took up his first post as a fully qualified chemist in October 1847⁵⁴.

The social background of the members of the 'Tunnel', "zu einem Drittel aus Offizieren und zu einem zweiten Drittel aus adligen Assessoren zusammengesetzt",⁵⁵ made it inevitable that the political philosophy of the society should be conservative - if only by implication, that is, by express exclusion of certain themes from treatment in poetic form as 'unaesthetic'.

Religion and politics were tabu.⁵⁶ Fontane recalled that: "Politisches eigentlich verboten war".⁵⁷ The society was an oasis of peace in a politically turbulent time, it was 'der Muse Vaterland', as evoked by von Merckel, one of the members:

"Hier schweigt die Welt, wie an der Tempelschwelle
Die Stürme ruhn. Vom wüsten Ozean
Zum Ufer rollt die sanftgewordne Welle
Und wiegt auf frommen Rücken deinen Kahn.
Gelockt vom Gruß der lauschenden Najade
Und weich gestützt von ihrer Rosenhand.
Mit leichtem Sprung ans blühende Gestade
Trittst du der Muse Vaterland." (58)

No greater contrast could have been imagined than between the 'Herwegh-Klub' in Leipzig and the 'Tunnel' in the early 1840's, dominated as it was by the poet Graf Moritz Strachwitz; the latter was dedicated to the cultivation of polished, aesthetically pleasing verse, the former to the unfettered fiery propagation of revolutionary ideas. In the one society the poet sought refuge in other-worldly realms, in the other the poet was actively involved in the political and social struggles of the day.

The first poems Fontane read to the assembled society on 30. July 1843 were poems containing social and political criticism: 'Die Linde', 'Der Trinker', and 'Der blinde König'.⁵⁹ The linden tree in the first poem is stunted in its growth because it is hemmed in by buildings, deprived of light and air, a symbol of human suffering under the conditions of the early industrial revolution; the second poem describes the desperation of a working-man, driven to drink by hunger and cold; the third poem, a king, blind to the suffering and exploitation of his subjects. The minutes of the meeting recorded the criticisms levelled at Fontane's poems, more especially at his translation of a poem by the English working-class poet Robert Nicolls 'Der Trinker':

"Eine kräftige ergreifende Schilderung der Trunksucht als Folge des Elends und des Elends als Folge des Trunkes....Indessen machte sich von einigen Seiten die Meinung geltend, daß eine solche Aufgabe, so verdienstlich sie auch in moralischer oder publicistischer Beziehung sein möge, aus dem ästhetischen Standpunkt doch nicht gebilligt werden können: daß dies Gedicht ein tüchtiges versifiziertes Plaidoyer oder ein gereimter ergreifender Artikel eines Fortschritts-Journals oder ein vortrefflicher Mäßigkeits-Gesellschafts-Präsidenten-Vortrag, kurz Alles - nur kein Gedicht." (60)

Fontane described the disapproval with which his poems were greeted by the members:

"Ich wurde sehr freundlich begrüßt...und hätte durchaus zufrieden sein können, wenn ich nur mit dem, was ich dichterisch zum besten gab, mehr oder doch wenigstens einen Erfolg gehabt hätte. Das wollte mir aber nicht gelingen." (61)

The reason for the lack of success was his aesthetically inadmissible concentration on political and social themes:

"Meine ganze Lyrik, nicht viel anders wie während meiner vorausgegangenen Leipziger Tage, war, auch zu jener Zeit noch, auf Freiheit gestimmt oder streifte wenigstens das Freiheitliche, woran der Tunnel, der in solchen Dingen mit sich reden ließ, an und für sich nicht ernstest Anstoß nahm, aber doch mit Recht bemerkte, daß ich den Ton nicht recht träfe....Es ging mir also anfangs nicht allzu gut." (62)

Despite fairly trenchant criticism ('alles - nur kein Gedicht') Fontane persisted initially in his predilection for poems with a markedly political and social content. In his first year as a full member of the Tunnel (1844) he read two distinctly political poems: 'Unser Friede' and 'Unsere Zeit' - both poems were in the Herwegh style and very critical of political conditions in Prussia under Friedrich Wilhelm IV.⁶³ The following year - 2nd February 1845 - Fontane read a political poem entitled 'John oder Harry' in which Germany is portrayed as John Falstaff:

"Und seh ich dann auf Polstersitze
 Dich, deutschen Michel, hingestreckt:
 Den Mund voll selbstgefälliger Witze
 Und in der Hand 'nen Becher Sekt;
 Wird mir dazu die Augenweide
 Von Hängebauch und Doppelkinn,
 Will mir, zu meinem eigenen Leide,
 John Falstaff gar nicht aus dem Sinn." (64)

The poem was sharply criticised for its undue caricaturisation of the German Michel, which was regarded as unpatriotic.⁶⁵

Thus up to 1845 - that is, two years after he had begun regularly attending the meetings of the 'Tunnel' - Fontane continued to submit poems of a decidedly social and political nature. He had not changed his political views.

Fontane remained the democrat he had been in Leipzig. When Arnold Ruge, the editor of the left-wing *Deutsche Jahrbücher*, emigrated to France (the periodical had been banned), he was attacked by the liberal press for what they regarded as his lack of patriotism. An article in Binder's 'Eisenbahn' roared (18th January 1844):

"Das fehlte noch, daß sich unsere unreifen Geister hinstellten und unser kaum erwachtes Nationalgefühl beschimpften! Wer Ruges Ansichten teilt, mag immerhin auch auswandern, wir brauchen solche Helfer nicht, wir wollen von ihnen keine Hilfe. Ruge verbinde sich mit Heine und ähnlichen zerrissenen Wesen - dort ist er an seinem Platze, nicht bei uns." (66)

Fontane stoutly defended Ruge's action; his sympathies were fully with Ruge who had championed radical reform, not with the so-called patriotism of the moderate Liberals. The poem 'An Ruge' reiterates Fontane's anger at the cautious inaction of liberalism:

"Nicht jeder hegt den frommen Glauben,
 Daß wenn dem Himmel daran liegt,
 Von selbst schon, wie gebratne Tauben
 Die Freiheit in den Mund uns fliegt.

...
 Wie schickt man nicht des Volkes Sprecher
 Gleich Kindern, nach wie vor, nach Haus?
 Und euer Zorn gebiert - ihr Schächer,
 Zweckessen und Champagnerschmaus." (67)

The key-word 'Schächer' occurs in another poem of this period in which Fontane hymns the heroic struggle of his democrat friend Hermann Kriege in the face of political presecution:

"Sie strebten lang, die Flügel dir zu lähmen
Bei Gitterfenster und bei Kerkertor;
Du aber schrittst, um kühnen Flug zu nehmen,
Aus ihren Höhlen ungebeugt hervor.

Gestempelt, du, mein Kriege, zum Verbrecher,
Des Seele frei von jedem Makel ist,
Dein Bettgenöß - ein Dieb vielleicht - ein Schächer,
Und alles nur, weil du kein Sklave bist." (68)

Fontane's political sympathies were still very much with the democratic ideas of his Leipzig days. Further evidence of this is a letter he wrote to his 'Tunnel' friend Bernhard von Lepel (27th July 1846); he was reporting on recent developments in Berlin:

"Hier hofft man mal wieder auf Révolution; die Geschichte mit dem Zentralverein, der zum Operieren mit Waffen Gelegenheit bieten sollte, schlug fehl; die Lichtfreunde, deren atheistische und radikale Rädelsführer mehr als eine religiöse Reform beabsichtigen und schon den Tag der Schlacht berechneten, machten sich schließlich lächerlich; jetzt hoffen die Häupter der haupt-, oft wohl auch kopflosen Opposition die Geldnot zum Hebel zu machen, um endlich die wackligen Throne vollends zu Fall zu bringen. Die Geldnot ist da...Unter allen Umständen also ist das Staatsoberhaupt der Sündenbock; das Herausrücken einer Konstitution soll seine geringste Strafe sein...

Diese Konstitution liegt schon fix und fertig in seinem Pult und ist nicht aus Furcht vor dem Volke, sondern aus gänzlicher Verachtung des Volkes hervorgegangen." (69)

Fontane's fairly restrained and faintly humorous bantering description gives way to a more indignant tone as his democratic views are given full expression without any regard for Lepel's reaction:

"Das Volk nämlich soll darin zu einer Komödie, die statt mit einer Ehe mit einem glücklichen Pump schließt, mißbraucht werden, und es zeugt von Verachtung des Volkes, ihm eine solche Rolle anzuweisen. Die Konstitution lautet nämlich: die Stände haben das Recht, Steuern und Anleihen zu bewilligen, nicht etwa zu verweigern. Weil sich Rothschild geweigert hat, ohne Garantie von seiten des Volkes Millionen vorzustrecken, gibt man dem Volk eine Konstitution, damit der König mit Volkserlaubnis - pumpen und besteuern kann." (70)

However, we must assume that the constant criticism of the other members of the 'Tunnel' persuaded him to look elsewhere for themes.⁷¹ Fontane accommodated himself to the thematic limitations that were the unwritten law in the 'Tunnel':

"Ganz allmählich aber fand ich mich zu Stoffen heran, die zum Tunnel sowohl wie zu mir selber besser paßten als das 'Herweghsche', für das ich bis dahin auf Kosten anderer Tendenzen und Ziele geschwärmt hatte." (72)

He turned to history, in which he had always been very interested⁷³, to English and especially to Prussian history.⁷⁴ He also began to concentrate more on the ballad as the form most appropriate for the treatment of historical themes.

It was a ballad about the burning of the Tower of London (Der Tower-Brand) that brought Fontane his first success in the 'Tunnel' (read on 15th December 1844), a success that could only encourage the shift away from political and social to historical themes. It was, Fontane wrote to Storm:

"Eine Art Sensation (ich schrieb es nach meiner ersten englischen Reise noch voll von Londoner Eindrücken) und entschied gewissermaßen über meine Richtung". (75)

He described his turning to history and to the ballad form as a re-discovery of his original interests:

"Dem vielgeschmähten Tunnel verdanke ich es, daß ich mich wieder fand und wieder den Gaul bestieg, auf den ich nun mal gehöre." (76)

The first ballad from Prussian history was 'Der alte Derfflinger' (1846) and proved to be an immediate success:

"...eines Tages erschien ich mit einem Gedicht: 'Der alte Derfflinger', das nicht bloß einschlug, sondern mich für die Zukunft etablierte." (77)

The minutes written by Merckel recorded the applause:

"Der alte Derfflinger: ein kerngesunder Junge; eine alte Geschichte und doch ein neues Lied; ein Lied vom Schneider und doch vom Helden, einfach, klar und doch voll Wucht, dem nichts fehlte, als die Volksmelodie... Ein Urteil wurde nicht gefällt, Akklamation vertrat dessen Stelle." (78)

However, Fontane had no illusions about the reasons for his success, as he remarked to Lepel:

"Im Publikum, z. B. in unserm Sonnabend-Club, hab ich die günstigsten Urteile über Deine Sachen gehört, was freilich nicht viel sagen will, da die Leutchen nur die Gesinnung beurteilen." (79)

This success was followed by other ballads on figures from Prussian history: 'Der alte Dessauer', 'Der alte Ziethen', 'Seydlitz', 'Schwerin', 'Keith', (all read in April 1847)⁸⁰

"Ich ließ alsbald diesem 'alten Derfflinger' eine ganze Reihe verwandter patriotischer Dichtungen im Volksliedton folgen und erzielte mit einem derselben, dem 'alten Zieten' eine Zustimmung - auch im Publikum - die weit über die bis dahin gehabtten Erfolge hinausging." (81)

Did Fontane's acceptance of the restrictions imposed by the 'Tunnel' and his turning to Prussian history and the ballad imply any rejection, or at least, a drastic modification of the radical political views he had adhered to while in Leipzig and the first few years in Berlin? Had he put aside such views and embraced a more loyal conservative philosophy, as might be suggested by a turning from Herwegh-type poems to ballads on Prussian military heroes? There certainly was one element of rejection in his shift from the overtly political poem in the Herwegh style to the Prussian ballad: he had rejected the declamatory style, although he remained wedded to the hopes and ideals of the 'Vormärz' period:

"Die Sehnsucht nach anderen Zuständen und die tiefe, ganz aufrichtige Mißstimmung darüber, daß diese Zustände noch immer nicht kommen wollten, das war das durchaus Echte von der Sache, das war das, was Männer und Knaben gleichmäßig ergriff und durch die Phrasenhaftigkeit derer, die kindlich tapfer auf ihrer Weihnachtstrompete bliesen, nicht aus der Welt geschafft wurde." (82)

The phrases had achieved nothing - Fontane was depressed by the ineffectiveness of the Herwegh style of poetry, its failure to bring about any change in the public mood, to mobilise the public or to influence the course of political events. The oppressive, debilitating atmosphere of political stagnation is well captured in 'Unser Friede':

"Das ist der Friede, der uns schlimmer
 Als je ein Krieg zu werden droht,
 Als je ein Krieg, der uns noch immer
 Gelegenheit zu Taten bot.
 Genüßler hegt jetzt unsre Jugend
 Und Stockgelehrte allenfalls,
 Doch jeder Kraft und Männertugend
 Brach dieser Friede schon den Hals." (83)

Hence Fontane's williness - out of a sense of frustration and disillusionment - to discard "alles Bombastische." ⁸⁴

Kohler comments:

"Der eigentliche Grund der Abwendung von der politischen Dichtung lag vielmehr tiefer ... Das allgemeine Gefühl der politischen Unfreiheit verband sich bei ihm mit dem Besonderen seines persönlichen zwangvollen Zustandes und mit einem schon in früher Jugend gefühlsmäßig erfaßten Ideal eines Dichters, dessen Lied eine freiheitbringende Tat weckt. In Herwegh fand er dies Ideal verkörpert, und so eifert er ihm nach. Mit der Zeit aber kam die Enttäuschung: das Lied war da, die Tat blieb aus. Der Begeisterung folgte der Skeptizismus und diesem die Resignation. Bald macht sich ein für das damalige Zeitbewußtsein gleichfalls charakteristischer Überdruß am epigonalen Wortschwall bemerkbar, eine schmerzliche Empfindung des Zwiespalts zwischen Wollen und Vollbringen, eine unerfüllte Sehnsucht nach einem Leben der Tat." (85)

This longing for action is transposed into the Prussian past: here Fontane found figures, epic heroes who were the embodiment of real action and mighty deeds accomplished. His ballads are not mere glorification of figures from the Prussian past; Fontane singled out men of action, not historical events.

In the poem 'Der alte Dessauer' Fontane paints a picture of a gruff unpolished military leader untroubled by intellectual qualms:

"Er hielt nicht viel vom Zweifel
Und wen'ger noch vom Spott
Er war ein dummer Teufel
Und glaubte noch an Gott." (86)

A Prince contemptuous of literature and science:

"All Wissenschaft und Dichtung
Sein Lebtage er vermied" (87)

A man of deeds, not words:

"Nicht mocht er Phrasen türmen
Von Fortschritt, glatt und schön;
Er wußte nur zu stürmen
Die Kesseldorfer Höhn.

Wir haben viel vonnöten
.....
Und sollten schier erröten
Vor solchem Mann der Tat." (88)

Fontane can even be said to have gone to the other extreme: he is prepared to hymn drastic action on an epic scale regardless of the policies served by such action (in this case war). Sheer untrammelled action is what attracts him:

"Ich halte es mit dem Zopf
Wenn solche Männer dran" (89)

Indeed, in his portrait of 'Der alte Dessauer' Fontane garishly over-paints the 'rough diamond' aspect to the point of crudity - as if to emphasise the coarse vitality:

"Nun denn, weil nie mit Worten
Er seine Feinde fraß
Und weil ihm rechterorten
So Herz wie Galle saß." (90)

Fontane thus acquiesced to the pressures put on him, he accepted reluctantly and gradually the restrictions, without, however, rejecting his democratic beliefs, although he did change his particular style of poetic expression and the vehicle for that expression.

It was, above all, as a poetry circle where the emphasis was on high aesthetic standards that the 'Tunnel' influenced Fontane permanently:

"Als Balladenschule vor allem übte er (der Tunnel) auch auf Fontane seinen Einfluß." (91)

Fontane's political views remained firmly democratic, anti-royalist, suspicious of liberalism. In 1847 Fontane ventured to read a political poem to the 'Tunnel' entitled 'Ein letzter Wille', a critical portrait of Frederick William I. He was severely reprimanded.⁹² Fontane's political sympathies were thus far from being conservative, as was seen a year later by his whole-hearted involvement in the March Revolution of 1848.

II : 1848-1852

a. Fontane and the 1848 Revolution

News of the February Revolution in Paris and of the uprising in Vienna reached a Berlin that was already ripe for revolution. The stage was set for confrontation. Fontane describes in his memoirs the constellation of forces and ideas: on the one hand, the mass of the people who demanded freedom and a constitution (as Fontane puts it:

"Menschen, an denen die die Welt umgestaltenden Ideen der Französischen Revolution nicht spurlos vorübergegangen waren"); (1)

on the other hand, the King of Prussia and the court, the aristocracy and the military who rejected such ideas.

("eine Konstitution, von der es nach königlichem Ausspruche feststand, daß sie was Lebloses sei, ein bloßes Stück Papier") (2)

Sporadic street fighting in the second week of March 1848 was enough to persuade the King, under pressure from his ministers, to accede to the constitutional demands of the people. A vast crowd assembled on 18th March outside the Berlin royal castle to acclaim the King. As the crowd grew, the King gave orders for the square to be cleared. Cavalry was brought in and, as a commotion broke out, shots were fired by soldiers lined up at the entrance of the castle. The crowd dispersed immediately, but the populace, feeling betrayed, began almost at once to build barricades in the streets of Berlin.³

On hearing the news of the shots Fontane rushed out into the street; his first poetic impulse was to ring the bells of a nearby church. Finding the church locked, he ran on and then joined a column of men marching in military style down the Neue Königstrasse. They entered the Königstädter theatre, armed themselves with guns and proceeded to build a barricade across the Königstrasse.

Fontane then began loading a gun - at which point his account breaks off, concluding with a few reflections on heroism in general and his own lack of genuine heroism in particular.

Fontane's account of his involvement in the revolutionary events of March 1848 is problematic: while there can be little doubt that he was actively on the side of those fighting on the barricades - he had after all been impatiently demanding drastic action for some time past - the extent of his activity can only be guessed at. Nowhere does he report that he was engaged in street fighting. Indeed, his account gives us few clues as to his commitment, veiling events more than elucidating them. Fontane's account of the part he played is humorous and self-deprecatory, not to say, comic in parts. Fontane's use of theatrical language ("mit meinem Debüt als Sturmklärer war ich also gescheitert")⁴ reinforces the impression of play-acting. Fontane's impulse to ring the church bell is inspired by ballads and historical precedents:

"In meinem Gemüt aber wurden plötzlich allerhand Balladen- und Geschichtsreminiszenzen lebendig, darunter dunkle Vorstellungen von der ungeheuren Macht des Sturmklärens; alles Große, soviel stand mir mit einem Male fest, war durch Sturmklären eingeleitet worden." (5)

The guns the column took from the properties room (!) of the theatre, Fontane muses, had probably been used in the comedy 'Mädchen in Uniform':

"Wahrscheinlich - denn es gibt nicht viele Stücke, darin moderne Waffen massenhaft zur Verwendung kommen - waren es Karabiner, die man fünfzig Jahre früher (!) in dem beliebten Lustspiele 'Sieben Mädchen in Uniform' verwandt hatte, hübsche kleine Gewehre mit Bajonett und Lederriemen, die, nachdem sie den theaterfreundlichen, guten alten König Friedrich Wilhelm III manch liebes Mal erheitert hatten, jetzt, statt bei Lampenlicht, in jeder vollem Tageslicht in der Welt erschienen, um nun gegen ein total unmodisch gewordenes und dabei, ganz wie ein altes Stück ausschließlich langweilig wirkendes Regiment ins Feld geführt zu werden." (6)

The gravity of the situation evaporates into a mock-heroic prank. Fontane's description of the barricades is equally disarming:

"unsere Barrikade.., die sich mittlerweile zwar nicht nach der fortifikatorischen, aber desto mehr nach der pittoresken Seite hin entwickelt hatte." (7)

Vast pieces of scenery had been dragged onto the street and used to build the barricade. The use of Fremdwörter heightens the bantering tone. The final act of the comedy is Fontane's description of his feverish attempt to load a gun. The gun was rusty, probably did not work, he had the wrong bullets and spilt powder everywhere!

"Und mit solchem Spielzeug ausgerüstet, nur gefährlich für mich selbst und für meine Umgebung, wollte ich gegen ein Gardebataillon anrücken! Ich war unglücklich, daß ich mir das sagen mußte, aber war doch zugleich auch wie erlöst, endlich zu voller Erkenntnis meiner Verkehrtheit gekommen zu sein." (8)

Fontane creates the impression that he, as a young man, was naively attempting to play the romantic revolutionary hero. Fontane refers to his 'Winkelriedgefühle' and later, when the revolutionary impulses had drained away, to 'Winkelriedunsinn'.⁹ Confronted with the risk of violent death, the bloody reality of revolution, Fontane sobered up, his heroic fever cooled. Whether he fought or not, however, there can be no doubt as to where his political sympathies lay, as is indicated very clearly by the articles he wrote for the radical democratic newspaper 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' and his dispatches for the 'Dresdner Zeitung' from Berlin in the autumn of 1848. His subsequent involvement in the political events of the year 1848 ~~was~~ restricted to finding himself elected as 'Wahlmann' in the elections for the Prussian 'Nationalversammlung' in May 1848.¹⁰ and offering his room in the church hospital Bethanien as accom^modation for delegates to a revolutionary left-wing congress to be held in Berlin. He requested Freiligrath ^{as a guest} but his offer was turned down. Fontane commented:

"Das Komitee war klüger als ich und begriff den Unsinn, einen blutroten Revolutionär - der Freiligrath damals wenigstens war - ganz gemütlich in Bethanien einquartieren zu wollen. Was ich mir dabei gedacht, ist mir noch nachträglich ganz unerfindlich. Alles in allem ein Musterstück unzulässigster Poetennaivität." (11)

Fontane once more documents his ineptitude in political matters, albeit admitting his sympathies for and involvement in the activities of the radical democrats.

b. Fontane as revolutionary journalist

1. The 'Berliner Zeitungshalle'

An important source for Fontane's political views during the turbulent months of 1848 and 1849 are the letters he wrote to his conservative 'Tunnel' friend Bernhard von Lepel¹² and the articles he wrote as a free-lance journalist. He made his 'publizistisches Debüt' with a series of four articles in the radical democratic 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle'.¹³ His links with the 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' can be taken to indicate the general direction of his own political thinking; there can be little doubt that he was active in his support of the cause of popular democracy and, as such, Fontane would have been regarded by most contemporaries as a 'revolutionary'.

Fontane's demands were, indeed, nothing short of revolution: in his first article in the 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' (13 August 1848) entitled 'Preußens Zukunft', he urged that the Prussian state should be dismantled so that a German Republic could be established:

"Preußen war eine Lüge, das Licht der Wahrheit bricht an und gibt der Lüge den Tod." (14)

The German dynasties would have to be abolished too, since they represented a major obstacle to the achievement of national unity within a 'große deutsche Republik'.¹⁵ Only as a republic would Germany become a united nation, of that Fontane was convinced:

"Es gibt keine deutsche Einheit bei 37 Fürsten, und deshalb will ich sie(i.e. die Republik) noch einmal. Von dieser letzten Wahrheit bin ich so tief durchdrungen ... daß um des gewaltigen Zweckes willen die Fürsten fallen müßten, und wenn sie Engel wären." (17)

In a later article Fontane warned of the dangers of sacrificing liberty for the sake of national unity:

"Unseré Einheit ohne das ganze Maß der Freiheit ist ein Unding... Ohne Freiheit gibt es wohl eine Einheit der Kabinette, eine Einheit der Polizei, eine Einheit von allem möglichen, nur nicht eine Einheit des deutschen Volkes."(18)

Fontane's strong anti-monarchist sentiments were not inspired by iconoclastic fervour, far from it, it was a position supported by two powerful arguments: firstly, that the monarchical institutions in Germany stood in the way of a united Germany, secondly, that the monarchy and its establishment posed an ever-present threat to the constitutional achievements of the 1848 Revolution. If the German people were to enjoy the fruits of liberty in tranquillity, then, Fontane felt, the monarchy would have to be abolished. He wrote to Lepel:

"Es liegt mir an der Freiheit, nicht an ihrer Form im Staate. Ich will keine Republik, um sagen zu können, ich lebe in solcher. Ich will ein freies Volk; Namen tun nichts zur Sache; ich hasse nicht die Könige, sondern den Druck, den sie mit sich führen. Man spielt kein ehrliches Spiel und darum will ich die Republik." (19)

To Fontane the Revolution of 1848 had been an act of self-liberation, in much the same way as the Wars of Liberation had been a popular movement of self-liberation:

"Das Jahr '13 kam; das Volk, und nochmals und nur das Volk befreite sich und seinen König mit." (20)

Now power had been delivered up into the hands of the German people once more:

"Der März gab alle Macht in die Hände des Volkes zurück." (21)

Fontane believed that men had originally been born equal and free and had only surrendered their rights to kings and chiefs for the purpose of protection against enemies. The demands for a popular democratic assembly were, in Fontane's view, demands for the return of original rights to the people, rights which pre-dated monarchical institutions.²²

Fontane's republicanism²³ was anchored in a broad historical perspective: the people had matured and were now ready to resume the exercise of their ancient sovereign rights. In both his letters and articles he invoked the 'right of the people' and the 'will of the people'.²⁴ He was opposed to a constitutional monarchy for two reasons: first, he believed as a democrat in the absolute sovereignty of the people as expressed in a popularly elected parliament²⁵, second, he felt that it left too much effective power in the hands of the monarch which might be used against the assembly.²⁶

It was anyway 'das ewige Recht der Revolution' ²⁷ to abolish the monarchy.

Fontane's greatest fear was that the monarchy and the army were for the moment biding their time, trying to stall progress towards the establishment of popular representative government in Prussia until they judged the moment favourable for outright military intervention:

"...eine ganze Reihe von Ereignissen seit den Tagen des März führt mir den unwiderleglichen Beweis, daß man entweder zurück will oder doch nicht so weit vor, wie man sollte und müßte." (28)

Abolition of the monarchy in such a situation was the only way to secure the Revolution against the

"Reaktionsbestrebungen der Hofpartei". (29)

The events of September 1848 increased Fontane's fears regarding the monarchy and possible counter-revolutionary moves. The newly-formed government under Pfuel

"ein in allen seinen Elementen als volksfeindlich bezeichnetes Ministerium" (30)

was

"ein Gewaltstreich, die Tat eines absoluten Herrschers" (31)

Here was the counter-revolution!

"Die Ereignisse der letzten Tage: der Wrangelsche Armeebefehl und das Ministerium 'Pfuel, Eichmann, Bonin' erklären geradezu die Contre-Revolution und fordern zum Kampf heraus." (32)

He interpreted these events as meaning that the army was on the move, marshalling its forces in order to crush the revolution by force. Fontane's first impulse was to call for a renewal of the revolution to pre-empt the counter-revolutionary forces.³³ Fontane was radicalised by the prospect of the army preparing to suppress the Revolution. Subsequent events were to prove him right.

On 17th November 1848 General Wrangel entered Berlin at the head of 40,000 troops, thus confirming Fontane's worst fears:

"Man hat das widerliche Reaktionsgesicht so frech und unverhohlen gezeigt, daß sich der ganze alte Schandstaat über dem Pulverfaß befindet und bei nächster Gelegenheit in den Mond fliegen muß." (34)

But there was no resistance and Berlin remained quiet; Fontane's initial impulse to fight subsided:

"Ich wünsche jetzt keinen Kampf; wer bereits mit dem Rasiermesser vor dem Spiegel steht, um sich den Hals abzuschneiden, den zu erdolchen wäre überflüssig." (35)

Events had finally made clear that democracy and monarchy were incompatible; he wrote to Lepel:

"Ich wende mich jetzt zurück zu dem eigentlichen Streitpunkt: ob Republik, ob demokratische Konstitution? Ich darf hierüber sprechen, denn ich habe monatelang an Deinem Standpunkte festgehalten und nehme meinen jetzigen nur gezwungen durch die gebieterische Macht der Umstände ein." (36)

The Prussian monarchy had revealed its reactionary nature; Fontane sadly re-called the fate of the Prussian reformers who were ousted as a result of the repressive policies pursued in Prussia after the Congress of Vienna:

"Der Sturz Humboldts und Boyens, die Beseitigung aller freisinnigen, ehrlichen Männer, die dem Volke nun auch mal gegen wollten, was ihm versprochen war, die Metternichsche Politik und als ihre Blüte die Karlsbader Beschlüsse, alle diese Einzelheiten sind Schandflecken auf den Purpurmänteln unserer Fürsten." (37)

Fontane saw the precarious achievements of the March revolution threatened from two sides: he took careful and anxious note of the gathering strength of the counter-revolutionary forces in Germany, but he also feared that the - as he believed - mistakenly moderate policies of both the National Assembly in Frankfurt and the Prussian National Assembly, meeting in Berlin would lead to a betrayal of the revolution by excessive anti-republicanism and a concern for unification at the expense of liberty and democracy. He attacked the Frankfurt assembly for sanctioning the use of Prussian troops to suppress the establishment of a republic in Altenburg and Sigmaringen, a move which, Fontane claimed, constituted a blatant disregard of the expressed will of the people by its so-called representatives sitting in Frankfurt:

"In Altenburg und Sigmaringen spielte das Parlament den Despoten. Hier lag der Wille des Volkes klar ausgesprochen da; aber das Parlament, statt diesen Willen zu achten

"setzte ihm den seinigen gegenüber, ließ wie immer marschieren und hemmte gewaltsam die selbständige Entwicklung zweier Staaten." (38)

Fontane feared that the Frankfurt Parliament would even authorise the dispatch of troops to Vienna to suppress the revolution there, if the Habsburg monarchy were in danger of being replaced by a republic.³⁹

Fontane was equally scathing in his assessment of the delegates to the Prussian National Assembly in Berlin. He castigated them for siding with the conservative establishment and attempting to thwart the expressed will of the people, namely, the establishment of republican democracy in Prussia:

"Volk der Intelligenz, ist das die Blüte, die du getrieben? Nein, und wieder nein! Dieselben Schmarotzerpflanzen, die stets an deinem Marke sogen, sie haben sich bis in den Gipfel emporgerankt und dünken sich in eitler Selbstverblendung die Blüte, die sie nicht sind...

Was solltet ihr sein, und was seid ihr! Auge und Herz des Volkes, voll klaren Blickes und kräftigen Pulsschlags - so sollt es sein; aber ihr seid nur Höcker - ein Unglück und eine Lächerlichkeit zugleich. Ihr habt keine Hand, um Saat und Segen auszustreuen, ihr habt nur Hände zum Beifallklatschen, ihr habt keinen Fuß, der neuen Zeit den Weg zu bahnen, ihr habt nur Füße zum Lärmen... Ihr, die das Volk als seinen Anwalt schickt, ihr, die ihr ihm bürgen solltet für ungeschmälerte Zahlung, ihr knipst und knapst jetzt mit den Vormündern um die Wette und plappert's ihnen nach: 'Es ist noch früh'." (40)

In a bold image, Fontane compared the people to Christ, thirsting for liberty:

"Das Volk ist durstig, ihr aber reicht ihm den Essigschwamm." (41)

He warned that an angry people would rise and claim its liberties:

"Es (das Volk) duldet keinen Hohn und wird sich erheben in gutem Recht und ganzer Kraft. Kennt ihr die Brücke von Arcole? Drüben die Stillstandsmänner und ihre Kanonen, hier der Fortschritt und seine Begeisterung. Gleich jenem volkentstammten Korsen ergreift das Volk die Fahne der neuen Zeit und über Leichen und Trümmer hin stürmt es unaufhaltsam zum Siege." (42)

Fontane continued to hope, even after the re-establishment of conservative government in Prussia and elsewhere in Germany, that a second uprising would retrieve the situation for the forces of democracy. In a letter to Lepel he wrote:

"Was die Vorgänge in der politischen Welt angeht,⁴³ so wird mir's immer klarer, daß wir um die Guillotine nicht drum rumkommen; es muß erst aufgeräumt werden, eh es besser werden kann; die Köpfe, die zu hart sind, müssen fallen; die Pöbelherrschaft ist die Brücke, über die wir fort müssen." (44)

In the autumn of 1848 the 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' was banned by General Wrangel because of its revolutionary democratic stance.

In the months that followed the banning of the 'Berliner Zeitungs-Halle' Fontane became increasingly preoccupied with plans to write a drama on the English Revolution.⁴⁵ He turned away from the depressing reality of a revolution in defeat and sought consolation by immersing himself in the more inspiring successes of the English Revolution. There was a direct parallel, for Fontane, between the Puritan Revolution under Cromwell in England and the 1848 Revolution in Germany: the political constellation was the same in both cases with the parliament and people on the one hand, and the monarchy and nobility on the other. Fontane compared the Hohenzollern dynasty to the Tudors:

"Schon unter den Tudors... begann die Krone in ähnlicher Weise zu operieren wie die Hohenzollern z.B. in der Person des Großen Kurfürsten. Die Prärogative sollten auf Kosten der Volksfreiheit wachsen. Mit der Thronbesteigung der Stuarts wurde dies Verlangen immer drohender, Jakob I. gründete die 'Sternkammer' und den 'hohen Gerichtshof' oder brachte doch beide Institute in Flor, und jede Selbständigkeit in religiösen und politischen Dingen wurde hier, unter dem Schein des Rechts, mit 'organisierter Willkür' bestraft. Nur die Schablone des Hofes galt; was da nicht hineinpaßte, war todeswürdig. Es war so eine Art deutscher Einigkeit 'um jeden Preis'." (46)

Prynne, Burton and Bostwick, Puritan opponents of Charles, were compared to prominent leaders of the democratic camp in Prussia, Waldeck, Jacoby and Temme:

"Gleichwohl, wie verschieden in sich das Puritanertum des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts von der Demokratie unserer Tage sein mag, die tiefen Wurzeln im Herzen des Volkes, den Haß gegen ihre Unterdrücker und die Überzeugungskraft, die Märtyrer und Helden macht, haben sie beide gemein." (47)

But the historical analogies were in vain: the Revolution in Germany was in its last throes. Local uprisings in Saxony, Baden and the Rhineland-Palatinate in support of the 'Frankfurter Reichsverfassung' in May 1849 were brutally suppressed. In a letter to Lepel Fontane quoted Georg Hesekei, the editor of the conservative 'Kreuzzeitung' as saying at a meeting of the 'Tunnel' poetry circle which Fontane still attended, that:

"...in 4 Wochen ist der Revolution der Kopf zertreten - wir haben das Geld und die Soldaten. Aus Elberfeld lauteten seine Nachrichten dahin: die Türkischrot-Färber sind noch im Aufstand, doch beabsichtigt man, sie, mit Hilfe von Kartätschen, in ihrer eignen Farbe zu färben. Schön! sagt er." (48)

Fontane was so discouraged at the turn of events in Germany that he made plans to emigrate to America.⁴⁹

On 1st October 1849 Fontane's appointment as pharmaceutical chemist at the Bethanien hospital expired and he took lodgings (Chambre garnie) in the Luisenstrasse in Berlin

"das erste Jahr in meiner Schriftsteller-Laufbahn." (50)

His attempt to set himself up as a professional writer proved more difficult than he had imagined, although 1849 did see the publication of a collection of ballads 'Männer und Helden' and his novel 'Von der schönen Rosamunde'. Lack of finance soon obliged him, however, to abandon his attempt⁵¹ and on 15th November he wrote to his friend Wolfsohn that he was prepared to accept his offer of a post as correspondent in Berlin to the democratic 'Dresdner Zeitung'.⁵²

2. 'Dresdner Zeitung'

Fontane was Berlin correspondent for the 'Dresdner Zeitung' from 15th November 1849 till 11th April 1850.⁵³ These months saw the climax of the counter-revolution in Prussia with the expulsion, harrassment and prosecution of republicans and democrats - reminiscent of the 'Demagogenjagd' of the 1830's - culminating in the trial of Waldeck, the democratic leader, who was accused of high treason. Fontane sent regular dispatches on the trial to the 'Dresdner Zeitung'.

The charge of treason, brought against Waldeck, was, as Fontane wrote:

"...weiter nichts als eine Kette von Vermutungen, Möglichkeiten und unberechtigten Schlüssen..." (54)

Such trials showed, he claimed, that the rule of law (Rechtsstaat) had been usurped by the police, turning Prussia into a police-state, what he called 'Polizeiwirtschaft'.⁵⁵

"Das Polizeiregiment ist in Blüte. Auflösungen demokratischer Vereine und Ausweisungen mißliebiger Persönlichkeiten sind Parole und Losung - das Alpha und Omega neupreußischer Staatsweisheit." (56)

In his dispatch dated 6th December 1849 entitled 'Der wiedergeborene Polizeistaat',⁵⁷ Fontane reported incidents in which the police had entered houses, searched and molested citizens for no other reason than that they were known - or suspected - as democrats. He cited examples of police brutality.⁵⁸ Fontane concluded:

"Die Grundlage unseres Staates ist nicht das Recht, sondern die Polizei. ... Nicht die großen Gewalten in unserem Staat, nicht König und Minister auf der einen, die beiden Kammern auf der anderen Seite, entscheiden über die Geschicke unseres Landes. Das preußische Volk ist ein Spielball in der Hand der Berliner Polizei." (59)

In an unpublished dispatch dated 11th December 'Preußen - ein Militär- oder Polizeistaat?' Fontane referred to

"...das Schreckensregiment polizeilicher Willkür." (60)

He believed, however, that the ultimate consequence of such repression would be an enraged populace ripe for revolution:

"Es gibt mannigfache Methoden, ein Volk zu quälen und zu erbittern: hohe Steuern, vergeudete Staatsgelder, strenge einengende Gesetze, fürstliche Übergriffe und

"Unverschämtheiten, aber über alles das hinaus geht die jedes Recht und Gesetz verhöhnende Polizeiwirtschaft, und wer eine Revolution will, der verschreibe sich zuvörderst einen Ohm oder Gödsche und verschaffe sich hinterdrein das Rezept zu einem Berliner Konstablerwachtmeister." (61)

He cast the right-wing of the Prussian conservatives in the role of inciters to revolution, men who by their advocacy of suppressive measures were directly precipitating a revolution:

"Wenn ich diese Herren 'Revolutionsmänner' nenne, so meine ich nicht 'Helden der Contrerevolution'. Nein, diese Stahls, diese Bismarcks und Gerlachs sind in der Tat die eigentlichen polnischen Emissare und gefürchteten Propagandisten, die immer neue Revolutionen vorbereiten." (62)

Fontane still believed that revolution would ultimately sweep away the bastions of reaction and suppression.⁶³ This confidence is reflected in Fontane's comment on the trial of Waldeck:

"...das Narrenschiff der Reaktion (wird) endlich an dem beleidigten Rechtsgeföhle des Volkes scheitern. Welche Entscheidung auch der 28. November bringen mag, den entscheidenden Kampf bringt er nicht; aber er wird ihn beschleunigen, wenn er den Glauben an Recht und Gesetze im Volk noch tiefer erschüttern sollte, als er bereits erschüttert ist." (64)

Suspecting that the establishment wished to provoke the democrats to some sort of action,⁶⁵ Fontane advised caution, the democratic elements should not allow themselves to be provoked,⁶⁶ since the conservatives would take the opportunity to destroy the democratic party:

"Ihr Streben (i.e. the conservatives') geht vor allem dahin, die Gemüter zu fieberhafter Aufregung zu bringen; sie wissen, die Hauptbedingungen zu einem Zusammenstoß sind dadurch erfüllt; die Gelegenheit, der zündende Funke muß sich dann finden. Der Prozeß Waldeck soll dies 'Muß' werden, und geht es nach Wunsch, so knüpft sich an jenen Tag die physische Vernichtung unserer Partei." (67)

Fontane urged the democrats to bide their time:

"Die Demokratie harrt ihrer Zeit und weiß, sie wird und muß kommen." (68)

Fontane was much encouraged by the successes of the democrats in elections in France in March 1850 and hoped that events there, as in February 1848, would precipitate revolution

in Germany:

"Auf anderen Feldern, auf der Stelle, wo die Wiege der Revolution stand, wo die angeborenen Menschenrechte nach Jahrtausenden wiedergeboren wurden, wird auch die Schlacht geschlagen werden, welche der Demokratie für alle Zeiten und in allen Landen, das Bürgerrecht sichert." (69)

Fontane reserved a good deal of bitter satire for the liberal majority in the Prussian National Assembly which he regarded as having betrayed the people:

"Sie(i.e. die Kammern) üben sich im Sprechen, sie beziehen Diäten, sie führen Kriege miteinander und schließen wieder Frieden, sie gehen abends, statt gemütlich ins Wirtshaus, unter Seufzen in die Kommissionssitzungen, sie werden vielleicht noch ein Gesellschaftshaus bauen und streng geschieden von aller Welt für sich und ihre Töchter Bälle und Konzerte arrangieren. Sie bilden eine Art Republik innerhalb des absoluten Staates, der da draußen seine Rolle ruhig weiterspielt. Das Band zwischen dem Volke und seiner Vertretung ist, soweit es noch da war, zerrissen. Die Kammern sind ein Spielzeug in den Händen der Krone geworden, aber kein Schild dem Volke mehr." (70)

The following extract is a good example of Fontane's biting style:

"Die Kammern sind jetzt dermaßen in ein pagodenartiges Kopfnicken, in ein unausgesetztes Jasagen hineingeraten, daß sie mich in ihrem mechanischen Tun und Treiben an das Schreiberideal erinnern, das das eigene Todesurteil ruhig abschrieb, ohne irgend etwas davon zu merken. In der Tat, die Regierung könnte jetzt eine Gesetzesvorlage bringen, die dahinlautete: 'Der Absolutismus ist wiederhergestellt, die Kammern sind bloße Narretei!', so würde man mit einer an Stimmeneinheit grenzenden Majorität den Regierungsvorschlag zum Gesetze erheben." (71)

Fontane believed that wealthy bourgeois liberals with no links with the people and their aspirations, had betrayed the revolution; this was to confirm his already present anti-bourgeois feeling.⁷²

Fontane's assessment of the 'oktroyierte Verfassung' of December 1848⁷³ is, against this background, fairly predictable: he went to great lengths to make clear to his readers in Dresden that the modified constitution which became law in January 1850, represented no advance at all on the position before the 1848 Revolution:

"Nicht die Kammermajoritäten, nicht die Minister, die aus ihnen hervorgegangen sind, sollen hinfort in dem

"konstitutionellen Preußen regieren, nein, die alte Ordnung der Dinge, die sogenannte 'göttliche Ordnung', soll bei uns fortbestehen, 'der König wird regieren, wie er bisher regiert hat - nicht zu seinem Wohlgefallen, sondern zur Ehre und nach dem Willen Gottes.' " (74)

The reports that Fontane wrote for the 'Dresdner Zeitung' reflect a fairly consistent attitude towards the political events on which he commented. He was above all concerned to expose the ruthless nature of the counter-revolution and the use of police-state methods to consolidate conservative power and suppress democracy in Prussia. Throughout this time he maintained his belief in his democratic and republican ideals, he still hoped that revolution would ultimately usher in 'die neue Zeit'.⁷⁵

And yet, in April 1850, he broke with the 'Dresdner Zeitung', although there would seem to have been no great disparity between Fontane's own political views at this time and those of the editors of the democratic daily.⁷⁶ There were other reasons: first, he found it irksome to have to produce regular pieces of work under pressure of time and began to feel that he was not really cut out to be a journalist:

"...und einmal steh ich wirklich auf einem ganz andern Gebiet und mußte mir in vielen Fällen geradezu Zwang antun." (77)

second, the newspaper was notoriously tardy in its payment of fees.⁷⁸

A few weeks later, a number of articles by Fontane⁷⁹, non-political in character - reminiscences of his stay in England and a literary piece on the poet Scherenberg - were published in the governmental, and thus, conservative 'Deutsche Reform'⁸⁰, and in August, a few months later, Fontane accepted a post as 'Lektor' with the official press office of the Prussian government in Berlin known as the 'literarisches Kabinett', an event which marked the beginning for Fontane of a career spanning nearly twenty years as a journalist with the conservative press in Prussia.⁸¹

Did Fontane's acceptance of a post with a government office and the publication of some of his articles in the government press mean that he had abandoned and repudiated the

the radical democratic views he had held so enthusiastically up till then? There is no evidence for such an interpretation. The break with the 'Dresdner Zeitung' was probably a move away from the meagre and insecure financial rewards of being a free-lance journalist towards a more stable source of income, that is to say, a post with the governmental press, since it was with the conservative press that he had most personal links via the 'Tunnel'. It is likely that Fontane's bride-to-be, Emilie Rouanet-Kummer, exerted pressure on him to get a more permanent and lucrative position. Not that Fontane needed reminding of his precarious financial state.⁸² He was heartily sick of the chronic financial insecurity of his position.⁸³ and wished to marry Emilie Rouanet-Kummer and settle down.⁸⁴ These were the reasons - rather than any political considerations - that led him to break with the 'Dresdner Zeitung' (his last dispatch is dated 11th April). But he did not break with the 'Dresdner Zeitung' until he had an assurance from Lepel that he would recommend Fontane for a post at the newly-created 'Literarisches Kabinett'⁸⁵, which was under the direction of von Merckel, a member of the 'Tunnel' and thus a mutual acquaintance of both Fontane and Lepel. Fontane was only too aware that he had a reputation as a radical and advised Lepel to tread warily:

"Ich gelte, namentlich Merckeln gegenüber, für einen roten Republikaner und bin jetzt eigentlich ein Reaktionär vom reinsten Wasser." (86)

Fontane, therefore, felt the need to sever his links with radical and democratic publications if he was to convince Merckel of a change of political heart. He, thus, broke with the 'Dresdner Zeitung' and approached the 'Deutsche Reform'. These moves were directed at securing more stable and lucrative employment and do not reflect any major change in his political views, Fontane was conscious of the need to be cautious, otherwise his moves to secure a post might be jeopardised.

He thus ignored a request from Ernst Keil, to write for his 'Die deutsche Reichsbremse' because:

"der gute Keil fast noch röter sei als sein Bart." (87)

On 28th July 1850 Fontane left Berlin and travelled to Hamburg in order to observe, at close quarters, the fighting between Schleswig-Holstein insurgents and Danish troops.⁸⁸

His ostensible purpose was to make his observations the basis for a number of articles on the campaign.⁸⁹ Yet, Fontane was clearly emotionally involved in the issue, as his first impulse had been to join the troops fighting the Danes.⁹⁰

He had, however, promised his bride-to-be that he would not take part in any fighting.⁹¹ That his thirst for action had been frustrated by his prospective family responsibilities seems to have depressed Fontane inordinately. He wrote to Lepel (28. July 1850):

"Ich werde...mit dem koddrigen Bewußtsein heimkommen, für die Schleswig-Holsteiner meine tapfre - Feder gezogen zu haben. Man hat vor den gewöhnlichen Lumpenhunden nur das voraus, daß man wie der wittenberg-studierte Hamlet sich über seine Lumpenschaft vollkommen klar ist." (92)

A letter from Merckel offering Fontane a post as Lektor prompted him to return to Berlin immediately.⁹³ He had achieved his aim and was now Lektor in the government press office with a secure income. He wrote to Emilie Rouanet-Kummer immediately and suggested October as a date for their marriage.⁹⁴ They married 16th October 1850.

c. Fontane as Lektor with the 'Literarisches Kabinett'.

The purpose of the 'Literarisches Kabinett', as formulated by Merckel in a memorandum to the Minister of the Interior, Manteuffel, was to influence the conservative press, and via the press "das preußische Volk für seine Regierung einzunehmen"⁹⁵

"Die Mitarbeiter des 'Literarischen Kabinetts' sollten mit den lokalen Blättern korrespondieren und durch eine leicht faßliche, auch 'derben Humor pflegende Polemik gegen demokratischen Unsinn' sollte der Leserkreis der lokalen Blätter 'aufgeweckt, gefesselt, belehrt und patriotisch gebildet werden.'" (96)

Fontane was employed in a fairly subordinate position; part of the work involved writing résumés of articles from the German press outside Prussia and from foreign newspapers. This was the kind of menial task that Fontane was set - not the writing of articles.⁹⁷ At least Fontane could console himself with the thought that he had never been put into a position where he would have been obliged to write articles supporting policies which he despised. He had not compromised his political beliefs. He wrote to Lepel, after he had been dismissed, on the closure of the 'Literarisches Kabinett' on 31st December 1850:

"Am 31. v.M. als ich in der Schadowstrasse No. 4 erschien, überraschte mich die Silvestergabe, daß das Cabinet aufgelöst und der Literat Th. Fontane an die Luft gesetzt sei. Eilig strich ich noch 40 Rtl. Diäten für Monat Dezember ein und verschwand für immer aus den heiligen Hallen, in denen ich 5 mal 4 Wochen Zeuge der Saucenbereitung gewesen war, mit welchen das lit. Cabinet das ausgekochte Rindfleisch Manteuffelscher Politik tagtäglich zu übergießen hatte. Gott sei Dank kann ich mir nachträglich das Zeugnis ausstellen, daß von meiner Seite kein Salz - Senf - oder Pfefferkorn jemals zu der Schandbrühe beigesteuert worden ist." (98)

Westphalen, the new Minister of the Interior, did not seem to have a very high opinion of Fontane's commitment to the task of defending government policy. According to a confidential report:

"hat die Beschäftigung, welche der Fontane lediglich einer persönlichen Begünstigung seitens des damaligen Vorstehers des literarischen Cabinets verdankte, nicht lange gewährt, derselbe im Verhältniß zu der ihm bewilligten Remuneration nicht viel geleistet." (99)

Relations with the 'Deutsche Reform' which had published a number of his articles in the summer of 1850 seem to have deteriorated as well; in a letter to Wolfsohn Fontane explained why he had been unable to get Wolfsohn's periodical 'Deutsches Museum' mentioned favourably in its columns:

"Daß in der Deutschen Reform (wenigstens meinerseits) Eures Museums noch immer nicht Erwähnung geschehen ist, liegt nicht an Faulheit oder bösem Willen, sondern an meiner miserablen Stellung dem Blatte gegenüber." (100)

Disillusioned and bored by the sheer drudgery of his task as 'Korrespondenzartikelfabrikanten',¹⁰¹ Fontane was soon casting about for alternative employment as a political journalist.¹⁰²

"Denken Sie sich, daß ich jetzt eine wahre Wut habe, Zeitungsredakteur zu werden! Ich schreibe jetzt gar nicht für politische Zeitschriften, aber nicht etwa, weil ich keine Neigung dafür hätte, sondern umgekehrt, weil mir für das Übermaß der Neigung der Kampfplatz, der Spielraum fehlt. ... Mit einem Wort, ich will kein Neuigkeitskrämer, sondern ein Mensch von Meinung und Urteil sein. In einem Moment gleich dem jetzigen an der Spitze eines einflußreiches Blattes stehn heißt an der Spitze einer Armee stehn." (103)

Fontane wished to exert what influence he could as a writer or editor on the political development in Prussia; his political reticence was due to the lack of suitable opportunities. He gave expression to his frustration in a letter to Wolfsohn:

"Es geht mir bei diesem Korrespondieren für Dein Blatt ganz eigen. In diesem Augenblick fühl ich es, daß mein beifolgender Artikel (104) den Eindruck eines Verschnittenen machen muß(er ist, wie schon gesagt, in der Tat verschnitten); es ist unmännlich, sich in einer Zeit, wo man Politik geradezu atmet, des Sprechens und Schreibens darüber enthalten zu wollen." (105)

In the same letter Fontane asked Wolfsohn if he knew of any vacant editor's posts:

"Noch eins. Wo möglich, vergiß nie, daß mir eine Redaktion(namentlich eines politisches Blattes) über alles gehen würde; wenn Du also was hörst, so denk an mich." (106)

He tried - in vain - to get the job of Berlin correspondent of the authoritative liberal 'Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung' published by Brockhaus in Leipzig, again through the good offices of his loyal friend Wolfsohn.¹⁰⁷

On 31st December 1850 the 'Literarisches Kabinett' was disbanded and Fontane dismissed. ¹⁰⁸ He wrote to Witte:

"Sie müssen wissen, daß das literarische Cabinet aufgelöst ist und daß ich seit 3 Tagen brotlos bin." (109)

He intensified his efforts to get a post as a newspaper correspondent:

"Bei irgendwelcher Constit. Zeitung, gleichviel ob in Aachen oder Königsberg, stettin oder Breslau." (110)

while at the same time attempting to establish himself once again as a writer by applying - unsuccessfully - for a grant from the King of Prussia. ¹¹¹

In the unsettled months that followed his dismissal from the 'Literarisches Kabinett' (December 1850) Fontane tried a number of ways to provide an income, in addition to sending articles and poems to various publishers: ¹¹² he tried to get a post with the Berlin Ministry of Education. ¹¹³, he started a 'Schülerpension' ¹¹⁴ and gave English language lessons. Sometimes Fontane felt that the joys of family life and historical study were the only solace ~~in~~ a desolate present:

"Es bleibt eimen nichts übrig, als sich mit dem Geist in die Vergangenheit und mit dem Herzen in den Freundes- und Familienkreis zu flüchten." (115)

Weary of the continued financial insecurity of his - very uncertain - circumstances, Fontane finally decided to establish himself as an English teacher, since that offered the best prospect of a steady income. He decided to travel to England and to stay in Edinburgh for six months in order to perfect his command of the English language. ¹¹⁶ Fontane also hoped to be able to write articles for English journals and exploit his experiences in England for articles when he returned to Germany. ¹¹⁷ He was not able to realise his plans to visit Edinburgh due to lack of finance. ¹¹⁸

Throughout this period - since his dismissal - Fontane had been quite determined to maintain his political independence and his intellectual integrity.

After his experience with the 'Literarisches Kabinett' he refused to contemplate a post with a government press office:

"Ich verachte diese feige, dumme und gemeine Sorte Politik und drei-und sechsfach die Kreaturen, die sich dazu hergeben, diesen Schwindel zu verteidigen, und tagtäglich ausrufen: 'Herr von Manteuffel ist ein Staatsmann!' Sie könnten mir meine frühere Stellung wieder antragen, ich will sie nicht. Man lebt nicht für den Tag, und wer sich dazu hergegeben hat, an unserem Manteuffelschen Hexenbrei mitzukochen, der hat sich selbst um seine Zukunft gebracht, der ist ruiniert in der öffentlichen Meinung." (119)

A few months later he reiterated his resolve:

"Fest entschlossen bin ich, mich nicht zu verkaufen." (120)

He was, after all, still a radical, a democrat, bitterly opposed to the Manteuffel government:

"Ja, es ist eine Schandwirtschaft, und Du hast ein wahres Wort gesprochen: 'Lieber die Lausereien der Kaserne als diese lausige Politik', (121)

he wrote to Lepel, quoting approvingly from Lepel's own letter. He continued to defend democracy as the great cause of the age in his correspondence with Lepel:

"Man kann das Demokratentum links liegenlassen, man kann König und Adel und Heeressiege mit Aufwand aller Kräfte feiern - ich habe nichts dagegen, ich vermag sogar mich dran zu erquicken, wenn's was damit ist, aber das im ganzen großen Streben unsrer Zeit in solcher Weise zu negieren (122), auf Kosten aller Wahrheit u. selbst des gesunden Menschenverstandes angreifen, das ist bloß noch lächerlich." (123)

If the way of evolutionary progress was to be barred - as seemed to be the case under Manteuffel - then, Fontane stressed, revolution was the only way forward:

"Eine neue Februarrevolution, und es wird sein - Heulen und Zähneklappen. Das nächste Mal fechten nur schwarze Husaren - und es wird kein Pardon geben. Man muß Pessimist werden; den Weg der Reform hat man verschmätzt, die Revolution tritt in ihr Recht." (124)

He underlined the point with a few lines from a poem by the revolutionary poet Herwegh:

"Ihr habt's verschmätzt, der Freiheit Ring, den engen,
Mit Meisterschlägen friedlich zu erweitern,
Ihr habt's verschmätzt - nun gilt es, ihn zu sprengen." (125)

This is the revolutionary Fontane once again, with one important difference: now resignation and defeat temper his revolutionary zeal. Revolution has become a remoter prospect, he was disappointed - as ever - by the stance of the liberal opposition, but he hoped that a vigorous opposition would eventually emerge:

"Puritaner brauchen wir... unsre Opposition ist bloß Negation, und für einen Nicht-Glauben stirbt keiner den Schlachten- oder Feuertod. Es fehlt das bestimmte Bekenntnis. Und hätten wir politische Puritaner?! Hier hoffe ich mehr. Was bis jetzt hervorgetreten, war nur der Schaum der Gärung, drunter sitzt, so hoff ich, das wahre, echte Feuer." (126)

Yet, on 30th October Fontane announced to Lepel:

"Ich habe mich heut der Reaktion für monatlich 30 Silberlinge verkauft und bin wiederum angestellter Scriblifax (in Versen und Prosa) bei der seligen Deutschen Reform, auferstandener Adler-Zeitung. Man kann nun mal als anständiger Mensch nicht durchkommen. Ich debütierte mit Ottaven zu Ehren Manteuffels. Inhalt: der Ministerpräsident zertritt den (unvermeidlichen) Drachen der Revolution. Sehr nett! Leb wohl." (127)

Constrained by financial circumstances, 'die blanke Not'¹²⁸

Fontane had written on 24th October to Dr. Quehl, the Director of the 'Zentralstelle für Presseangelegenheiten', which had very much the same function as the previously disbanded

'Literarisches Kabinett', requesting a non-political post

"...beim Feuilleton, oder was ihm viel lieber wäre, beim englischen Artikel der Adler-Zeitung." (129)

He could not help feeling that he had betrayed his own resolve, his own convictions:

"Ich kann dir aufs Wort versichern, daß ich dieser 30 Rtl. nicht froh werde und ein Gefühl im Leibe habe, als hätt ich gestohlen. Meine Handelweise entspricht zwar den Diebstählen aus Not, es ist das Sechserbrot, das der Hungrige aus dem Scharren nimmt - aber es ist immer gestohlen. Wie ich's drehn und deuteln mag - es ist und bleibt Lüge, Verrat, Gemeinheit. Die Absolution, die mir die hündsche Verworfenheit dieser Welt und dieser Zeit angedeihn läßt, kann mir nicht genügen." (130)

Unfortunately for Fontane he was asked to write poems in praise of both the hated Manteuffel and the Queen of Prussia,¹³¹ but there is no evidence that he was employed for the writing of political articles.¹³²

Although Fontane had gratefully accepted the post with the 'Zentralstelle', this was intended as no more than a temporary measure to tide him over his strained financial circumstances. He still hoped that he could leave Germany at some later date and travel to England. A few days after accepting the post, he wrote to Lepel:

"Ich sehne mich nach wie vor aus diesen Verhältnissen, ich glaube fast aus diesem Volke und Lande heraus, ... dir sieht man auch diese arme, impotente Zeit aus den Augen - man kommt dahin, sich nach den Verbrechen finstrier Jahrhunderte zurückzusehnen, es war doch was damit - heutzutage aber ist alles matt wie die Limonade in Kabale und Liebe, matt wie die Liebe selbst." (133)

He longed to go into voluntary exile, disheartened at the political development in Germany, at the victory of the counter-revolution, and sickened by his own capitulation to circumstances. He submitted a request to be sent to London as 'Londoner Berichterstatter' of the 'Preußische Zeitung',¹³⁴ (18th February 1852). His request was granted and he made preparations to leave for England at the beginning of April. For Fontane the opportunity of working in London for a few months was

"...die einzige Möglichkeit - nach menschlicher Berechnung - meines Glückes, einer Zukunft überhaupt." (135)

On 23rd April he arrived in London.

III : 1852-1855

a. Fontane in London (April to September 1852)

Fontane's brief was to write articles for the governmental 'Preußische (Adler) Zeitung' both of a political and of a more general nature.¹ In the event he wrote only for the 'Feuilleton' of the 'Preußische Zeitung'.² The stay in London represented for Fontane both an escape from the constricting circumstances of his situation in Berlin, characterised as it was by a degree of dependence that - compounded by guilt and self-reproach - oppressed him greatly³ and cramped the free expression of his political views; it was also an opportunity to achieve the independence he so longed for. He had plans to settle in London permanently.⁴

Yet, for the moment, he was still an official correspondent in the employ of the Prussian government, no less beholden to Dr. Quehl, his pay-master while he was in London, than before in Berlin.

"Der 'freie' Schriftsteller bekam abermals zu spüren, wie wenig frei er in Wahrheit war. Die Bindung an das Kabinett Manteuffel, durch die ihm der Londoner Aufenthalt ermöglicht worden war, hing eben diesem Aufenthalt wie ein Bleigewicht an." (5)

Fontane was very conscious of his obligations:

"Von Manteuffel aber leben und gegen ihn schreiben wäre die Steigerung der moralischen Ruppigkeit." (6)

He felt that his position obliged him to approach Bunsen, the Prussian ambassador in London and a known opponent of Manteuffel, with care, and to largely shun contact with political refugees from Germany, who were in the main democrats with whom Fontane had made common cause only a year or two previously and with whom it would be expected he would have a good deal of sympathy.

"Das Schicksal, in Gestalt Blomeyers, hatte mich in das einzige Haus Londons geführt, das ich gebunden war, nicht zu betreten." (7)

Was such reserve dictated by caution and a concern for his reputation at the 'Zentralstelle' in Berlin? was it inspired merely by a strong sense of obligation, as is implied in the

above diary entry? or was such reserve the product of Fontane's impatience with democrats, in other words did it signal the end to Fontane's democratic sympathies, as is generally inferred?⁸ Had Fontane, as Nürnberger suggests, become genuinely contemptuous of democrats and democratic ideas out of a deep sense of disillusion and bitterness at the defeat of the 1848 Revolution? Nürnberger writes:

"Dieses Kapitel gibt übrigens in drastischer Weise Fontanes Enttäuschung über die vertriebenen Revolutionäre von 1848 wieder, ist aber auch ein bedenkliches Zeugnis seiner Annäherung an die Reaktion. Wenn er 'die künftigen Präsidenten der einigen und unteilbaren Republik' mit Hohn übergießt, wenn er die deutschen Regierungen auffordert, diesen 'Abhub' nicht zu fürchten, so hat er, mögen seine Eindrücke gewesen sein, wie immer sie wollen, alles preisgegeben, wofür er selbst einmal gekämpft hat." (9)

It is notoriously difficult to establish precisely what Fontane's political views were at this time. We have the entries in his diary written at the time¹⁰ and the article on 'Long Acre' written in retrospect in 1853. The diary entry - probably the most reliable source for his view in 1852 - betrays neither a positive nor a negative attitude to the political refugees¹¹ while the article, since it was destined for publication, would inevitably have to conform broadly to the political expectations of his employer, the 'Zentralstelle' in Berlin.

Fontane was subject to pressure from a number of directions: the defeat of the 1848 Revolution had deprived him - almost at a stroke - of the convictions, based on his understanding of historical necessity and moral right, that had informed his democratic position in the 1840's. The inevitability of progress now seemed a rather remote doctrine, he was no longer sure what he believed. The early 1850's were for Fontane years of crisis and his political views were probably the product of pressures and circumstances more than anything else. In order to secure an adequate income - in middle class terms - and in order to remain a writer, he had been obliged

to turn to those who were in a position to help him and these were his conservative friends. While it must therefore appear that Fontane adapted his political stance, gradually moving towards a more conservative position, we cannot be sure that such a trend was not more apparent than real. We can assume that Fontane concealed his beliefs rather than concede them, since it would have been inopportune to give incautious expression to even vaguely democratic ideas either in his articles for government newspapers or his correspondence with conservative friends. Where Fontane did make explicit concessions to conservative thinking, these are frequently matched by statements more reminiscent of Fontane the radical, but the evidence is insufficient to be conclusive.

In a letter to his wife Fontane protested his allegiance to constitutionalism:

"Und nun noch eins, ein Ausspruch, den ich auch in Berlin gelegentlich gemacht habe: ich bin ein ehrlicher und aufrichtiger Konstitutioneller und denk es mein Lebtag auch zu bleiben..." (12)

Yet, he believed in the same democratic republican aims:

"Und uns, die wir drauf und dran sind, die großen Ideen von Freiheit und Gleichheit ihrer einzig denkbaren Verwirklichung entgegenzuführen..." (13)

sentiments that seem fairly democratic and still smack of a certain republican radicalism which would still be compatible with reservations about the character of the democrats living in exile in London. It would seem that Fontane had reluctantly accepted the post-revolutionary situation in Germany and that he now held that the only practical way forward politically to the republic he believed in, was by means of piece-meal and limited constitutional advance. The final aim remained the same but the means were different.

Despite his dependence on the 'Zentralstelle' and others in the conservative establishment in Prussia which necessarily imposed restrictions on his freedom of expression, it is sometimes surprising to discover traces of Fontane's radicalism invading even the pages of the 'Preußische Zeitung': his description of the elections in Middlesex makes it clear that he

believed that such sham-democracy could only be made meaningful if universal suffrage were introduced:

"Was soll diese Farce? ... Der ganze Akt ist ein Widerspruch. In Ländern, wo alle Stimmen gleich schwer wiegen, mag dies 'Aufwarten' vor versammeltem Volk einen Sinn haben, aber sinnlos ist es ... um nichts und wieder nichts sich einer ... Rotte in solcher Weise preiszugeben, einer Genossenschaft, die, außerhalb des Wahlrechts stehend, wie auf Abschlag nur mit dem Schimpfrecht ausgestattet zu sein scheint ... Weg mit solchem Plunder!" (14)

The article ends with a - fairly radical - quote from Schiller's 'Wilhelm Tell':

"Das Alte stürzt, es ändert sich die Zeit,
Und neues Leben blüht aus den Ruinen." (15)

In an article entitled 'Der verengländerte Deutsche' he makes a skilful defence of the 1848 Revolution, comparing it to the Wars of Liberation:

"Aber die Untreue und die Maßlosigkeit, die Illoyalität und die Verkehrtheit jener Zeit, die so oft und so gebührend verurteilt worden sind, sollten uns die nationale Seite, diesen gesunden Kern jener Erhebung, nicht undankbar verkennen lassen und uns nicht blind gegen die Tatsache machen, daß ein deutscher Geist, wie ihn die Freiheitskriege sahen, erst unter den Gewehrschüssen des 18. März wieder erwachte, ähnlich wie der Frühling unter Donnerschlägen seinen Einzug zu halten liebt." (16)

But such references were to become much rarer as the 1850's wore on.

b. Back in Berlin at the 'Zentralstelle'

In September 1852 Fontane returned to Berlin, determined to pursue a career as a journalist.¹⁷ While he was engaged in what he described to friend Witte as

'Korrespondenzschmasserei' (18)

at the 'Zentralstelle' (he had resumed his post there on 1st October), he had - secretly - renewed his more serious contacts with the Leipzig publisher Brockhaus in an attempt to break free from the 'Zentralstelle' or, at least, to reduce his dependence on it. He was subsequently employed by Brockhaus as parliamentary correspondent in Berlin for the liberal daily 'Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung' from November 1852 till December 1853.¹⁹

In February 1853 Fontane was transferred to proof-reading in the evening at the 'Zentralstelle' which gave him more time for his journalism and other writing and editing.²⁰ His employment by the 'Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung' seems to have lapsed at the end of 1853, though he continued to work - with a break of a few months in 1853²¹ - at the 'Zentralstelle' and in 1854 was made 'Lektor der englischen Zeitungen'.²² Metzel, who was now Fontane's superior at the 'Zentralstelle', sent him to London in September 1855 to establish a 'Deutsch-Englische Korrespondenz'.

It is almost impossible to establish with any degree of certainty what Fontane's political views were in the 1850's. His political ideas were anyway in a state of considerable flux, not unconnected with the pressures to which he was subject. He had a number of irons in the fire: while he was proof-reading for the 'Zentralstelle' (entirely conservative material) he was penning articles for the liberal 'Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung'. The early years of the 1850's do, however, appear to be characterised by a degree of disaffection with his own revolutionary and democratic beliefs.

In a letter to Theodor Storm he makes pejorative references to the illusion of equality,

'Egalité-Chimäre' (23)

and is careful to distinguish between liberty and what he describes as

'das Barrikadenkind'. (24)

He refers to revolution as

"bei uns ein reiner Einwanderer" (25)

and would thus appear to be subscribing to the notion - only five years after his own involvement in the events of 1848 - that the Revolution of 1848 was the work of foreign revolutionaries on German soil. This was a view that was widely propagated by those who wished to discredit the 1848 Revolution. Yet, even in his most conservative period - in the early 1860's - Fontane defended the 1848 Revolution:

"Am 24. Februar 1848 ... die junge Freiheit war geboren." (26)

The truth seems to be that Fontane had no fixed political views at this time, that he was groping towards a re-orientation of his whole political outlook. It is not surprising therefore that repudiation of the political poetry of the 30's and 40's and the political ideals that were held aloft²⁷ can be contradicted - or, at least neutralised - by statements welcoming the liberation of a people, a theme very dear to the hearts of the Vormärz poets:

"Mein Herz jubelt stets, wenn ein getretenes Volk,
Christ oder Heide, seine Bedrücker niederwirft." (28)

Any attempt to chart in detail the evolution of Fontane's political views during the 1850's is fraught with difficulties. We have, at present, to be content with references here and there that indicate no more than the general trend of his thinking, without paying over-much regard to the twists and turns of his transition from democratic views to liberal conservatism.

The initial phase was followed by one in the middle and late 1850's in which Fontane's political philosophy firmed up, taking on a more permanent outline, in which he re-orientated his political thinking along more conservative lines, combining a ready repudiation of democracy with an emphasis on anti-absolutism:

"Die Gesinnung, aus der heraus, Front machend gegen Absolutismus und Demokratentum, damals jenes Gedicht entstanden ist, erfüllt mich noch. Das Leben und die Verhältnisse aber haben mich zu einer anderen Partei, richtiger wohl zu einer anderen Nuance der großen antiabsolutistischen Partei hinübergeführt..." (29)

He believed that progress could be made along constitutional lines:

"Unser bißchen Parla_mentarismus ist doch auch was wert. Daß die alten Zustände nichts taugten(i.e. pre-1848), ist ja bewiesen; sie wären sonst nicht ohne weiteres zusammengefallen. Unsere Kammern sind wenn auch sonst nichts, doch die Sicherheitsventile des Staatslebens, und das ist nicht hoch genug anzuschlagen." (30)

c. Fontane, democrat or conservative?

Most studies of Fontane agree that his political views underwent considerable change in the early 1850's, that he moved away from the radical democratic position he had adopted during the revolutionary years 1848-1850 and assumed a more moderate, conservative posture. This observation has been accompanied by a tendency on the part of many commentators to imply that Fontane's political radicalism was an isolated episode in an otherwise unruffled development, an aberration even, that he was able to correct in the more bracing political atmosphere of the 1850's and 60's. In such a light Fontane's radicalism is seen as a youthful relapse, induced by the heady events of those turbulent years, but in essence a deviation from his true self which he subsequently rediscovered.³¹ Fontane's involvement - both intellectual and emotional - in the revolutionary events of 1848 to 1850 cannot be dismissed as an episode, it was a logical step in his development which had its roots in his stay at Leipzig. The political development in post-revolutionary Germany sickened Fontane and made him despair of seeing his democratic ideals realised in Germany. Depression was ultimately overcome and gave way to an acquiescent realisation that the great ideals of popular sovereignty and democracy were no longer practical possibilities and that the continued propagation of such ideas constituted a pointless academic exercise which would explain the absence of overt democratic comment. It should also be remembered that the expression of the sort of opinions Fontane had expounded as a correspondent of the 'Dresdner Zeitung' would have jeopardised his career, both as a writer and poet and put the security of his family at risk. Fontane moved socially in conservative-thinking circles and he was to a large extent dependent for his economic survival on friends and acquaintances who were conservative. He was hardly, therefore, an entirely free agent able to give uninhibited expression to his views. It is inadmissible to infer from an absence of statements declaring unmistakably his continued allegiance to the ideas of 1848 a major revision in Fontane's political philosophy. There are, in

fact, only sparse references to the political events of the 1850's and 60's; many of these are spontaneous, off-the-cuff comments and reactions, certainly not considered statements of political principle.

Equally fraught with problems is the attempt to construct a coherent picture of Fontane's political views in the period before 1870 from the various comments on political matters strewn throughout his correspondence. It is more likely that Fontane's period of conservatism was more an accommodation to the reality in which he had to live and work rather than a true conversion. Looking back on his life he wrote to Friedländer

"...daß ich immer einen ganz ausgebildeten Sinn für Tatsächlichkeiten gehabt habe. Ich habe das Leben immer genommen, wie ich's fand, und mich ihm unterworfen. Das heißt: nach außen hin, in meinem Gemüte nicht." (32)

As the prospects for change towards a more democratic society became real in the 1890's, so too, we see Fontane shake off the overlayer of moderate conservatism and rediscover the democratic ideals of 1848. We see the Fontane of 1848 once again in the 1890's.

IV : 1855-1860

a. Fontane in London: the 'Deutsch-Englische Korrespondenz'

Fontane's main task in London - as outlined in his written instructions from Metzel, one of the Directors of the 'Zentralstelle' in Berlin ¹ - was to establish a press agency, to be known as the 'Deutsch-Englische Korrespondenz' which would supply conservative and governmental newspapers in Germany with reports on events in Britain. In this way Metzel hoped to counteract the pernicious democratic influence of the 'Schlesinger-Korrespondenz' and of the authoritative London correspondent of the liberal 'Nationalzeitung' Lothar Bucher. Metzel complained that

"...durch eine gewisse Art und Weise der Darstellung und Auffassung englischer Zustände wird gesucht, auf die Vorstellungen der deutschen Leser einzuwirken und eine Art demokratischer Propaganda zu etablieren." (2)

Metzel's prime concern, reflecting official government concern, was to prevent public disillusion with parliamentary forms of government,³ since such disillusion might well lead to the emergence of more radical demands for popular government:

"Es wird verblümt tagtäglich gelehrt: Ihr auf dem Festlande dürft es ja nicht machen wie die Engländer, denn die Verfassung derselben ist faul, sie erzeugt eine Klikenherrschaft, aber keine Freiheit; ihr müßt tiefer greifen." (4)

Fontane's brief was to preserve the German public's faith in parliamentarism as a constitutional form of government, to help preserve the myth that the parliamentary form of government, as constituted in Britain represented the best practical approximation to the high ideal of self-government. Although Fontane's views on the British parliamentary system were ironically more akin to those of Bucher in the early 50's,⁵ he now appeared to agree with Metzel that Bucher's critique of British parliamentarism was exaggerated.⁶ Fontane, therefore, felt perfectly justified in defending the basic tenets of the British constitution without offending against his original instructions from Metzel. He interpreted his instructions thus:

"...so lauten meine mündlich und schriftlich erhaltenen Ordres wie folgt 1) Du hast für Alt-England einzustehn

"und die Bucher-Schlesingersche Ansicht, daß alles faul und verbraucht, alles Lüge sei, nach Kräften zu bekämpfen 2) Du hast für einen vernünftigen Parlamentarismus, für preußische und deutsche Interessen das Wort zu führen..." (7)

Fontane thus found himself in a rather unique position: he was an employee of the Prussian government, a government that under Manteuffel was committed to reactionary policies (Manteuffel certainly had no intention of introducing a parliamentary system on the liberal English model into Prussia) and yet, Fontane had been instructed to ensure that the reports he sent back of political, and in particular of parliamentary life in England, reflected a positive attitude to parliamentary institutions. Such an approach accorded well with Fontane's own views: he had rejected revolution as a means of attaining freedom in the early 1850's and now saw constitutional advance, that is, the gradual erosion of absolutism and its replacement by a more representative form of government, as the only feasible strategy in the post-revolutionary period in Germany. Thus his emphasis on anti-absolutism.⁸

A further consideration - though one which must remain speculation - which would help to explain Fontane's acceptance of a position as reporter for government and conservative journals is that he might have seen his role as that of contributing to the progressive political education of the conservative sections of Prussian society which would make up the greater part of his reading public and who were, in the main, if not violently opposed to, at least, deeply suspicious of parliamentarism. Fontane would, by presenting a positive picture of parliamentary institutions in Britain hope to reduce such prejudice and would thus be able to exert a progressive influence.

The 'Deutsch-Englische Korrespondenz' was in the event unable to compete effectively - as Metzel had hoped - with the Schlesinger Correspondence and was closed on 1st April 1856.⁹

b. Fontane as official London correspondent

Although the 'Deutsch-Englische Korrespondenz' ceased publication, Fontane stayed on in London as an official correspondent employed by the Prussian government's 'Zentralstelle' in Berlin. Privately Fontane still hoped that an extended stay in London would allow him to establish a reputation as a foreign correspondent.¹⁰ In addition to the more normal task of a correspondent in a foreign capital, that is the dispatch of regular reports for various Berlin newspapers¹¹ Fontane had in the meantime been given instructions to research a study of the London press.¹² The study was to include information on the political stance of the individual newspapers and of the links that existed between them and the political parties. Metzel intended that the study should provide Fontane with the information that he would require in order to fulfil the other part of his new brief, that is, to 'influence' and 'engage' certain journals for the interests of Prussia. Metzel had written to Fontane:

"Ein anderer noch wichtigerer Bestandteil Ihrer Berichte werden die Nachrichten bilden, die Sie zu bemühen haben werden, über die Beziehungen einzuziehen, in denen die verschiedenen Blätter zu den politischen Parteien und vorzugsweise zu einzelnen hervorragenden Persönlichkeiten innerhalb derselben stehen. Nur bei genauer Kenntnis aller dieser persönlichen Verhältnisse wird es Ihnen möglich sein, in erwünschter Weise den zweiten Teil Ihrer Aufgabe zu erfüllen, der zunächst darin besteht, einen entsprechenden Einfluß auf die englische Presse zu gewinnen. In jedem Lande, wo die Presse mehr oder minder eine freie und von der Regierungsgewalt unabhängige ist, läßt sich auf dieselbe ein Einfluß erzielen. Entweder in der Weise, daß man einen Teil derselben erkauft, oder in der, daß man durch Verkauf mit den leitenden und bestimmenden Persönlichkeiten der Publizistik auf diese und dadurch auf die Haltung der von ihnen abhängigen Blätter einwirkt." (13)

For the sum of 2,000 Thalers a year Fontane was able to secure the 'cooperation' of the 'Morning Chronicle', which undertook not to publish any anti-Prussian articles and to accept for publication any articles that either Fontane or Bernstorff, the Prussian envoy in London, submitted to the editor. The arrangement only lasted for five months (July to December 1856). In the articles Fontane subsequently published on the London press he touched on the question of bribery and concluded that attempts

to bribe newspapers were of dubious usefulness, perhaps reflecting his own experience.¹⁴ Towards the end of 1858 Fontane decided to relinquish his post as correspondent and return to Berlin. On 15th January 1859 he left England for Germany.

c. Fontane, the liberal Conservative

Fontane described his own political position in 1855 as 'liberal-konservativ'.¹⁵ While such a description indicates in general terms the direction of Fontane's political thinking in the 1850's, it tells us little of his reactions to the political issues of the day. Although in the employ of the Prussian government, and thus of the reactionary Manteuffel regime, Fontane did not agree with the policies Manteuffel represented, but his opposition remained largely theoretical and private, since in practice, he was dependent on the Manteuffel regime for his continued employment as correspondent. In his private correspondence to non-conservative friends he criticised Manteuffel and his regime for its police-state measures and its abuse of religion for conservative ends.¹⁶ He wrote to Wolfsohn, a close friend from more radical days:

"Aus zwei Dingen baut sich der Typus des altpreußischen Volkscharakters auf, aus schlichtem Rechtsgefühl und einem Minimum an Glauben. Gegen beides hat man verstoßen, innerhalb des Rechts hat man gekünstelt, was fast noch toller ist, als es brechen und die Religion hat man per Nürnberger Trichter besorgen wollen." (17)

Fontane welcomed - albeit cautiously - Manteuffel's rumoured dismissal:

"...liegt nichts vor, was mich bestimmen könnte, seinen Fall, wenn er endlich eintreten sollte, zu beklagen. Den Sturz des bisherigen Systems kann ich im Interesse meines Vaterlandes unmöglich betrauern." (18)

He defended, in his private correspondence, those liberals who refused to sanction armed intervention to restore the Prussian monarchy in the Swiss canton of Neuchâtel after a popular uprising had declared Neuchâtel a republic.¹⁹ His attitude to the Manteuffel government was, however, complicated by his continued sense of gratitude to the government for giving him a post:

"Ich bin nie sein Anhänger gewesen, sein Regime aber, ob gut oder schlecht, war es, das mich über Wasser hielt, mir Brot gab und mich hierher beförderte, dafür hab ich ihm dankbar zu sein und bin es." (20)

but he stressed to Lepel:

"Ich bin weder ein Kreuz-Ztngs-Mensch noch ein Manteufflianer."
(21)

The main features of Fontane's political thinking in the 1850's were his opposition to 'absolutism', his passionate concern for the re-establishment of the rule of law and his belief in the need to develop constitutional forms of government in Prussia, as a demand of the age.²² His opposition to Manteuffel was a reflection of his opposition to every expression of 'absolutism':

"Die Gesinnung, aus der heraus, Front machend gegen Absolutismus und Demokratentum damals jenes Gedicht (1849) entstanden ist, erfüllt mich noch." (23)

In the same letter Fontane described himself as belonging to :

"einer anderen Nuance der großen antiabsolutistischen Partei." (24)

While Fontane felt that progress towards an extension of parliamentary institutions was desirable,²⁵ he also believed that constitutional progress and a return to the rule of law were imperative if the political situation in Prussia were to be stabilised and the country made secure against the impact of revolutionary outbreaks elsewhere, especially France:

"Nicht ohne Besorgnis dürfen wir in die Zukunft blicken. Über kurz oder lang kommt doch mal wieder ein großer Krach von Frankreich her und die Flut wird uns fortreißen wie immer, wenn man bis dahin nicht verstanden hat, die Sicherheitsdämme zu bauen." (26)

If such dams were to be built, then it required, as a first step, a

"Befreiung von der Polizeijustiz, die wenig besser ist als Druck und Willkür," (27)

which characterised the Manteuffel regime. Fontane thus argued the need for political progress in order to prevent worse disasters. To what extent Fontane is evoking dire visions of revolutionary upheaval at some unspecified future date in order to add weight to his argument for evolutionary change, or whether he genuinely feared a democratic revolution, is difficult to say.

Fontane would have welcomed such a revolutionary impact in the early 1850's, hoping, as he did, that Germany would be engulfed by the revolutionary ²⁸ tide; now, while he still believed that the revolutionary impetus would come inevitably from France, he counsels political change in order to be able to ride out the storm. Apparently concerned to secure a stable political situation in Prussia, Fontane puts forward powerful arguments for evolutionary change.

d. The 'Neue Ära' in Prussia

On 7th October 1857 Prince William of Prussia, the 'Kartätschen-Prinz' became Prince Regent in place of his mentally ill father, King Frederick William IV. Due to the close links that had developed between the essentially conservative Prince and certain prominent members of the liberal 'Wochenblattpartei', liberals hailed his assumption of supreme power as a 'Neue Ära'. Such hopes were fuelled by the dismissal of Manteuffel on 6th November. Fontane followed these changes from afar with keen interest. ²⁹

Fontane supported the new government:

"Ich habe Dich nie im Zweifel darüber gelassen, daß die Träger dieses Ministeriums meine Hochschätzung und im letzten Kern meine Sympathien haben." (30)

Although the new government enjoyed Fontane's private support, he was reluctant to declare himself publically:

"aber was mir zuwider ist, das ist das beständige Wechseln der eigenen Positionen, selbst dann noch wenn das neue Heerlager unserem Fühlen und Denken mehr entspricht als das alte." (31)

His reluctance was inspired, however, perhaps rather less out of a desire for continuity - as Fontane here suggested - than by a tactical concern for his reputation as a political journalist. He did not wish to ally himself to the new 'camp' only to find that the price he had paid was the loss of his reputation, especially as he had no guarantee that his transfer would be honoured:

"ein Enthusiasmus, der vor mir selber wenigstens die Fahnenflüchtigkeit rechtfertigen würde, dürfte alsbald vielleicht auf ein Schauerbad stoßen, das wenig von ihm übrig läßt." (32)

Fontane continued in the same letter to Eggers:

"Der aber ist schlimm daran, der voll Vertrauen aus einem andern Lager herüber kam und nun wahrnehmen muß, daß er den guten Ruf den guten Ruf der Treue, Zuverlässigkeit und Konsequenz um nichts geopfert hat. Drum ausharren an dem Platze, wo man nun mal steht!" (33)

Fontane was well aware that he was regarded as a 'Manteufflianer', and that any move on his part to associate himself with the new government that had ousted Manteuffel could be construed, to use Fontane's word, as 'Fahnenflüchtigkeit'. In order to prevent any such interpretation Fontane tended to stress his reservations about the new government:

"Es liegt mir nicht im geringsten daran, mich mit den 'neuen Leuten' zu stellenNicht als ob ich gegen die Personen und ihre Prinzipien irgend etwas hätteDie neue Regierung hat noch nichts getan; soll erst zeigen, ob sie's besser zu machen versteht .!"(34)

Fontane expressed his real hopes in a letter to Lepel:

"In spätestens 3,4 Monaten hoff ich in Berlin zu sein; bis dahin ist das Ministerium Manteuffel halb vergessen, vieles hat sich verblutet und vernarbt und wenn dann die Neuen nur irgendwie Miene machen sollten, mir den kleinen Finger hinzureichen, So magst Du sicher sein, daß ich nicht Anstand nehmen werde, nach der ganzen Hand zu fassen." (35)

Given time and the opportunity Fontane was determined to give his active support to the new liberal government.

But his reputation as a 'Manteufflianer' dogged him where-ever he went ³⁶. He failed to secure a position in the Foreign Office or to be appointed - as he had confidently expected - ³⁷ editor in charge of the 'Feuilleton' of the 'Preußische Zeitung' in succession to Eggers. Fontane wrote to Eggers:

"Es scheint aber, daß man den 'Manteuffelschen Apostel' in mir nicht vergessen kann noch will." (38)

Fontane's application for the post of Private Librarian to King Maximilian II. of Bavaria - with the help of his friend Paul Heyse, the poet - met with no success either. ³⁹

Fontane even considered joining the army:

"Ich denke auch allen Ernstes daran, einzutreten, nicht Begeisterungs wegen, sondern um untergebracht zu werden." (40)

Fontane finally succeeded, with the help of Friedrich Eggers, in securing a post as one of three lobby correspondents to the new government, ⁴¹ a post which gave Fontane access to confidential information from government circles.

He had the misfortune to misjudge the situation by publishing an article, based on such confidential information, in the 'Hamburger Nachrichten'.⁴² The article purported to give details of the Prince Regent's government programme. However, a statement later issued by the Minister of the Interior, Count Schwerin, contained a version of the programme that differed substantially on some points from the details given in Fontane's article. It was feared that this would be taken as implying that the Prince had in the meantime retracted on a number of points and caused the Prince considerable political embarrassment.⁴³ Fontane was obliged to apologise for his - albeit unintentional - indiscretion and was forthwith expelled from the group of lobby correspondents. He was thus ejected from the one political camp, the liberal camp, that he had joined out of political conviction and not as a solution to pressing material needs. Fontane's career - both as a writer and as a political journalist - might have been radically different had it not been for this incident and its consequences. At the end of the year (1859) Fontane broke all links with the governmental press agency.⁴⁴ Although the latter months of 1859 saw the abrupt end to any prospects of a career for Fontane as a political journalist, serving the liberal cause, he was able to score some success as a writer and poet. He secured the publication of two volumes on England and Scotland⁴⁵ and a volume of ballads.⁴⁶

B. Fontane's political thinking and his view of Bismarck

I : 1860-1871

a. The 'Wanderungen' and Fontane's ethical conservatism

In the summer months of 1859 Fontane began his tours through the Mark Brandenburg ¹ and published his travelogues as 'Märkische Bilder' in the conservative 'Kreuzzeitung'.² The 'Bilder' formed the basis for the first volume of 'Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg' published by Hertz in 1862. Thus began a task that was to occupy Fontane for most of his life: he published further volumes of his 'Wanderungen' at intervals in 1863, 1864, 1872, 1881 and 1888.³ Fontane sought to bring alive the history of localities in the Mark Brandenburg by linking description of places with biographical details of notable persons associated with the places. He explained to Hertz what his intentions were:

"Die letzten 150 Jahre haben dafür gesorgt, daß man von den Brandenburgern...mit Respekt spricht; die Taten, die geschehen und die Männer, die diese Taten geschehen ließen, haben sich Gehör zu verschaffen gewußt, aber man kümmerte sich um sie mehr historisch als menschlich. Schlachten und immer wieder Schlachten, Staatsaktionen, Gesandtschaften - man kam nicht recht dazu, Einblicke in das private Leben zu tun... Eine Folge davon war, daß die Schauplätze, auf denen sich unser politisches Leben abgesponnen, auf denen die Träger eben dieses politischen Lebens tätig waren, relativ unbelebt blieben. Interesselos ging man dran vorüber. Man wußte allenfalls: 'hinter diesen Mauern hat der und der gelebt' aber man wußte nicht wie er gelebt hatte... Das schön-menschliche blieb tot. Der Zweck meines Buches ist nach dieser Seite hin anregend und belebend zu wirken... Detailschilderung behufs besserer Erkenntnis und größerer Liebgewinnung historischer Personen, Belebung des Lokalen und schließlich Charakterisierung märkischer Landschaft und Natur - das sind Dinge, denen ich vorzugsweise nachgestrebt habe." (4)

For Fontane there was an intimate link between a landscape and the noble families that dominated the area and shaped its history.⁵ Indeed, the localities and their description are but a preface, almost a pretext for delving into the history of the local noble family. Thus, in the chapter on Carwe near Wustrau, the village itself is hardly mentioned, let alone described. Fontane devotes his attention almost exclusively to an anecdotal account of incidents from the family history of the local aristocratic family, the Knesebecks.

Such figures from the Prussian past as Karl Friedrich and Wilhelm Ludwig von dem Knesebeck embodied that 'nobility of mind and character' ⁶ that was central to Fontane's understanding of conservatism. He commends the Knesebecks for their

"...Mannesmut und adlige Gesinnung, Vaterlandsliebe, Gemeinsinn und Opferfreudigkeit." (7)

virtues that Fontane was, however, prepared to admit were not so evident among the members of the Prussian aristocracy in his own day.⁸ Indeed, Fontane protested to his wife who seems to have reproached him for his interest in the aristocracy, that the virtues which were found in former times amongst the Prussian aristocracy he had elevated to the plane of a general principle:

"Ich verwahre mich übrigens feierlich dagegen, daß das, was ich 'adlig' nenne, bloß an der Menschenklasse haftet, die man 'Adel' nennt; es kommt in allen Ständen vor, es ist der Sinn für das Allgemeine, für das Ideale und die Abneigung gegen den Krimskrams des engsten Zirkels, dessen Abgeschlossenheit von selbst dafür sorgt, daß aus jedem P - ein Donnerschlag wird." (9)

The outstanding Prussian aristocrats of the past were the prototype Prussian character: he regarded:

"...jene alten Familien...die, von den Tagen der Quitzows an, mehr auf Charakter als auf Talent hielten und deren Zähigkeit und Selbstgefühl...doch nur die Typen unseres eigenen Wesens sind..." (10)

Fontane was well aware that such virtues were no longer the prerogative of the aristocracy as a class:

"...wo der Bürgerstand(im weitesten Sinne) eine hervorragende Bedeutung hat und zum Teil gerade der Träger all der Vorzüge ist, die sonst dem Adel und der Geistlichkeit eigen waren..." (11)

He, nevertheless, did tend to attribute the old Prussian virtues to the conservatives of his day:

"Übrigens hab' ich doch auch heute wieder gesehen, daß alle ernstesten Leute, die nach Zuverlässigkeit, Treue, Charakter, meinetwegen auch ein bißchen nach Fanatismus und Verbissenheit aussehen, Konservative sind; - das andere ist doch der reine Trieb sand, der durch die Strömung, wie sie gerade geht, mal hierhin mal dorthin geworfen wird." (12)

A year later Fontane echoed the same sentiment in a letter to his wife:

"Unsere Partei umschließt viele Dummköpfe, viele Egoisten, viele Fromm-Hochmütige usw, aber ich habe trotzdem die feste Überzeugung, daß die größere Anzahl nobler, bescheidner,

opferbereiter und mutiger Charaktere auf unserer Seite steht." (13)

For Fontane conservatism was, above all, a code of moral values which made up the 'adlige Gesinnung'. He tended to overlook the fact that in practice conservatism was also a political ideology evolved in the defence of social privilege and vested interest.¹⁴ Later in life Fontane distinguished between the historical role and the aesthetic attraction that the Prussian aristocracy held for him¹⁵ and the political principles they represented:

"...ich werde immer zwischen politischen Anschauungen und menschlichen Sympathien zu unterscheiden wissen, und diese menschlichen Sympathien habe ich ganz ausgesprochen für den märkischen Junker. Die glänzenden Nummern unter ihnen ... sind eben glänzend ... aber auch die nicht glänzenden ... haben trotz Egoismus und Quitzowtum, oder vielleicht um beider willen, einen ganz eigentümlichen Charme, den herauszufühlen ich mich glücklich schätze. Die Rückschrittsprinzipien als solche sind sehr gegen meinen Geschmack, aber die zufälligen Träger dieser Prinzipien haben es mir doch nach wie vor angetan. Vielleicht weil ich - ich glaube manche gut zu kennen - an den Ernst dieser Rückschrittsprinzipien nicht recht glaube. Sie können eines Tages total umschlagen." (16)

b. Conservatism as an historical principle

Between 10th January and 14th May 1860 Fontane gave a series of public lectures in the Hotel Arnim in Berlin, among them a lecture on British constitutional history entitled 'Whigs und Tories'.¹⁷ In the lecture Fontane sought to define the essential nature and expound the guiding principles of the two political parties and assess their contribution to political development in Britain. Fontane saw historical development as the product of a dynamic conflict between two immutable historical principles: between the principle of change and a counter-principle, striving to maintain stability. These two principles he identified in the contemporary situation as, respectively, the Whigs, the force for change, and the Tories, the counter-force.¹⁸ Both forces are necessary to progress in history. Fontane quoted the British historian Macaulay approvingly:

"Akzeptieren wir den Satz Macaulays, des eben hingeschiedenen größten Geschichtsschreibers und Verherrlichers des Whiggismus, daß die Gesellschaft in ihrem Wissen unaufhörliche Fortschritte macht und daß der Schweif des Kometen jetzt da ist, wo vor wenig Menschenaltern noch der Kopf des Sternes war ..." (19)

He concluded his lecture by pointing to the importance of the counter-force, the Tory principle:

"...aber hüten wir uns zu gleicher Zeit um dieser wachsenden Kenntnis, um der bloßen Erweiterung und Verbreiterung unsres Wissens willen die alten großen Dogmen überheblich zu ignorieren, an die selten eines Menschen Weisheit reicht. Sei jeder von uns ein Whig auf dem Wege zu fortschreitender Erkenntnis, aber in des Herzens Liebe und Treue ein Tory." (20)

Such a dialectic view of history - with its assumption that progress would be made - postulated an acceptance of the conservative principle as a restraining and stabilising influence. This view equally presumed that the conservative principle would act only as a healthy restraint and would not block progress altogether, since that would be to deny the efficacy of the principle of change.

Fontane compared Prussia and Britain and saw that more progress towards freedom had been made in Britain. He ascribed this to the effective working of the two principles in the political institutions of Britain, more especially, in the two party system, which he recommended for Prussia:

"Mögen diese Parteien einen Namen haben, welche sie wollen - die Wiederherstellung zweier Parteien, die sich bekämpfen und ablösen, wird dem Lande Ruhe, Gesundheit, Festigkeit wieder geben." (21)

One can understand the attraction of such a view of historical progress for Fontane. It contrasted favourably with the failure of the 1848 Revolution and promised a greater degree of ultimate success. Fontane had lived through the early years of the bitter period of reaction imposed after the defeat of the 1848 Revolution. He concluded that a 'gradualist' approach, in the long run, was likely to be more successful. Evolution was the key, since revolution only provoked bloody counter-revolution. It should not be overlooked that this lecture contains a strong plea for the establishment of an effective 'progressive' party, made palatable to conservatives under the guise of an historical principle.

Such was Fontane's historical perspective in the 1860's; his view of conservatism must be seen within the context of this broader historical perspective. His rapprochement with conservatism from 1860 onwards, albeit encouraged by circumstances, did not represent such an abrupt break, but has considerable elements of continuity. He was able to regard conservatism as a positive force in history and identified with this aspect of conservative ideology. This even allowed him to see his own role as that of a progressive conservative, since he felt that - within the dialectic - conservatism would itself undergo change.²²

c. Fontane and the 'Kreuzzeitung'

On 1st June 1860, having failed to secure a post as a journalist elsewhere, Fontane accepted - as ultima ratio - the offer of a post of 'Redakteur des englischen Artikels' with the right-wing conservative Berlin daily, the 'Neue Preußische (Kreuz) Zeitung'.²³ This, only a year after he had given unstinted support to the new liberal government of the 'Neue Ära'! Had Fontane at last seen the error of his ways, renounced his liberalism and returned to the conservative fold? The acceptance of the post implied for the moment no such direct change of his political position, although it was a step that was to influence his political thinking considerably in the ensuing decade. He did not accept the post because he had become more conservative; having once accepted the post, however,²⁴ Fontane did discard in time his sympathy for liberalism and moved towards a fairly general identification with the conservative camp.²⁵ Fontane's conversion to conservatism, once he was inside the fold, proceeded apace, and he was soon to regard himself as a thorough-going conservative:

"Man wird mit den Jahren ehrlich und aufrichtig konservativer." (25)

Yet his conservatism was not of the mould of the 'Kreuzzeitung', he did not identify with the politics, as enunciated day by day in the columns of that newspaper.²⁶ Fontane evolved in the 1860's a particular, almost apolitical understanding of conservatism: he saw conservatism, firstly, as a necessary and preordained historical principle (this view had its roots in his experience in England), secondly, he saw it as a code of values, associated in Fontane's mind with the 'adlige Gesinnung', the nobility of mind and character of the Prussian aristocracy. He saw conservatism very much in quintessential ethical terms, that is to say, in terms of moral qualities rather than in terms of political ideas. It is interesting to note that he saw his association with the 'Kreuzzeitung' - or at least justified it to himself - in these terms:

"Mein Kreuz-Ztngs.tum, das ein Hindernis sein könnte, tritt doch wirklich kaum in dem Buche zutage; auch ist das echte, ideale Kreuzzeitungstum eine Sache, die bei Freund und Feind respektiert werden muß, denn sie ist gleichbedeutend mit allem Guten, Hohen und Wahren. Das Zerrbild, das oft zutage tritt, ist nicht die Sache selbst." (29)

As a sub-editor of the 'Kreuzzeitung' (Redakteur des englischen Artikels) which was the journal of the conservative Prussian establishment, Fontane had unrivalled opportunities of moving socially in upper class circles and was thus able to observe at close-quarters that class of person that was to be the prime subjects of his novels in later life. Fontane records that the social gatherings organised by Beutner, the editor, were, in addition to being social occasions of the first order, frequently the forum for debate on the great political and social issues of the day.²⁸

Fontane's post as sub-editor allowed him considerable free time in which to pursue his literary inclinations: he published the first volume of his 'Wanderungen' in 1861 and this was followed in 1863 by a second volume. He also started work on his first full-length novel 'Vor dem Sturm' which was not to be completed and published until 1878.³⁰ Prompted by his interest in strategy and military history - an interest that was very much in evidence in the first two volumes of the 'Wanderungen' - Fontane accepted the suggestion of a Berlin publisher Rudolf von Decker to accompany the Prussian army on the campaign against Denmark in the 1864 war as war correspondent with a view to publishing an account of the war; Fontane's book 'Der Schleswig-Holsteinische Krieg im Jahre 1864' was published in 1866. No sooner had he completed the one than the outbreak of war between Prussia and Austria in 1866 obliged him to leave Berlin for Bohemia - the main theatre of war - to collect material for his next book 'Der deutsche Krieg von 1866' which was published - after three years' work - in 1870. Pressure of work thus compelled him to neglect his novel, but it remained his first love.³⁰ Fontane continued as sub-editor on the 'Kreuzzeitung'

until April 1870 when he resigned.³² In June of the same year - just a month later - he accepted the post of theatre critic for the 'Schausspielhaus am Gendarmenmarkt' on the liberal 'Vossische Zeitung'.

d. The Constitutional Conflict in Prussia(1862-1866)

Fontane's political thinking and his attitude to the political issues of his day are quite naturally closely linked with his view of history. We have already noted his dialectical view of the forward march of history in which progress is seen as the result of a continuing synthesis achieved in the eternal conflict of two necessary and opposing principles, the principle of change and the principle of preservation, these being identified in broad political terms as, respectively, liberalism and conservatism. We noted that Fontane interpreted the conservative principle as a restraining influence on ebullient progress, preserving stability and thus ensuring a smooth continuity of development:

"Wir wünschen uns frischen und freien Wind in den Segeln unseres Staatsschiffes, aber wir brauchen auch den rettenden Anker, der uns auf tiefem Grunde mit seinem Eisenzahne festhält, wenn die frische Brise zum Sturme zu werden droht." (33)

The conservative principle was, as Fontane conceived it, far from being static, it was itself constantly evolving with the dialectic pattern; the dialectic made each principle dynamic, depending for its own evolution on its opposite. The two principles were thus mutually indispensable, if progress in history was to be sustained.

The two principles, far from moving towards a synthesis, clashed dramatically in Prussia in the 1860's in the Constitutional Conflict between the King and his Prime Minister Bismarck and the liberal majority in the Prussian parliament. It is possible to deduce from his writings what Fontane's view of this conflict was.³⁴

In the second volume of the 'Wanderungen' published at the height of the conflict in 1863, Fontane devotes a chapter to the political career of Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz, an aristocrat from the Mark Brandenburg who was prominent amongst those who opposed the reforms of Stein and Hardenberg. Fontane describes Marwitz's intellectual achievement as a 'Wendepunkt'³⁵ in the

political evolution of Prussia. Where did the significance of this figure lie for Fontane? As Fontane saw it, Marwitz had given in his writings and in his political activities - for the first time in Prussia - coherent and cogent expression to a conservative philosophy in direct opposition to the liberal and democratic ideas of the French Revolution. Marwitz had established conservatism as a political principle in Prussia:

"...wie viele auch, mit größerem oder geringerem Recht, bestrebt sein mögen, Einzelparagraphen des Konservatismus zu bekämpfen, das Prinzip selbst ist von jedem Denkenden anerkannt." (36)

The two great historical principles were thus established in Prussia as fully formulated thesis and antithesis; evolution could begin!

"Erst die Französische Revolution schuf politisch-freiheitliche Gedanken, und aus der Auflehnung gegen den siegreichen Strom derselben, aus dem ernstesten Unternehmen Idee mit Idee und geistige Dinge mit geistigen Waffen bekämpfen zu wollen, gingen wahrhaft politische Parteien und ein wirkliches politisches Leben hervor." (37)

Fontane welcomed the establishment of the two principles in the political life of Prussia

"Erst von Marwitz' Zeiten ab existiert in Preußen ein politischer Meinungskampf." (38)

and thus the dialectic of progress. He was even more concerned that the political struggle should be removed from the arena of power politics where the confrontation between the state and parliament had momentarily paralysed the operation of the two principles, he emphasised the need for 'Ideenkampf auf politischem Gebiete',³⁹ of the need to 'geistige Dinge mit geistigen Waffen zu bekämpfen'.⁴⁰ Fontane urges that the synthesis of the two opposing principles should be achieved at any given time in a peaceful manner without resort to force.

This stress on rational and civilised debate by men of principle and honour is significant seen against the background of parliament and the monarchy locked in bitter struggle. It looked as if the mutually beneficial influence

of thesis and antithesis had become paralysed with each principle denying the validity and existence of the other.⁴⁰ The present parliamentary deadlock could easily lead to revolution or fear of revolution could lead to suppression and reaction. To avoid this Fontane sought in the pages of his 'Wanderungen' to make a restatement of the evolutionary road; he wished to de-escalate the conflict and release the two principles from the grip of political deadlock so that they could once again move freely towards synthesis.

The evolutionary road involved for Fontane the acceptance of both principles and their combined influence as the motor of peaceful change. In the 'Wanderungen' he was seeking to persuade his largely conservative readership likewise and reconcile them to the necessary existence of the liberal principle. As he had stated in his lecture 'Whigs und Tories':

"...die Wiederherstellung zweier Parteien, die sich bekämpfen und ablösen, wird dem Lande Ruhe, Gesundheit, Festigkeit wiedergeben." (42)

While Fontane asserted the validity of the conservative principle⁴³ and wrote as if he were a conservative himself, he was equally at pains to defend the liberal or democratic principle:

"Innerhalb der Politik sind sie (i.e. self-made men like Johann Christian Gutz) dann jedesmal treue Anhänger des Satzes 'alles für das Volk, alles durch das Volk'. Und so war auch der alte Gutz. Die Zeiten sind vorüber, wo man sich berechtigt glauben durfte, daraus einen moralischen Makel herzuleiten. Das Recht einer freien Entwicklung der Geister, nach rechts oder links hin, ist zugestanden..." (44)

Elsewhere in the same volume Fontane defends the 1848 Revolution, pointing out that promises of constitutional reform had been given, but had not been kept and he specifically rejects the notion that the Revolution was the work of a small active, but unrepresentative minority:

"Am 24. Februar erfolgte die 'Februarrevolution' und in weniger als drei Wochen zog das revolutionäre

"Wetter über ganz Europa hin. Überall fand es reichlichen Zündstoff und überall schlug es ein. Es war eben nicht alles so, wie es sein sollte. Die Zusagen von 1815 waren unerfüllt geblieben, ein Druck war da, eine Luft, die das freie Atmen hinderte... Aus dieser Stimmung heraus erwuchs unser '18.März'. Ohne den stillen Vorschub, den das gesamte Volksgefühl den Krawallern von Fach leistete, wäre dieser Tag nicht möglich gewesen. Die junge Freiheit war geboren." (45)

He countered the view that those who fought on the barricades were just professional agitators and ruffians:

"Es handelt sich also nicht um 'Gesindel', das bekämpft werden sollte, sondern, wie schon hervorgehoben, um eine Elite-Truppe, die nach Intellekt, Wissen und bürgerlicher Stellung erheblich höher stand, als die uckermärkischen Füsiliere, die hier unsererseits in den Kampf eintraten." (46)

Fontane was careful to reassure his conservative readers of his loyalty to the cause of conservatism, emphasising that he was on the side of the army by the use of 'unsererseits', only to calmly proceed in the next line to continue his rehabilitation of the 1848 revolutionaries:

"Je bestimmter ich auf seiten dieser letzteren(i.e. government troops) stehe, desto freier auch darf ich es aussprechen, daß nichts falscher und ungerechter ist, als auf die Scharen des Maiaufstandes verächtlich herabzublicken." (47)

A few lines further Fontane asserted:

"Eine Republik herstellen zu wollen, ist nicht notwendig eine Dummheit, am wenigsten eine Gemeinheit." (48)

In his contributions to the volume 'Männer der Zeit'(1862) Fontane struck a decidedly democratic note, more particularly in his critical appreciation of Otto von Raumer who was Minister for Education under Manteuffel.⁴⁸

In all this we see Fontane fighting on both sides of the barricades, as it were; he is ostensibly a conservative writer, but a conservative who frequently took to defending the actions and motives of the opponents of conservatism. His main concern was to establish with his readers the validity of both conservatism and democratic liberalism so that the protagonists would accept each other as honourable opponents. The one point on which Fontane criticised Marwitz was his refusal to accept the middle class as equals.⁵⁰

Fontane stressed the need to fight honourably for one's political beliefs, indeed, attaching greater importance to the manner in which the struggle was carried on than to the ends:

"...nicht Ziel und Richtung gelten fürder als das sittlich Entscheidende, sondern der Weg. Wessen Weg über Treubruch, Verrat und Undankbarkeit führt, den kann kein hohes Prinzip, keine glänzende Fahnschrift retten; wer umgekehrt lautere Wege wandelt, dem gegenüber ist es gleichgültig, wenigstens vom ethischen Standpunkt aus, wohin diese Wege leiten." (50)

He reiterates the point in volume II:

"Denn jedem selbstsuchtlos geführten geistigen Kampfe gelten unsere Sympathien, und erst aus Streben und Irren gebiert sich die Wahrheit." (52)

Fontane was urging compromise on both sides.

In volume I of the 'Wanderungen' Fontane relates the biography of one Andreas Fromm, a seventeenth century theologian, a rather curious figure for his time. He is described as

"...ein Mann des Friedens, der Versöhnung, des schönen Maßes." (53)

who was characterized by

"...eine zu Nachgiebigkeit und Kompromiß geneigte Natur." (54)

He was

"...ein feinfühligter Mann, dem alles Gröbliche und Rücksichtslose widerstrebte, er war ein feinsinniger Mann, dem alles tyrannische Wesen, gleichviel ob es Hof oder Geistlichkeit, Volk oder Regierung übte, widerstand. ... Es gebrach ihm an dogmatischer Strenge, das wird zuzugeben sein, aber er hatte die schönsten Seiten des Christentums: die Liebe und die Freiheit." (55)

Fromm pleaded for tolerance between Lutherans and Calvinists:

"Er war einfach ein Mann, der in einer kirchlichen Zeit, die durchaus ein 'Entweder-Oder' verlangte, sich mit Wärme für ein 'Weder-Noch' entschied." (56)

Fromm was a symbol of reconciliation in a time of bitter and deep dogmatic division:

"...er hatte den Mut auf halbem Wege stillzustehen und sich zwischen die Parteien zu stellen." (57)

Fontane describes the religious strife of those years in a way which suggests striking parallels to the political situation in Prussia in the 1860's:

"Er (i.e. Fromm) glaubte, wenn nicht an eine Verschmelzung,

"so doch an eine Versöhnung der beiden Konfessionen, an die Möglichkeit eines einträchtigen Nebeneinandergehens und beklagte deshalb die unerbittliche Rechthaberei der Lutheraner, deren Starrsinn... die Möglichkeit einer Ausgleichung oder nur eines gegenseitigen Geltenlassens immer weiter hinausrückte." (58)

Fontane obviously warmed to the character and fate of Fromm; perhaps he even saw something of himself in Fromm as some-one who probably sided with neither party whole-heartedly, aware as he was of the validity of both philosophies. Fontane probably felt that he could side with neither Bismarck and the Prussian aristocracy nor with the liberal bourgeoisie; compromise and reconciliation were the only means to a feasible solution.

Reconciliation is broadly the theme of the novel 'Vor dem Sturm' begun in the early 1860's in which Fontane depicts the Prussian aristocracy and bourgeoisie united in the struggle to liberate Germany from French occupation in 1812. The reconciliation is symbolised in the union between Lewin von Vitzewitz the aristocrat and Marie Kniehaase, the commoner. In his original notes on the novel written in 1862 ⁵⁸ Fontane had intended the aristocrats to be portrayed as men concerned for the interests of the whole German nation, not for narrow dynastic and class interests:

"Die Militärgruppe: v.Schach, v.Jürgaß, v.Bummcke. Loyal, aber oppositionell, mehr republikanisch fürs Land als für die Dynastie. Dies in einer Einleitung als allgemeine Charakterisierung des märkischen Adels." (60)

Such sketches betray Fontane's hopes that the aristocracy would abandon - in the conflict situation of the 1860's - the defence of class privilege and accept the liberal bourgeoisie as its equal,⁶⁰ his hope that the two classes would join - as in the Wars of Liberation - in the great common cause, the unification of Germany.⁶¹

Were Fontane's hopes of a progressive aristocracy realistic? It would seem not, given the confrontation between aristocracy and bourgeoisie in the 1860's, yet it must be remembered that Fontane's conservatism - with its basic assumption of change, however gradual - encompassed

both the ethical principles for which he believed conservatism stood and, just as important, his hopes for the future evolution of conservatism. He believed that such an evolution must take place, and that the constant interaction of the two principles, each working on and gradually modifying the other, would ensure that conservatism developed into a more progressive philosophy. 'Vor dem Sturm' represented his hopes for the future evolution of conservatism. Fontane was himself, as a writer, quietly agitating for such changes, he was very much the progressive 'evolutionary' conservative to whom such hopes did not seem too exaggerated.

Despite the 'progressive' nature of Fontane's conservatism, there is no hint of any sympathy or support for the constitutional demands of the progressive opposition in the Constitutional Conflict. Indeed, in a letter to Hertz, he went so far as to welcome the removal of moderate liberals from the government.⁶³ Yet, was not the struggle of the opposition for the rights of the people in a sovereign parliament the same struggle that Fontane had committed himself to as a young revolutionary democrat some twelve years previously? Was he not stirred in some way by the events and the possibility of a victory for the opposition? or had he now foresworn his earlier political convictions?

Fontane had probably not abandoned his earlier political beliefs completely - after all, he defended the 1848 revolutionaries in his writings. But the Revolution had been crushed, republican democracy had been defeated and Fontane's republican ideals, which he had not given up,⁶⁴ had become utopian. Meanwhile he had to live and work in the far from ideal conditions of the 1850's and 60's. He had thrown in his lot with the conservatives, originally as much for material reasons as from inner conviction. But he tried his best to become a sincere conservative, as he understood conservatism:

"Daß ich seit 4 Wochen eine Stellung bei der Kreuz-Ztg. habe und den englischen Artikel des Blattes redigiere, wirst Du vielleicht schon erfahren haben. Bis jetzt hab ich durchaus keine Ursache, den getanen Schritt zu bereun. Man wird mit den Jahren ehrlich und aufrichtig konservativer und läßt sich durch Persönlichkeiten und zufällige Vorkommnisse immer weniger in den großen Prinzipien beirren." (65)

His circumstances - as editor on the 'Kreuzzeitung' - precluded any open support for the opposition and its demands.⁶⁵ He had, anyway, no inclination to risk losing his job, his social status and his security and being forced to abandon his work on the 'Wanderungen':

"Mein Leben hat sich sehr gnädig gestaltet; viele Jahre lang entschieden ein 'verlorner Posten', habe ich jetzt eine Art bürgerliche und gesellschaftliche Stellung, mein anständiges Auskommen, einen Beruf, der mich erfreut und befriedigt, gute Kinder und eine in hundert Stücken respektable und sehr zu lobende Frau. ... Man wird älter, lebt seinen Büchern und seinem Beruf und läßt im übrigen die Dinge laufen, wie sie laufen wollen." (67)

Any sympathy Fontane might have had for the aims of the liberal opposition was checked by his deep-seated scepticism of liberalism. He had been disillusioned by the conduct of the opposition in the 1850's.⁶⁸ Liberalism was the ideology of the bourgeoisie, a class for whose values and general character he had little respect.⁶⁸ In addition, the turbulent policy of confrontation adopted by the liberal opposition

"- das andre ist doch der reine Treibsand, der durch die Strömung, wie sie gerade geht, mal hierhin mal dorthin geworfen wird." (70)

conflicted with Fontane's profound need for peace and stability:

"Ich bin innerlich tief-müde, seit Monaten, vielleicht seit dem Monat schon, wo ich von England als eine geschlagene Truppe zurückkam, und bin seitdem (halb auch aus einer Art Klugheit oder aus dem Instinkt: 'Wozu? es hilft ja doch alles nicht') halb unfähig, halb unlustig, Dinge mit Feuer in Angriff zu nehmen." (70)

His support of the conservative cause seems to have stemmed as much from a sense of hopelessness and resignation as anything else, a feeling that was not mitigated by unresolved contradictions in his attitude to the conservative aristocracy.

On the one hand, he felt that the typical conservative contrasted favourably, as regards character, with the typical bourgeois,⁷² but he also recognised that:

"der Bürgerstand ... eine hervorragende Bedeutung hat und zum Teil gerade der Träger all der Vorzüge ist, die sonst dem Adel und der Geistlichkeit eigen ..." (73)

Indeed, he believed that the power and influence of the bourgeoisie would increase, while that of the conservative aristocracy would decrease:

"An die jetzt durch die Dampfschiffe so belebte Staffage in Treptow anknüpfend, meinte er (Fontane), diese würden für Berlin eine neue Fortschrittsära einführen; es sei überhaupt mit der alten Zeit aus! So sehr er der Gesinnung nach zu den Konservativen auch gehöre, so müßte er doch eingestehen, die Macht des Adels sei gebrochen und gehe über kurz oder lang ihrem Ende zu. Sie haben sich auf den Grundbesitz basiert - dieser gelte jetzt schon wenig genug - das Kapital wäre an seine Stelle getreten und damit zugleich würde der Bürgerstand seine Macht immer mehr erheben. In früheren Zeiten habe sich dieser in den alten Reichs- und Handelsstädten wohl schon hervor getan, in den anderen Städten sei er aber in seinen Ideen höchst beschränkt zu nennen gewesen - mit der Macht, die ihm das Geld gebe, erweitere sich auch sein Gesichtskreis. Man würde die neue Zeit demnach die Herrschaft des Geldes bezeichnen müssen." (74)

The Constitutional Conflict was finally resolved by resort to the sort of compromise that Fontane had been quietly advocating. In his biographical sketch of Bismarck he describes the end of the Conflict in the following way:

"Abweichend von dem in absolutistisch-militärischen Kreisen bestehenden Anschauungen wünschte Bismarck der neuen Volksvertretung versöhnlich entgegenzukommen und beantragte deshalb in der am 5. August eröffneten Session 'Indemnität' für alle seit Beginn des Konflikts ohne Landtagsbewilligung verwendeten Beträge. Diese dem konstitutionellen Prinzip gemachte Konzession führte zur Bildung einer die deutsche Politik Bismarcks unterstützenden 'Nationalliberalen Partei' ..." (75)

There is no reason to suppose that Fontane did not fully approve of Bismarck's action.

e. Bismarck's foreign policy 1860 - 1871

1. The War with Denmark (1864)

According to the account given in his history of the 1864 war with Denmark 'Der Schleswig-Holsteinische Krieg im Jahre 1864',⁷⁵ Fontane was of the opinion that Denmark had provoked the military intervention of Prussia and Austria

"der Handschuh war hingeworfen; die beiden deutschen Großmächte nahmen ihn auf ..." (77)

by incorporating the province of Holstein fully into the Kingdom of Denmark under a centralised constitution and thus separating Schleswig from Holstein. He concluded, giving expression to his evident satisfaction at the successful outcome of the war:

der "Ausgehend, nicht von dem Erbrecht des einen oder andern Prätendenten, sondern von dem deutschen Recht der Herzogtümer (das, feierlichen Zusagen zum Trotz, auf dem Punkt gestanden hatte, durch die Einverleibung Schlesiws in Dänemark schwer verletzt zu werden) hatten die deutschen Großmächte den Kampf begonnen und das Resultat dieses Kampfes lag jetzt vor: die Herzogtümer waren deutsch, frei. Ein sechsmonatiger Krieg ... hatte dies glänzende Resultat herbeigeführt, glänzender, als es bei Ausbruch des Krieges die kühnsten Hoffnungen erwartet haben mochten." (78)

Fontane's very readable and informative account of the causes of the war is characterised by a remarkable degree of objectivity and detachment; there is a complete absence of nationalism or partisan comment. His concern was that the reader should understand the reasons for the developments that led to war, on both sides. To this end, he describes, in some detail, the political situation in Denmark so that the reader will appreciate why King Christian IX of Denmark felt obliged to ignore the joint Austro-Prussian ultimatum and signed the new constitution.⁷⁹ Much of the book is taken up with graphic descriptions of the fighting; here again, Fontane is scrupulously fair, quoting from Danish as well as German sources⁸⁰

and paying tribute to the bravery and patriotism of the Danish soldiers.⁸⁰ In his pursuit of objectivity Fontane conscientiously compares alternative versions of several key episodes in the fighting, thus quite deliberately countering contemporary tendencies to 'mythologise' persons and events.⁸² Prussia's subsequent outright annexation of the two provinces Schleswig and Holstein - following the defeat of Austria in 1866 - , a matter of considerable controversy at the time⁸³ met with Fontane's approval⁸⁴ although he is at pains in his discussion of the causes of the 1866 war with Austria to point out that Prussia was - at least, vis-à-vis the German Confederation - in breach of formal undertakings: instead of annexing the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, Prussia should have handed it over to the lawful heir, the Prince Augustenburg.⁸⁵ To have done so, and thus adhere to formal legality, Fontane suggests would have meant neglect of Prussia's 'Nationale Aufgabe'.⁸⁶ As it was, Prussia's action, the annexation of Schleswig-Holstein, was entirely justified by Prussia's 'nationaler Beruf':

"Dieses Unrecht ... ist längst als politisches Recht, als nationale Pflicht, als ein Heil und Segen erkannt worden ..." (87)

Fontane omits reference to the question of whether the population of the two provinces were opposed to the annexation or not, although he knew that opposition to annexation by Prussia existed. To have raised the issue, however, would have been regarded as a provocation in both conservative and nationalist circles and Fontane's position did not allow him such freedom of comment.

2. Fontane's perception of Bismarck's role in the events of 1864-1865

Reuter suggests that Fontane's subsequent critical attitude to Bismarck has its roots in his clear perception of Bismarck's dubious role in the events leading up to the war with Austria:

"Insbesondere die Entwicklung von Fontanes Stellung zu Bismarck ist auch für diesen Zusammenhang erhellend. Der alte Fontane beteuerte wiederholt aufrichtig, er beuge sich vor Bismarcks 'Genie'... Wenn Fontane aber zugleich nicht müde wurde, Bismarck immer wieder wegen seines 'beständigen Hanges, die Menschen zu betrügen,' anzuklagen.. so lagen all dem Erfahrungen zugrunde, die bis in die Anfänge der Regierungszeit Bismarcks zurückreichten. Die Behandlung der schleswig-holsteinischen Frage hatte eine wesentliche Rolle dabei gespielt." (88)

It is, however, difficult to establish how Fontane saw and interpreted Bismarck's involvement in the diplomatic manoeuvring that preceded the outbreak of war. There are no explicit references to Bismarck in his history of the war with Denmark: he always used non-personal terms such as 'Preußen' or 'Berlin' or, when referring to both Prussian and Austrian governments 'die deutschen Großmächte'. Fontane followed the conventions of diplomatic historiography. This cannot be taken to mean that Fontane was unaware of Bismarck's role, Bismarck was after all both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. But if he did have reservations about Bismarck's handling of the Schleswig-Holstein question, he did not express them.

3. The war with Austria(1866)

Fontane regarded the war of 1866 as the inevitable consequence of the untenable situation that had been created after the war with Denmark:

"Der Frieden von 1864 gebar den Krieg von 1866... Österreich und Preußen hatten gemeinschaftlich gesiegt, Schleswig-Holstein war gemeinschaftlicher Besitz der beiden Sieger geworden und diese Gemeinschaftlichkeit enthielt die Keime eines beinahe unausbleiblichen Konflikts.

Ein Nebeneinander-Regieren war auf die Dauer unmöglich, der Moment der Auseinandersetzung mußte kommen." (89)

Once again Fontane argued that Prussia had been provoked, this time by Austria's abandonment of the condominium, a move that signalled in Fontane's view Austria's intentions to isolate Prussia diplomatically:

"Preußen in seinen Ansprüchen zu beschränken, an der Entwicklung seiner Machtentfaltung zu hindern, war gleichbedeutend mit Krieg. Diese Alternative lag vor. Die Politik dreht sich um die Frage: wird Österreich zu Preußen stehen oder zum Bunde? Als es (i.e. das Wiener Kabinett) schließlich seine Entscheidung traf und endgültig von der Seite Preußens auf die Seite des Bundes trat, trat es in den Krieg." (90)

The blame lay squarely with Austria:

"Es(Österreich) erkannte nicht scharf genug, daß Preußen keine Wahl, daß es mußte, daß es vor einem nunc aut nunquam stand. Seine Forderung war eine Frage seiner Existenz." (91)

Prussia did not want war.⁹² Perhaps, Fontane hints, Prussia could have been more accomodating,⁹³ but Austria, he reavers,⁹³ bears the full responsibility for the war:

"Seine(i.e. Prussia's) Gegner (zugegeben bis zu einem gewissen Grade provoziert) haben ihm diesen Krieg und mit diesem Kriege seine Siege aufgedrungen." (94)

Prussia, Fontane claimed, was taking justifiable action to defend its interests in the face of hostile Austrian moves, in particular Austria's support for Augustenburg's claims to Schleswig-Holstein.

"Ohne diese Provokationen würde Preußen den Krieg nicht geführt, und im Vertrauen auf seine natürlichen Chancen, auf die unzweifelhaft für ihn günstig liegende Gesamtsituation seine Zeit abgewartet haben." (95)

Fontane concluded his line of argument thus:

"Über den Krieg selbst war entschieden, als Feldmarschall Leutnant von Gablentz die Einberufungsordre für die

"holsteinischen Stände veröffentlichte. Dies war der Handschuh. Österreich hatte ihn hingeworfen. Preußen nahm ihn nur auf." (96)

Throughout his account of the diplomatic prelude to the war Fontane concentrated on the steps that Austria took; Austria was thus seen as the active initiator, while Prussia was cast in the role of the passive defender. Fontane stressed Prussia's restraint.⁹⁷ He believed that Prussia had been provoked: all the evidence available to him pointed to this interpretation, particularly the opposition to the war with Austria within the political and military establishment in Prussia which Fontane described at great length,⁹⁸ persuaded him of the correctness of the hypothesis. He seems, thus, to have underestimated the influence of Bismarck in directing the course of events; reading Fontane's account, you would not have thought that Bismarck played a decisive role at all. He tended to see circumstances as the most powerful factors:

"Die Verhältnisse waren mächtiger als die Personen. Das Gebieterische der Situation drang durch." (99)

Bismarck is described as an agent of the Prussian government rather than a determining influence:

"In Berlin war man schnell entschlossen. Das Maß war voll. Am 26. Januar richtete Graf Bismarck eine Depesche nach Wien, die man als den Ausgangspunkt des Zerwürfnisses betrachten kann." (100)

Frequent use of 'Preußen' and 'man' and other non-personal terms further reduce the emphasis given to individuals and the part they played.

While Fontane's reactions to the major political events of the late 1860's, the establishment of the North German Confederation, the split of the Progressive Party (Fortschrittspartei) and the formation of the National Liberal Party (Nationalliberalen) are not known, there are no reasons to believe that he was affronted by any of these developments.

4. The war with France(1870-1871)

In the introductory chapters to his extensive history of the military campaigns of the Franco-Prussian war, Fontane differentiated between what he called the apparent, 'vorgeblichen' and the real, 'wirklichen' causes of the war. By the apparent causes Fontane understood France's importunate insistence on firm assurances from William I of Prussia that at no future date would he give his support to the candidature of a member of the Hohenzollern house to the throne of Spain. Such insistence, Fontane wrote, was

"...Verzicht...in Form einer Unterwerfung." (101)

France was demanding:

"...ein sich Beugen vor der superioren Macht Frankreichs und dadurch vor aller Welt eine Anerkennung dieser Superiorität." (102)

Yet this was just the apparent cause of the war, the real cause lay deeper. The real cause was the inability of Napoleon to withstand pressure from certain quarters

"...eine rührige Minorität." (103)

for a war with Prussia. The war was not itself due to French chauvinism:

"Selbst der viel verklagte Chauvinismus...kann nicht als der eigentliche Kriegsgrund betrachtet werden." (104)

It was Napoleon's desperate bid to shore up his weak and discredited regime by a show of strength:

"...der Kaiser (sah sich) veranlaßt, ein gezwungen-freiwilliges Bündnis mit dem Chauvinismus als letztes Rettungsmittel zu wählen. Dies war gleichbedeutend mit Rheingrenze und Marsch auf Berlin. Die Schwäche, die Unordnungen, die Verlegenheiten des Kaiserreiches, indem sie dasselbe den nationalen Exaltados in die Arme trieben, sie schufen den Krieg."(105)

The Hohenzollern candidature was an opportunity for France to demonstrate its power:

"So die Vorgänge in Ems. Sie zeigen, nach unserem Ermessen, deutlich, daß man in Frankreich den Krieg wollte und daß die Hohenzollernsche Thronkandidatur nur ein lang ersehnter Vorwand war..." (106)

Prussia was to be forced to back down, Prussia was to be humiliated:

"...die peremptorische Forderung weiterer Konzessionen (drückte) ersichtlich das Verlangen einer

"Demütigung Preußens aus." (107)

And again:

"Die Spanische Thronkandidatur wie die Entrüstung über die dem Grafen Benedetti wiederholentlich verweigerte Audienz - war nur Vorwand für etwas bereits Geplantes." (108)

Bismarck's role in all this was comparatively modest:

"Im übrigen darf gern zugegeben werden, daß Graf Bismarck, als er obiges Telegramm (i.e. Emser Depesche) ... redigierte, die Absicht hatte, den Bruch zu fixieren, ein abermaliges Friedensflickwerk unmöglich zu machen... Er wußte genau, daß Frankreich den Krieg entweder wollte oder ihn wollen mußte... Die Unvermeidlichkeit des Krieges war also gewiß... Sein Telegramm schuf nicht den Krieg, sondern zwängte ihn nur in die richtige Stunde." (109)

Fontane was clearly impressed by the correctness of Bismarck's interpretation of French intentions, as he was by the skill with which Bismarck intervened decisively in the course of events by his publication of the edited Ems telegraph, turning events in Germany's favour.

On 19th June 1870 Napoleon declared war on Prussia; the Franco-Prussian war had begun. Having accepted a suggestion by Decker ¹¹⁰ that he write an account of the war with France along the same lines as the wars with Denmark and Austria, Fontane left Berlin for France on 26th September, travelling via Lunéville to Nancy. On 5th October, while on an excursion to the birthplace of Joan of Arc Domrémy, he was arrested as a Prussian spy. ¹¹¹ After appearing before a military tribunal in Besancon, he was committed to prison on the Ile d'Oléron. ¹¹² He wrote a vivid account of his arrest and imprisonment entitled 'Kriegsgefangen. Erlebtes 1870.' Numerous attempts were made by influential friends of Fontane to secure his release: Decker, Prof. Lazarus, the Wangenheims and Lepel, Heyden and Eggers. Prof. Lazarus wrote to the French Minister of Justice, Crémieux, while the Wangenheims contacted the Archbishop of Besancon, Césaire Mathæu. ¹¹³ Fontane's release was finally secured by Bismarck's personal intervention and he returned to Berlin in December.

In April and May of the following year(1871) Fontane resumed his travels visiting the battle-fields of the war in northern France in order to collect material and impressions for his history of the war.¹¹⁴ He published a separate account of his travels through France in 1871 under the title 'Aus den Tagen der Okkupation. Eine Osterreise durch Nordfrankreich und Elsaß-Lothringen'.

The defeat of France was, in Fontane's view, intended by fate:

"Der endliche Ausgang ist bekannt, er kam, weil er kommen sollte, nicht weil er kommen mußte. Die Demütigung des alten Hochmutsvolkes war beschlossen und an diesem Schicksalsbeschuß gescheitert zu sein, kann die heroischen Anstrengungen, die gemacht wurden, ihn abzuwenden, nicht entwerten."

Fontane also took the defeat of France to be a symptom of its decadence,¹¹⁶ but also as a timely warning for Germany: the whole tenor of his criticism of conditions in France is that of an oblique warning to Germany not to go the same way. The war itself depressed Fontane,¹¹⁷ and he was horrified by the enormous loss of life.¹¹⁸

e. Fontane and the German Empire

Fontane welcomed the establishment of the German Empire. His own description of the proclamation of William I of Prussia as Emperor of Germany is characterised by considerable detachment and restraint,¹¹⁹ almost lack of enthusiasm, but he later admitted:

"Ich habe vieles erlebt, das mir eine tiefinnerliche Freude gemacht hat: die Herausreißung Deutschlands aus der politischen Misere ..." (120)

The foundation of the German Empire was generally regarded as a major triumph for Bismarck and Fontane is not likely to have dissented from this general view.

However, Fontane was concerned about certain aspects of the peace-settlement, especially with regard to the two new provinces Alsace-Lorraine. While he is far from suggesting that the annexation was wrong, he did believe that the opposition of the population to being incorporated into the German Empire could only gradually be overcome. The population would have to be won over.¹²¹ The arrogant chauvinism of some Germans in their attitude to the people of Alsace-Lorraine would guarantee failure.¹²² His worst fears were confirmed in subsequent years.¹²³ Fontane was also deeply disturbed that reports of atrocities by German troops, which he knew to be fully authentic¹²⁴ should have been so strenuously denied by official circles. He wrote a short article for the 'Vossische Zeitung' but it was not published.¹²⁵ Fontane began to appreciate the dangers of militarism, in this case, in the form of suppression of criticism of the military. He was even prompted to remove certain essays from later editions of the 'Wanderungen' as they placed too much emphasis on military traditions and military values.¹²⁶

II : 1871 - 1881

a. Fontane the writer

Fontane continued as theatre critic for the 'Vossische Zeitung' until June 1890, when Hauptmann's 'Friedensfest' was the last play reviewed. The early 1870's saw him at work on his voluminous history of the Franco-Prussian war 'Der Krieg gegen Frankreich 1870-71' which was published in two volumes (1873 and 1875/76). He also wrote a further volume of the 'Wanderungen' describing the 'Havelland' (1873). Apart from a brief period (March to August 1876) as Permanent Secretary to the Academy of Arts in Berlin ¹ Fontane remained a free-lance writer and novelist for the rest of his life, devoting his time and energy entirely to writing. In 1878 he published 'Vor dem Sturm', an historical novel which he had begun in the 1860's. This was followed in 1880 by a further historical novel from the 16th century 'Grete Minde'. Yet Fontane's interest had already been drawn to the problems of contemporary Berlin society; his unfinished novel 'Allerlei Glück'² reflected Fontane's concern with the question of moral norms and the individual in bourgeois society, as did his novel 'L'Adultera' which appeared in 1882.

b. Fontane's view of the general development(1871-1881)

1. Fontane as social critic

One single ideal dominated Fontane's thinking from the early 1860's onwards and remained life-long the load-star in his moral universe: the ideal of the 'cultured aristocratic gentleman' as the embodiment of those values which Fontane prized most highly: nobility and generosity of mind and manner, courage, independence, tolerance, humanity, modesty, concern and consideration for the well-being of others and selflessness in the service of the common weal.³ Fontane's admiration for the English was based on his picture of the English as a race of aristocratic gentlemen:

"Es ist aber doch so, daß uns die beiden westlichen Nationen und ganz besonders die Engländer an Charakter überlegen sind. An Gaben des Geistes sind wir ihnen ebenbürtig, an Allgemeinheit und Vielseitigkeit des Wissens übertreffen wir sie, aber an schöner, edler Gesinnung, an allem was die Engländer 'Gentlemanschaft' nennen, stehen wir weit hinter ihnen zurück." (4)

In contrast Fontane described the Germans as

"...die Proletarier der Weltgeschichte." (5)

The military traditions and the education system made - as far as Fontane could see - no positive contribution to the developments of those character traits he held to be so important. In much the same way Fontane rejected 'Borussismus' because he believed that the values and standards that had made Prussia the political, military and economic power she had become, were obsolete in that they no longer fulfilled any perceptible moral purpose.

"Solange es galt, aus einem fruchtbaren Rohmaterial erst ein brauchbares Staats- und in weiterer Entwicklung auch ein einigermaßen genießbares Menschenmaterial herzustellen, war dieser Prozeß des 'Wichtignehmens' nicht bloß selber wichtig, sondern auch überaus erfreulich und beinah schön.

Nun aber sind wir aus dem Größten heraus, und es muß nun mit dem Scheinwesen ein Ende haben." (6)

The notion of status stemming from official state approval, while it may in the past have served a useful and constructive purpose⁷ led in the present day to

arrogance and conceit. Fontane therefore rejected these Prussian values as inimical to the encouragement of those character traits represented by the 'cultured gentleman'. Such values

"Titulaturen, Orden und andre Wichtigkeits-Attribute sind aber Alfanzereien, gehören der Vergangenheit an und haben mit Freiheit und Gesittung nichts zu tun." (8)

They constituted an obstacle to further moral progress and had, therefore, to be set aside.

Even in his assessment of the influence of the Prussian traditions on the political culture of his day, the ideal 'cultured gentleman' is a key factor:

"Da kam ein kluges Fürstengeschlecht ins Land und schuf einen Staat. Alles darin teilte sich weniger in Stände... sondern in Regierte und Regierende. Dies ging sehr gut, denn auch die Regierten fühlten sich glücklich. Ein Staat entstand, und die Entstehungsgeschichte desselben muß in ihrer Art als bewundernswert gelten. Aus einem ziemlich wertlosen Rohmaterial entstand etwas relativ Gutes. Aber wie gut auch in seiner Art, es gehörte einer niedrigsten Kulturentwicklung an. Von Freiheit keine Rede. Und daran kranken wir noch. Aller gegebenen und gesetzlich garantierten Freiheit zum Trotz, sind wir innerlich unfrei geblieben und teilen uns nach wie vor in Regierende und Regierte. Die Selbständigkeit fehlt, die Initiative; wir erwarten nach wie vor alles von der Regierung. Wir finden es bequem und vorteilhaft, uns regieren zu lassen. Wir fahren dabei gar nicht schlecht; aber es geht uns in Erscheinung und Auftreten etwas Freies, Sicheres, Weltmännisches dadurch verloren." (9)

Colonies could perhaps, Fontane speculated, play a valuable role in building such free reliant individuals:

"Der einzige Weg zur Heranziehung einer Aristokratie, d.h. eines aristokratischen Fühlens in einer herrschenden Rasse ist das Koloniewesen." (10)

The point of departure for Fontane's social critique is a) the critique of certain negative character traits in individual members of a social class,¹¹ which recurrently observed, Fontane came to regard as typical for the class as a whole; b) the critique of those traditions, institutions, attitudes and models which, by their encouragement of negative character traits, constituted obstacles in the way of progress towards realisation of that ideal Fontane cherished of the moral and free man.

2. The middle classes

One trend, in particular, preoccupied Fontane in the years following the establishment of the German Empire: the ascendancy of the middle classes and the attendant spread of the bourgeois mentality in German society:

"Überall prävaliert ein Standes- oder Bourgeoisgefühl, und ich kenne keinen, der sich ganz davon frei hielt." (12)

Fontane had already noted that

"...die Macht des Adels sei gebrochen und gehe über kurz oder lang ihrem Ende zu. Sie habe sich auf den Grundbesitz basiert... das Kapital wäre an seine Stelle getreten und damit zugleich würde der Bürgerstand seine Macht immer mehr erheben. Man würde die neue Zeit demnach die Herrschaft des Geldes bezeichnen müssen." (13)

With the dominant position of the bourgeoisie came the bourgeois mentality, the 'Geldsackgesinnung':

"Denn der Bourgeois, wie ich ihn auffasse, wurzelt nicht ausschließlich im Geldsack; viele Leute, darunter Geheimräte, Professoren und Geistliche, Leute, die gar keinen Geldsack haben oder einen sehr kleinen, haben trotzdem eine Geldsackgesinnung und sehen sich dadurch in der beneidenswertesten oder auch nicht beneidenswertesten Lage, mit dem schönsten Bourgeois jederzeit wetteifern zu können." (14)

The bourgeois mentality came to represent for Fontane all that he found reprehensible in contemporary society:

"...echtstes Bourgeoisium: sicher, bequem, trivial, ungebildet...die Mischung von Mesquinerei und Roheit, die all unsre Zustände durchdringt." (15)

He detested the materialism of the bourgeoisie, not that he objected to wealth, indeed, wealth brought with it an independence that was positively liberating:

"Es haftet ja dem Gelde eine zauberhafte Macht an, auch im Guten, und das Absterben des Kleinlichen, daran die Deutschen auch jetzt noch leiden, ist eine der großen Segnungen großen Besitzes und großer Verhältnisse." (16)

What Fontane objected to was the hypocrisy, the moral cant of the typical bourgeois whose single-minded pursuit of wealth and status was accompanied by fulsome lip-service paid to high ideal values:

"Alle geben sie vor, Ideale zu haben; in einem fort

quasseln sie vom 'Schönen, Guten, Wahren' und knicksen doch nur vor dem Goldnen Kalb, entweder indem sie tatsächlich alles, was Geld und Besitz heißt, umcounen oder sich doch heimlich in Sehnsucht danach verzehren." (17)

The figure of Frau Jenny Treibel in the novel of the same name is the outstanding representative of this mentality:

"Titel: 'Frau Kommerzienrätin oder Wo sich Herz zum Herzen findt'. Dies ist die Schlußzeile eines sentimentalen Lieblingsliedes, das die 50jährige Kommerzienrätin im engeren Zirkell beständig singt und sich dadurch Anspruch auf das 'Höhere' erwirbt, während ihr in Wahrheit nur das Kommerzienrätliche, will sagen viel Geld, das 'Höhere' bedeutet. Zweck der Geschichte: das Hohle, Phrasenhafte, Lügnerische, Höchmütige, Hartherzige des Bourgeoisstandpunktes zu zeigen, der von Schiller spricht und Gerson meint." (18)

The pre-eminence accorded by the bourgeois to material possessions had, Fontane felt, a stultifying influence on human values; he accordingly, associated such qualities as ostentatiousness, conventionality, superficiality, small-mindedness, meanness, lack of generosity, warmth, tact and fine feeling with the bourgeois mentality.

Fontane's hostility to the bourgeoisie goes back to his 'democratic' period, had its origins in what he saw as their failure to give vigorous political and moral leadership in the struggle for democracy in the 1840's and 50's.:

"Es ist mindestens ein Fingerzeig, daß die mittelalterliche Kunst und Kultur nirgends herrlicher geblüht hat als in den Bürgerrepubliken der lombardischen und flandrischen Städte, die trotz kaiserlicher Oberhoheit wirkliche Republiken waren und selbst den Arm und die Macht eines Barbarossa oder fünften Karl nicht scheuten, wenn es galt, für ihr Recht und ihre Freiheit einzustehen. Wie sind wir zurückgekommen! Das waren die noblen Tage der Selbstregierung, wonach wir jetzt schreien und wozu wir nicht mehr und nicht weniger mitbringen als - nichts. Die Bürger von damals dachten und taten alles selbst; für unsre feisten Bourgeois muß gedacht und getan werden; der Götze der Bequemlichkeit hat den Gott der Freiheit in den Staub getreten." (19)

The middle classes lacked the courage of their liberal convictions, had compromised their political principles and thus proved themselves unfit to make any claim to leadership.

Fontane's enthusiasm in the late 1850's for aristocratic figures from Prussian history derives - at least in part - from his belief that here, in the Prussian past, he had discovered a breed of men who could justifiably claim to be both political and moral leaders. As a reaction to the supine representatives of bourgeois liberalism, Fontane turned to conservative men of action. In the Prussian past were men of action who combined energy and valour with patriotic virtues and nobility of mind. Although in his more rational moments Fontane knew full well that such men were figures from the past, and that the aristocracy of Fontane's own time singularly lacked such colourful individuals, he still clung to his rather idealised picture of the aristocracy,²⁰ hoping that the aristocracy, mindful of its traditions and inspired with a re-newed spirit of patriotic service, might give Germany the political and moral leadership that Fontane believed to be the task of the aristocracy.²¹

3. The Aristocracy

In the post 1871 period the Prussian aristocracy - despite the emergence meanwhile of a prosperous and politically influential bourgeoisie - continued to occupy the highest positions in the state and the army; as a class, they continued to lay claim to political leadership in Germany. Fontane had - as we have noted - looked to the aristocracy and his interpretation of the moral principles of conservatism to give Prussia and Germany the moral lead she required. Yet - as Fontane came to realise - the claims made by the aristocracy to leadership and to control of the state were made not in pursuit of some worthy political or moral ideal, some patriotic goal or in the service of the common weal; the claims were made in the naked and arrogant defence of political influence, class privilege and sectional interest. Here lies the reason for Fontane's gradual but increasing disillusionment with the aristocracy in the 1870's.

The origins of Fontane's disillusionment with the aristocracy and with what he describes as the 'regierende Klasse' can be traced to his dealings with the Prussian civil service, more particularly, the 'Kultusministerium' and to the way he felt he had been shabbily treated by that other bastion of Prussian aristocratic conservatism, the 'Kreuzzeitung'.²² Fontane was incensed by the condescending tone habitually adopted by civil servants and by the marked lack of generosity he felt characterised their attitude, a point reminiscent of his criticism of the bourgeois mentality:

"Gegen das ganze Ministerium (Kultusministerium) habe ich einen wohlbegründeten Haß. Seit langem hätte es eine Art von moralischer Verpflichtung gehabt (namentlich wenn Sie daran denken, wie wenig man mir meine 4jährige Mission in England gelohnt und gedankt hatte) etwas Reelles, Dauerndes für mich zu tun; statt dessen haben sie sich jeden Tropfen abbetteln lassen. Bethmann-Hollweg war ein steifbockiger, unliebsamer alter Herr, Mühlner ein dünkelfafter, halb-verdreht gewordener Egoist, seine Frau (die man mitrechnen muß, denn sie war Minister) ein Gräuel, Stiehl ein wichtigtuertischer Grobian und selbst Lehnert ein wunderbarer Heiliger....

An den perfiden, nichtsnutzigen Reskripten dieses kümmerlichen, schusterhaften Ministeriums wüрге ich noch." (23)

Fontane's brief and unhappy experience as Secretary to the Berlin Academy of Arts confirmed his worst impressions:

"Immer die unsinnige Vorstellung, daß das Mitwirtschaften in der großen, langweiligen und so weit ich sie kennen gelernt habe total confusen Maschinerie, die sich Staat nennt, eine ungeheure Ehre sei ... Nur die ungeheure Eitelkeit der Menschen, der kindische Hang nach Glanz und falscher Ehre, das brennende Verlangen den alten Wrangel einladen zu dürfen oder eine Frau zu haben, die Brüsseler Spitzen an der Nachtjacke trägt ..." (24)

The mediocrity of Prussia's 'ruling class' contrasted sadly with their arrogant claims to represent the state:

"sie sind vielleicht unerlässlich, oder doch höchst wichtig, aber sie überschätzen sich. Es sind die mediokresten Menschen von der Welt, die alles bei uns bevölkern, für alles gerade ausreichen, zuverlässig, brav, gerecht, tüchtig sind, aber langweilig zum Extrem, nichts weniger als klug und begabt, und auf ihre kleine Begabung hin von einem Dünkel, der alles übersteigt. Sie identifizieren sich mit dem Staat. Dazu haben sie eine Art Recht. Aber sie vergessen, daß dieser Staat sicherlich minder unausstehlich und wahrscheinlich moralisch nicht viel schlechter wäre, wenn sie fehlten und andere Leute an die Stelle träten. Sie sind von kleinem Adel, haben ein kleines Vermögen und ein kleines Talent, aber sie addieren es doch so zusammen, daß schließlich eine Größe herauskommen muß." (25)

The indifferent reception given to Fontane's Novelle 'Grete Minde' (1879) by the upper class convinced him that they had become thoroughly infected by the bourgeois mentality with its perennial concern for status, prestige, position and wealth:

"Es ist so furchtbar respektlos und bestärkt mich in meinen Anschauungen von dem innerlichst niedrigen Standpunkt unsrer sogenannten 'regierenden Klassen'. Man spricht immer von Bourgeoisium; unsre Bourgeois sind lange nicht mehr die schlimmsten; der niedrige Geist des Bourgeoisiums steckt jetzt in der Militär- und Oberbeamtenschicht. Stellung, Orden, Titel, Vermögen, Hofgesellschaft - alles andre ist Kaff." (26)

The moral cant Fontane had hitherto tended to associate with the bourgeoisie, he now observed in the upper class too:

"Übrigens ist es zum Totlachen, daß gerade Z , solange ich ihn kenne, immer von 'Fahne hoch halten' und 'Wahrung der ideellen Interessen' spricht. Alles Larifari." (27)

Fontane was affronted by the spectacle of the upper classes continuing to claim political and moral leadership, when they had so totally succumbed to the bourgeois mentality:

"Das Bourgeoisium, will sagen das ohne rechten Lebensgehalt bloß aufs Äußerliche gerichtete Dasein steckt jetzt viel mehr und jedenfalls viel häßlicher in den oberen Militär- und Beamtenkreisen als im Bürgertum. Jedenfalls tritt es hier (bei Militär und Beamten) häßlicher, verdrießlicher, beleidigender auf. Ein reicher Brauer hat keine Verpflichtung sich um 'ideale Menschengüter' zu kümmern, er verlangt Vermögen, Wohlleben und eine Villa. Jene 'regierenden Klassen' aber haben aus alter Zeit die Vorstellung mit herübergenommen, daß es mit ihnen etwas Besonderes sei, daß sie Hirn und Herz des Volkes verträten und sie vertreten heutzutage keins von beiden mehr, weder das eine noch das andre. Sie sind ganz und gar veräußerlicht, kleine sich unterwerfende nur auf den Gehorsam gestellte Streber und Carrieremacher, die dann, wenn's endlich heißt 'Du hast's erreicht Oktavio' wie der Kürassier (im Lager) hochmütig vom hohen Sattel her auf die Menschheit niederblicken." (28)

Fontane's long-nurtured hopes that the Prussian aristocracy might abandon its concern for its own sectional and class interest and evolve into a broader based Tory party on the English model were to be disappointed. He noted:

"Wirklich, es lebt in unserm Adel nach wie vor ein naives Überzeugtsein von seiner Herrscherfähigkeit und Herrscherberechtigung fort, ein Überzeugtsein, das zum Schaden ebensowohl des Ganzen wie der einzelnen Teile, und auf lange hin das Zustandekommen einer auf Prinzipien und nicht bloß auf Vorteil und Interesse basierten Torypartei verhindern muß." (29)

A glaring discrepancy thus developed between Fontane's ideal, his notion of the 'gentleman' and the reality of his personal experience of the Prussian aristocracy:

"Unser Adel, ich weiß daß ich zu Ihnen so sprechen darf, ist meist nur adlig durch das 'von' vor seinem Namen, er hält auf seine Rechte, sucht sich aber seinen Pflichten zu entziehen. Daß er seine Söhne Lieutenants werden läßt, ist Privatvergnügen. Wenn ich Umschau halte, so begegne ich in der Oberschicht unsres Volkes, unter Adel, Beamten, Honoratioren, Künstlern und Gelehrten einer nur sehr mäßigen Anständigkeit. Sie sind eng, geizig, neidisch, rechthaberisch, ohne Sinn für Form und Billigkeit,

"wollen nehmen und nicht geben, huldigen mehr der Schein-Ehre als der wirklichen und entbehren in einem unglaublichen Grade der Hochherzigkeit, des Edelmutts und der Gabe zu verzeihen und Opfer zu bringen. Sie sind selbstsüchtig, hart, unliebenswürdig. So sind die Tausende, unter denen es immer Hunderte von Ausnahmen gibt. Diese Ausnahmen sind mitunter sehr glänzend, aber doch immer Ausnahmen." (30)

Fontane was obliged to conclude:

"Der Adel und namentlich der Kleinadel hat keine Ahnung davon, daß seit etwa 100 Jahren etwas in der Welt herangereift ist, was man den Gentleman nennt und was zwischen allen denen, die diesen Namen führen, eine Gleichheit schafft, eine Gleichheit, die auf gleichartiger Bildung (Wissen), Gesinnung und gesellschaftlicher Form beruht und demselben Anstande und Ehrengesetz gehorcht." (31)

By the end of the 1870's Fontane's hopes for a renewed Tory aristocracy had considerably diminished, he rejected their hoary claims to leadership in Germany. Their

"...Pseudokonservativismus...der schließlich nichts will als sich selbst und das was ihm dient..." (32)

their refusal to abandon the defence of class interest and privilege and join the middle class and give Germany the unifying moral and political leadership she needed ³³ disqualified them in Fontane's eyes for such a task.

4. Militarism

The increasing prestige of the army after the victories over the French in the 1870/71 war and the attendant overweening arrogance of the Prussian officer corps was a further trend that deeply disturbed Fontane. In the 1860's Fontane had developed a keen interest in military matters: apart from the 'Kriegsbücher', he had paid a good deal of attention in volumes one and two of his 'Wanderungen' (1861 and 1863) to the biographies of military heroes and to detailed descriptions of battles.

In the meantime, however, especially since 1871, Fontane had become more sceptical about the value of Prussian military traditions; he had anyway tended to regard them primarily as furnishing outstanding examples of valour and personal sacrifice. Now these same traditions were, as he was able to observe, having a brutalising effect on social mores.

While travelling in Alsace in 1871 Fontane was able to see for himself how the military spirit had infected the civil administration of the newly won province: the recalcitrant population was to be intimidated, compelled into becoming German. A truly military solution! ³⁴ Fontane believed that the only way the population of Alsace-Lorraine could be won for Germany was if they were gently weaned from French culture:

"...wir müssen einfach versuchen, eine neue Liebe zu gewinnen." (35)

He warned of the danger of trying to 'germanise' the population by decree:

"Der französische Geist muß erst wieder heraus. Darüber ist man einig. Diesen französischen Geist aber vertreiben wir maßlich weder durch unsere zivile noch durch unsere Heeresverwaltung, was alles auch zu Lob und Preis beider gesagt werden mag. Um die Vorzüge derselben, die sich in Exaktheit, in Treu und Glauben, in Unbestechlichkeit zu erkennen geben, zu würdigen, ja auch nur zu verstehen, muß der ganze geistige Boden erst umgeackert worden sein. Ein solches Umackern geschieht aber nicht durch Paragraphen, auch nicht durch die besteh,..." (36)

The task was essentially a cultural one:

"diese Aufgabe aber ist eine rein geistige und kann nur durch geistige Mittel gelöst werden. Die Berührung mit dem deutschen Geist allein kann diese Wandlung vollziehen: Lehre, Wissenschaft, Predigt, Lied. Vor allem auch die Presse ... Das Allerbeste, was Deutschland hat, wird dann gerade gut genug sein für - Elsaß-Lothringen." (37)

While Fontane was sometimes no more than faintly amused at the conceited antics of young officers parading about in public in Berlin:

"Zahllose langbeinige Leutnants, mit ihrem mephisthaften langen Krötenspieß an der Seite, die ganzen Kerle überhaupt wie hagre, karikierte Spanier aussehend, laufen in der Potsdamer Strasse auf und ab und zwingen mich wieder zu einem beständigen Kopfschütteln. Und das findet man fein und schön! Ich habe kein Organ für all dies Wesen..." (38)

he was deeply concerned at the wide-spread admiration for the 'military' which bordered on idolatry.³⁹ The 'military tone', the 'forsche Schnauzbärtigkeit'⁴⁰ much affected in military circles and imitated elsewhere Fontane dismissed as:

"eine der niedrigsten Formen der Vornehmheit". (41)

What particularly incensed him was the fact that the officer class, while reserving the right to look down on the rest of civilian humanity, expected to be treated with deference.

Yet, this claim to a special position in society was, in Fontane's view, completely unjustified; he regarded the militarism of the Second Empire as one of the obsolete traditions of the Prussian aristocracy - a tradition that had once served an historical purpose, the creation of the Prussian state, but which now had outlived its usefulness and served only to perpetuate the prestige of the military ethic - a set of values hostile to freedom, morality and humanity.

The fact that the Prussian aristocracy remained wedded to the militaristic traditions of their forebears was for Fontane proof - once more - of that class's determination to cling to false outmoded values:

"...es muß nun mit dem Scheinwesen ein Ende haben. Ein Leutnant darf eben nur ein Leutnant sein und muß darauf verzichten, selbst wenn er bei den Zietenhusaren steht oder gar wohl einen großen Totenkopf an der Pelzmütze trägt, ein Halbgott oder überhaupt irgendwas Exzeptionelles sein zu wollen. Aber wir arbeiten immer noch mit falschen

"Werten und stecken immer noch im 'Wichtignehmen' drin, wo längst schon nichts mehr wichtig zu nehmen ist. Wir müssen jetzt anfangen, mit wirklichen Größen zu rechnen und die Dinge zu nehmen als das, was sie sind, nicht als das, was sie scheinen. Kraft und Vermögen, sie mögen nach einer Seite hin liegen, wohin sie wollen, sind immer eine wirkliche Macht." (42)

The problem of false values is central to Fontane's Novelle 'Schach von Wuthenow' which was, significantly, begun in 1873 and published in 1882. The action of the novel takes place in the summer of 1806 just prior to the collapse of Prussia following the defeats at Jena and Auerstedt. Fontane felt that the situation of the aristocracy in Prussia at that time was similar to that of the aristocracy in the 1870's. A comparison of the passage quoted above from a letter to Martha (8th August 1880) and the following passage from the novel makes this very clear:

"Er(i.e. der Schach-Fall) ist durchaus Zeiterscheinung... dies beständige Sprechen von Ehre, von einer falschen Ehre, hat die Begriffe verwirrt und die richtige Ehre totgemacht... diesen Kultus einer falschen Ehre, die nichts ist als Eitelkeit und Verschrobenheit, ist denn auch Schach erlegen... Eine Stundenspäter war ein Reich zertrümmert und ein Thron gestürzt. Und warum? Weil alles Geschraubte zur Lüge führt und alle Lüge zum Tod... Wir werden an derselben Welt des Scheins zugrunde gehen, an der Schach zugrunde gegangen ist." (43)

This historical novel constituted a warning to the aristocracy of the 1880's, the historical precedent was recalled in literary form.

A comparison current in Fontane's day saw Prussia with its military traditions as a latter-day Sparta; Fontane had nothing but contempt for such a parallel:

"Spartanertum! Bah, Maschinentum ist es und jeden Tag wird es toller." (44)

Far from being the great epic military adventure conjured up by the name of Sparta, the modern Prussian army was no more than a vast and complicated piece of machinery. It was not without significance for Fontane, who was very alive to historical precedent, that Sparta and the Spartan ideal had ultimately perished, having had little influence of the history of Western man:

"Freilich haben Athen und Sparta einst politisch rivalisiert, aber Sparta ist längst nur noch Name und Begriff, während die beglücktere Rivalin eine Wirklichkeit ist bis auf diesen Tag." (45)

Fontane had the uneasy feeling that a society that was founded on military ideals as opposed to moral ideals - and in his view Germany was fast becoming the 'Feldwebel der Geschichte' ⁴⁶ - was predestined to decay: Schach von Wuthenow and Sparta were both examples of this. Moral ideals were, Fontane felt, the only sound and 'real' basis for a just, and therefore, lasting social order.

Fontane also observed with mounting unease the effects of militarism on contemporary values: he saw how the elevation of military values led to contempt for more humane 'civilian' values such as 'Freiheit und Gesittung', ⁴⁷ he observed the hollowness and vainglory of the concept of honour. He noted that no society could be permanently founded on military values alone and warned that the fabric of society that depended on such ideals was morally weak. It is interesting to note that Fontane deliberately reinterpreted the significance of military strength in the evolution of the Prussian state. He saw Prussia's strength in the eighteenth century in its tradition of justice and order, not in its military might. Lorenzen, the pastor in the novel 'Der Stechlin' says:

"Wir haben drei große Epochen gehabt. ... Die vielleicht größte...war die unter dem Soldatenkönig... Er hat nicht bloß das Königtum stabilisiert, er hat auch...die Fundamente für eine neue Zeit geschaffen und an die Stelle von Zerfahrenheit, selbstischer Vielherrschaft und Willkür Ordnung und Gerechtigkeit gesetzt. Gerechtigkeit das war sein bester rocher de bronze." (48)

The root-cause of militarism and its virulence was, as Fontane saw it, the continued dominance of the army and its traditions by the aristocracy, who had, as it were, a vested interest in militarism. Yet Fontane made no demands - not even in the privacy of his correspondence - that the power and influence of the aristocracy should be broken, at least, not yet. Fontane's critique was at this stage still confined to

observation and diagnosis, it did not yet include a prescription. Fontane probably felt that there was very little the individual could do to combat such powerful trends, perhaps he felt that it was no part of his function as a writer to descend into the arena of public controversy, although he was not averse to treating the issue in historical guise. Perhaps he did not even see it primarily as a social and political problem, i.e. a problem that would require political action and social change to solve it. His solution at this stage seems to have been very much in terms of moral reform and renewal rather than social or political change.

c. Fontane's political views(1871-1881)

1. Fontane and conservatism

Conservatism was the political ideology of the Prussian establishment, dominated by the aristocracy in church, army and state. Fontane had identified himself fairly closely with conservatism throughout the 1860's - albeit in his more historical and ethical interpretation - and this progressive conservative outlook remained his basic political position in the 1870's.⁴⁹ As he became increasingly disillusioned with the Prussian aristocracy, it was inevitable that he should also grow more critical of conservatism.

By the end of the decade Fontane had come to believe that the Prussian aristocracy had betrayed the essential principles of conservatism. He conceived the historical function of conservatism to be that of a wholesome check on the incautious forces pressing for radical change, conservatism was to be the guardian of tradition, the guarantor of stability in the midst of change.⁵⁰ Prussian conservatism was not fulfilling this function at all; it sought, on the contrary, to prevent all and any change that threatened the economic and political interests of the aristocracy, to hold back the very movement of history. Far from broadening out into the party of stability, embracing both aristocracy and the middle classes, on the English Tory model⁵¹ Prussian conservatism remained a party of narrow aristocratic privilege, opposed to any alliance with the liberal middle classes.

Such a philosophy, based on 'Vorurteil und Interesse' did not even deserve to be called conservatism, which is why Fontane called it

"...Pseudokonservatismus unsres Adels, der schließlich nichts will als sich selbst und das was ihm dient..."(52)
In his novel 'Vor dem Sturm' Fontane had attempted to demonstrate the viability of the true principles of conservatism and their application in modern times:

"...was ich eigentlich wollte: Verherrlichung der

"Vaterlandsliebe über die bloße, mehr oder weniger geschraubte 'Loyalität' hinaus und Verherrlichung christlichen Sinnes und Lebens auf Kosten christlicher Bekenntnisformeln..." (53)

Fontane saw patriotism and Christianity as the two essential principles of conservatism; the book was a sustained attack on pseudo-conservatism:

"Das Buch ist der Ausdruck einer bestimmten Welt- und Lebensanschauung; es tritt ein für Religion, Sitte, Vaterland, aber es ist voll Haß gegen die 'blaue Kornblume' and gegen 'Mit Gott für König und Vaterland' will sagen gegen die Phrasenhaftigkeit und die Karikatur jener Dreiheit." (54)

The patriotism of the average Prussian conservative was a caricature of the real thing, a sham, it was essentially self-interest masquerading as patriotism.

While Fontane did not hesitate to describe himself as 'ganz unchristlich',⁵⁵ he recognised in Christianity a force for good, a source of moral renewal:

"Das Christentum ist nicht tot; es steckt uns unvertilgbar im Geblüt und wir haben uns nur darauf zu besinnen. Jeder der sich prüft, wird einen Rest davon in sich entdecken. Und diese Reste müssen Keime zu neuem Leben^{werden}." (56)

He had great respect for the real moral achievements of Christian commitment.⁵⁷ Because he regarded Christianity as essentially enshrining a deeply humane morality, he found the misuse of the Christian religion for political ends - as practised by Prussian conservatism - highly objectionable.

The arch-conservative 'Kreuzzeitung' was a particularly vociferous exponent of 'political' protestantism. It emphasised the Protestant nature of the Prussian monarchy and the Prussian state, dubbing opposition to the social and political status quo a godless crime. The duty of the good Christian was to bolster the social and economic order of the day; it was his duty to side with the forces of the Church against the onslaughts of the ungodly, whether they be liberals or socialists. Religion was blatantly used to retain the loyalty of the mass of the people to the Prussian state and conservatism. Fontane regarded such practices as a debasement of religion, he also doubted whether such methods

would be successful:

"Die Kreuz-Ztg. erhielt ich heut; ich geniere mich aber sie zu zeigen oder gar in Gegenwart anderer zu lesen. Ich glaube, da liegt was drin, nämlich das, daß ein anständiger und gescheiter Mensch sie doch wirklich nicht lesen kann. Beinah nicht darf. Und diese Leute wollen das Land regieren! Bibelsprüche sind sehr was Gutes und Schönes, aber bloß mit'm Bibelspruch läßt sich das Geschäft nicht mehr machen." (58)

Fontane predicted that, after the attempt of William I's life in 1878 the establishment would demand more religion:

"...der Notschrei 'Religion, Religion' wird überall laut werden, sogar in den Bourgeoishäusern, die für ihren Geldbeutel ernstlich anfangen besorgt zu werden. Aber es wird nichts helfen. So was läßt sich nicht 'besorgen'. ... Mit Gesetzesparagrafen und langweiligen Pastoren zwingt man's nicht." (59)

Fontane was thus fairly cynical about the political role of official Protestantism in Prussia. In his unpublished novel 'Storch von Adebar' Fontane depicted 'political' protestantism, he explained his intentions to the critic Gustav Karpeles:

"Es handelt sich um eine politische Novelle, etwas ganz Neues und Eigenartiges... Der Titel soll: Storch von Adebar und die Tendenz geht dahin, den pietistischen Konservatismus, den Friedrich Wilhelm IV aufbrachte, und der sich bis 1866 hielt, in Einzelexemplaren (Potsdam) auch noch vorhanden ist, in seiner Unechtheit, Unbrauchbarkeit und Schädlichkeit zu zeigen. Die Hauptträgerin dieses Konservatismus ist die 'Störchin'..." (60)

Although Fontane saw fit to stress the point that the novel dealt with a form of protestantism that was no longer wide-spread, there can be little doubt that he nevertheless regarded the message as still highly relevant to the situation of conservatism in Prussia in the 1870's, as is clear from his comments on the 'Kreuzzeitung'. The principal figure, the 'Störchin' embodies precisely that identification of religion with the preservation of the political and social status quo that Fontane criticised in the 'Kreuzzeitung': she declares:

"Ich habe mein Leben an die großen Prinzipien gesetzt und ich will meins Teils dahin wirken, daß wir eine Umkehr haben, daß sich diese entgötterte Welt wieder auf das

"Heil besinnt und das Heil da sucht, wo es allein zu finden ist in Gehorsam und Demut und Fügung in die Fügungen Gottes. Ich will die Herrschaft von Thron und Kirche und Klassen-Gliederung an Stelle dieses modischen Unsinns von der Egalité. . . . Also Konservierung alles Heiligsten." (61)

Fontane's critique of conservatism in Prussia in the 1870's was linked very closely with his growing disillusionment with the lack of moral and political leadership in the aristocracy. The lack of specific reference to any of the political issues of the day is significant, perhaps it indicates a lack of interest on Fontane's part in the 'politics' of conservatism; there is, for example, no criticism of conservative policies. Fontane's criticism is much more general, but at the same time more fundamental: it was directed against the basic failings of conservatism which Fontane believed were leading to a perversion of true conservatism. At the end of the 1870's he was a good deal more pessimistic about the prospects for the renewal of conservatism than he had been previously.

2. Fontane and liberalism

Political liberalism was represented in Germany in the post-1870 period by two major political parties: the National Liberal Party (Nationalliberale Partei) and the Progressive Party (Fortschrittspartei). The National Liberal Party was founded in 1866 after the defeat of Austria and the unification of the north German states under Prussian hegemony by Bismarck. The party was founded with the purpose of abandoning the stance of opposition to Bismarck and giving liberal, if critical, support to Bismarck's German and foreign policies. After the unification of Germany in 1871 the party continued to give strong support to Bismarck; indeed, during the so-called "Liberal Era" they were widely regarded as the party of government. The Progressive Party, on the other hand, the original liberal party that had confronted Bismarck during the Prussian Constitutional Conflict, remained - true to its ideological origins - a party of radical liberal opposition, continuing to press for the introduction of effective parliamentary government in Germany. Bismarck was seen as the prime obstacle to this. Accordingly, the party was highly critical of Bismarck's authoritarian regime, almost permanently in opposition to government policies.

Both liberal parties share some of the odium Fontane attached to bourgeois liberalism, but the National Liberals come off more lightly than the Progressives who were constantly under attack from Fontane. In later life Fontane was to describe his own political position as roughly that of the National Liberals:

"Meine politischen Anschauungen - allerdings zu allen Zeiten etwas wackliger Natur - haben sich meist mit dem Nationalliberalismus gedeckt, trotzdem ich zu demselben, wie schon an anderer Stelle ausgeführt, niemals in rechte Beziehungen getreten bin. Also eigentlich nationalliberal." (62)

Since liberalism was predominantly the ideology of the middle classes, it is not surprising that Fontane saw it as tainted by certain attributes of the bourgeois mentality.

The moral cant, the intellectual hypocrisy that Fontane found so offensive was matched by political cant, the affected belief in political ideals. Fontane had noted this phenomenon while travelling through France in 1871: he had registered a contempt for ideal values which he put down to the pre-eminence of materialism and money-making, a materialism that had completely perverted the old republican ideals of 'liberty, equality, fraternity', reducing them to catch-phrases, lies:

"...dieses schöne, bevorzugte, verfallene Land, wenn es wieder empor will aus diesem Verfall, bedarf es dessen, was dieses Eremitenbildnis repräsentiert, bedarf es der selbstsuchtlosen Hingabe an eine große Idee. An die Stelle eitler Erregung muß wieder ein echter Enthusiasmus treten, eine Begeisterung, die hebt und heiligt, statt lächerlich macht, die gibt, statt bloß zu nehmen, und die mit dem Satze bricht, daß das Sparkassenbuch das Buch aller Bücher ist. Einmal begonnen damit, werden der Neid und die Phrase hinfallen und mit der Phrase zugleich jene Lügentrinität, die die Freiheit in die Zerstörung des Überkommenen, die Gleichheit in die Herabsetzung alles Höheren und die Brüderlichkeit in die Verachtung der Sitte setzt." (63)

Thus, while lip-service was still paid to the glorious republican ideals of the French Revolution, the money-making bourgeoisie was little inclined to implement them, their republicanism had degenerated into so much clap-trap.

Fontane observed the same tendency in Germany: the bourgeoisie was becoming less concerned with political freedom⁶⁴ and more concerned with economic freedom, that is, freedom from constraint in the process of accumulating wealth and property.⁶⁵ The sturdy, freedom-loving, fiercely independent farmers of Dithmarschen represented - in sharp contrast to the complacent bourgeois - the idea of true vigorous freedom. His admiration for the 'Bauernrepubliken' of Dithmarschen in 'Der Schleswig-Holsteinische Krieg im Jahre 1864'⁶⁶ makes this clear.

Fontane did not object so much to the theories and principles that liberalism stood for (we have seen that he regarded his own political position as roughly corresponding to that of the National Liberals), it was more the practitioners of liberalism that angered Fontane with their hypocrisy and supercilious tone. He attached great importance to the 'tone' in which ideas were presented, since the tone was the expression of an attitude of mind and for Fontane that frequently took precedence over the quality of the ideas expressed.⁶⁷ Accordingly, he saw the decline of the National Liberals as the consequence of its arrogant, supercilious tone:

"...bis diesen Tag ist es mir unerklärlich geblieben, daß, mit Ausnahme kurzer Zeitläufte, diese große politische Gruppe keine größere Rolle gespielt und sich nicht siegreicher als staatsbestimmende Macht etabliert hat. Es hat dies nach meinen Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen weniger - wenn überhaupt - an den Prinzipien unseres deutschen Whiggismus gelegen als an dem Tone, in dem diese Prinzipien vorgetragen wurden." (68)

The dogmatism of the Progressive Party, Fontane opined, was less objectionable than the arrogance of the National Liberals:

"Der Fortschritt ist auch rechthaberisch doktrinär, aber er vertritt mehr den Doktrinarismus eines rabiaten Konventiklers als den eines geistig und moralisch mehr oder weniger in Hochmut verstrickten Besserwissers, und das Hochmütige verletzt nun mal mehr als das Rabiäte." (69)

For Fontane liberalism, whether of the national liberal or the progressive persuasion, almost inevitably conjured up associations with such terms as 'doctrinaire',⁷⁰ 'academic' in a formal sterile manner,⁷¹ 'arrogant' and 'conceited',⁷² and 'pompous'.⁷³ While such epithets say very little about Fontane's attitude to the actual policies of the liberal parties - there is very little comment on strictly political matters - they do indicate that it was the 'moral' failings of liberalism that concerned him, not the policies or principles, but the human qualities, the moral character of liberalism, and here he found German liberals seriously wanting. Indeed, he even attributed the decline of liberalism in Germany to these very failings, in Fontane's eyes the cardinal sin of German liberalism was arrogance.⁷⁴

Fontane knew that such an interpretation was unusual and that it would be rejected by professional politicians.⁷⁵ He was probably seeking, by the emphasis he gave to the importance of 'tone', to provoke reflection, if not contradiction. Taken at its face value, the statement suggests that Fontane seriously underestimated the political reasons for the decline of liberalism as the dominant ideology in Germany in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but it underlines the political significance Fontane attributed to moral qualities.

3. Fontane and socialism

Fontane's comments on the Paris Commune of 1871, the first proletarian revolution in Europe, are those of an uninvolved observer ⁷⁶ whose political sympathies were engaged by neither the 'communards' nor the 'Versailles' troops ⁷⁷ loyal to the provisional government of France which finally crushed the Commune. Yet the Paris Commune made a deep impression on him. Four months after the fall of the Commune in the summer of 1871 he wrote, reflecting his view that bourgeois society was faced with a mounting political threat from the working class:

"Die Welt liegt in Wehen; wer will sagen, was geboren wird! Der Sturz des Alten bereitet sich vor. Gut, die Dinge gehen ihren ewigen Gang; tut eure Maulwurfsarbeit, ihr, die ihr unten seid. Millionen leben, die an dem Fortbestand dessen, was da ist, kein besonderes Interesse haben können, die eine Art Recht haben, wie an der Glücksbude, die Chancen eines Wechsels der Dinge zu befragen. Mögen Sie tun, was sie nicht lassen können, und mag es über uns hereinbrechen früher oder später." (78)

He seems to have regarded the spread of socialism amongst the working class in Germany as an inevitable historical process:

"...die Dinge gehen ihren ewigen Gang." (79)

He understood the link between the creation of a depressed and exploited working class by ruthless capitalist industrialisation and the spread of socialist ideas; his sympathetic understanding ⁸⁰ moved him to concede to those whom bourgeois society oppressed the right to overthrow that society. ⁸¹ He betrayed a certain sympathy with the principle of egalitarianism, as advocated by the socialist movement, inasmuch as it was directed against the 'feudal pyramid', as he called it, of German society, but he relegated the implementation of such ideals to some utopia remote in time, reminding himself that, for the present, such notions were revolutionary. ⁸² His initial reactions were therefore far from hostile, he felt unable to condemn a movement whose origins he understood so well. Fontane noted the electoral success of the socialist party in 1872 without undue concern. ⁸³

Although Fontane understood why the industrial proletariat should vote for socialist parties,⁸⁴ he nevertheless feared that socialist agitation, with its utopian vision of a just, classless society, would, because it gave organised expression to the inarticulate hopes of the working masses, eventually lead to the emergence of a powerful political movement committed to the overthrow of bourgeois society. Such developments, Fontane feared, far from forcing the government to accede to socialist demands would provoke draconian counter-measures designed to suppress the socialist movement, reminiscent of the reactionary regime that established itself in Prussia after the failure of the 1848 Revolution. Fontane's personally very bitter - almost traumatic - experience of the counter-revolutionary period prompted him to seek a gradualist approach to the solution of social problems. At the back of his mind lurked the ever-present fear of renewed political reaction in Germany.⁸⁵

Fontane's immediate reaction to the attempt by Nobiling on the Kaiser's life (on 2nd June 1878, the second within weeks)⁸⁶ is remarkable for its restrained tone, although written in the heat of the moment: he expressed his sympathy for the unhappy fate of the Kaiser, but did not utter a word of condemnation against Nobiling.⁸⁷ The bourgeois press linked Hödel and Nobiling with the Socialist Party and sought to establish in the public mind the idea that the socialists were a party of violent revolution, of murder and assassination, the socialist movement as a whole was to be tarred with the brush of two anarchists.⁸⁸ Fontane also failed to distinguish between the isolated acts of two individuals, acts, moreover, which were condemned by the Socialist Party, and the broader socialist movement; he saw the 'masses' as, in some way, behind the shootings, it was their mass opposition to the state that had erupted into violence:

"Massen sind immer nur durch Furcht oder Religion, durch weltliches oder kirchliches Regiment in Ordnung gehalten worden, und der Versuch, es ohne diese großen Weltprofosse leisten zu wollen, ist als gescheitert anzusehen." (89)

The ultimate reason for the shootings was, in Fontane's view,

not only to be found in the existence of the Socialist Party and its propaganda, but in the more general attempt - favoured by many liberals at the time - to educate the masses.

Fontane saw such education as undermining the authority of the social and political order. Education encouraged the questioning of accepted notions, the

"Geist der Unbotmäßigkeit". (90)

Education enabled workers to read and understand political tracts. Such political knowledge was a weapon in the struggle against bourgeois society.

"Man dachte, in 'Bildung' den Ersatz gefunden zu haben, und glorifizierte den 'Schulzwang' und die 'Militärpflicht'. Jetzt haben wir den Salat. In beiden hat sich der Staat, ja mehr denn das, 'die Gesellschaft' eine Rute aufgebunden: der Schulzwang hat alle Welt lesen gelehrt und mit dem Halbbildungsdünkel den letzten Rest von Autorität begraben; die Militärpflicht hat jeden schießen gelehrt und die wüste Masse zu Arbeiterbataillonen organisiert. Gewiß, der Versuch mußte gemacht werden, aber Rousseau hat Recht behalten, der schon 1750 schrieb: 'Künste und Wissenschaften zwingen es nicht'." (91)

Fontane shot a bit wide of the mark with his reference to 'Arbeiterbataillone', since the attacks on the Kaiser had been the work of two individuals, not proletarian paramilitary units. But his remarks illustrate his fear of the urban proletariat, a fear which added intensity to his conviction that those much-lauded achievements of German civilization 'conscription' and 'universal education' were devoid of any deeper civilising influence, since they served only to nurture a serpent at the bosom of bourgeois society, a proletarian army committed to the overthrow of that society. Fontane feared that the shootings would provoke suppression and the re-introduction of the police-state methods of the 1850s. (92) Fontane was correct: for those who were socialist, Germany became a police-state. Although the first draft of an anti-socialist bill was rejected by the Reichstag by an overwhelming majority (241 to 57) on 24th May 1878, after elections had been held (30th July 1878) the new Reichstag passed the (222 to 149 votes) bill that proscribed the Socialist Party and drove it underground.

Yet Fontane was convinced that any attempts by the state to suppress the socialist movement would meet with failure.

"Ein Reaktionsregiment wird beginnen, und der Notschrei 'Religion, Religion' wird überall laut werden, sogar in den Bourgeoishäusern, die für ihren Geldbeutel ernstlich anfangen besorgt zu werden. Aber es wird nichts helfen. So was läßt sich nicht 'besorgen'... Mit Gesetzesparagrafen und langweilige Pastoren zwingt man's nicht." (93)

Part of the reason for this conviction was Fontane's view that the working class would reject the idea that, as a class of people, they were inferior to either the middle or upper class and would thus retain their belief in the justice of their cause. He did not regard the working class as a rabble:

"Millionen von Arbeitern sind grade so gescheit, so gebildet, so ehrenhaft wie Adel und Bürgerstand, vielfach sind sie ihnen überlegen. Der junge Rinneberg ist ein Tischlergeselle; glaubst Du, daß er Max oder Kurt Sommerfeldt nachsteht? Gewiß nicht. Nun ist der junge R. zwar zufällig ein Bürgersohn, er könnte aber auch der Sohn einer alten Waschfrau sein. Dann hättest Du den echten Repräsentanten des 4. Standes. Alle diese Leute sind uns vollkommen ebenbürtig, und deshalb ist ihnen weder der Beweis zu führen, 'daß es mit ihnen nichts sei', noch ist ihnen mit der Waffe in der Hand beizukommen." (94)

He also recognised that some of the demands made by the socialists were justified and that socialism, as an ideology, represented certain humanitarian ideals and principles that could not be suppressed :

"Sie vertreten nicht bloß Unordnung und Aufstand, sie vertreten auch Ideen, die zum Teil ihre Berechtigung haben und die man nicht totschiessen oder durch Einkerkelung aus der Welt schaffen kann. Man muß sie geistig bekämpfen, und das ist, wie die Dinge liegen, sehr, sehr schwer." (95)

Such optimism as to the survival of ideas is touching when it is remembered how humanitarian and democratic ideals were discredited, and thus to all intents and purposes 'suppressed' by the dominant trends in political and philosophical thinking in Germany in later decades.

It would be incorrect to conclude from these sympathetic comments that Fontane agreed with socialism and sided with the working class against bourgeois society. He recognised the justice of their demands, he sympathised with many

of their criticisms of bourgeois society, their attacks, for example, on the predominant position of the aristocracy and militarism. He found the humanitarian and democratic-egalitarian aspects of socialism attractive, but he was far from embracing a generally socialist outlook. His attitude to the 'masses' was at this time ambivalent, ranging from positive comments ⁹⁶ to comments which clearly indicate his distrust of the masses. ⁹⁷ Fontane saw no prospect of a solution to the threat which socialism posed to bourgeois society: attempts to suppress socialism would, he believed, be doomed to ultimate failure, on the other hand he feared that the emergence of a strong, socialist movement would provoke suppression by the state. ⁹⁸

The ideas of 'state socialism' and 'welfare monarchy' ('soziales Königtum'), as advanced by Wagener, editor of the 'Kreuzzeitung' - ideas with which Fontane was well familiar ⁹⁹ - as a solution to the social question do not seem to have met with Fontane's approval, although he shared Wagener's hostility to the bourgeoisie. ¹⁰⁰ It was Wagener's motives which were suspect, his welfare policies smacked heavily of a grand machiavellian strategy to preserve the power of the aristocracy and the monarchy rather than being inspired by a straightforward concern for the plight of the working classes. ¹⁰¹ The whole scheme was too obviously paternalistic, too obviously designed to perpetuate the political and social supremacy of the Prussian aristocracy for Fontane's liking. He had, besides, none too high an opinion of Wagener

Fontane was sceptical, therefore, of the strictly 'political' solutions that presented themselves. He seems to have believed that any lasting solution to the social question would have to be based on a 'change of heart', a moral renewal or re-orientation within the nation as a whole:

"Es muß kommen, das Erscheinen großer Geister muß den

"Volksgeist umgestalten. Aber dürfen wir darauf rechnen?"(103)
Fontane felt that such a moral revolution would come about as the result of some national crisis or under the leadership of some great moral leader:

"...ein großer Mann, ein Erwecker, ein Licht- und
Flammenträger muß die ganze Geschichte mal wieder aus
ihrer Misere herausreißen." (104)

Fontane's weakness for the outstanding leader who would initiate revolution from above was an expression of his despair that any positive moral lead might be given from below, that is, by the bourgeoisie itself.¹⁰⁶ The challenge posed to German society by socialism and the socialist movement continued to preoccupy Fontane for the rest of his life.

4. Summary

The questions that Fontane is concerned with in his correspondence, namely, the spread of the bourgeois mentality in the upper 'ruling' class, the problem of militarism and Prussian conservatism, were not the issues that dominated the political scene in Germany in the 1870's. This serves to underline the point that Fontane was not a political commentator, but an observer of general social and moral trends. His critique of these trends is the reaction of a morally sensitive individual to social phenomena that were perceived as threats to the values and human qualities that he held dear. Fontane is critical of liberalism because he sees it as characterised by dogmatism, arrogance, superciliousness and political cant; he judged liberalism by the moral character of its exponents,¹⁰⁷ not by its policies. His critique is moral not ideological. He tended to detect the same negative 'character' features in the political parties as in the social classes they represented.

Fontane's political position in the 1870's is somewhat complex: he tended to regard himself as a liberal conservative, as belonging to that social class which was, on the whole, conservative in its basic outlook. He moved socially in largely conservative circles,¹⁰⁸ with little contact with liberal or progressive circles. Yet, later in life he defined his position, retrospectively, as that of a national liberal,¹⁰⁹ adding, in order to complicate matters

"In meinen alten Tagen bin ich immer demokratischer geworden..." (110)

In the 1870's Fontane's already established hostility to liberalism and the liberal bourgeoisie continued undiminished, while his erstwhile attachment to conservatism was very steadily giving way to disillusion. The main features of his later radicalism are present by the end of the 1870's, subsequent developments only served to confirm and reinforce the trend.

d. Fontane's view of Bismarck (1871-1881)

At the centre of Fontane's view of Bismarck is his view of Bismarck the man, his character and personality; Bismarck's policies, while not unimportant, are of secondary importance for Fontane.

What was Fontane's picture of Bismarck in the 1870's? ¹¹¹
An article, entitled simply 'Prince Bismarck' ¹¹² - which Fontane believed had been written by Bucher, Bismarck's private secretary, ¹¹³ provoked the following enthusiastic comment from Fontane:

"Der längere, aus 'Blackwoods Magazin' genommene Artikel über Bismarck ist so gut, wie ich auf diesem Gebiet lange nicht gelesen habe. Dagegen verblaßt wieder der Macaulay-Essay." (114)

The article paints an unmitigatedly glowing picture of Bismarck, both as a statesman and as a man. There is a complete absence of critical comment. ¹¹⁵ Since Fontane's approval of the article is couched in general terms, it is difficult to draw any precise conclusions; we may assume, however, that he felt that the general approach and tone - with its emphasis on the person of Bismarck and his extraordinary character - was appropriate. He does not appear to have been disturbed by the adulatory tone nor by the lack of critical discussion of the political and social issues raised by Bismarck's policies which are assumed to be correct. This would tend to indicate that Fontane viewed Bismarck very much in the light of his character and not in the light of his policies, a point which underlines the moral nature of Fontane's approach to politics.

Fontane was fairly certain that the article had been officially inspired by Bucher and it could thus have easily been dismissed as 'public relations', as 'propaganda', but this is not Fontane's reaction. The picture of Bismarck given in the article seems to have accorded with his own; his approval would reflect a largely uncritical attitude to Bismarck at this time(1878).

Bismarck, however, by no means represented an ideal statesman, for such ideals Fontane looked elsewhere, to England

and America: Pitt and Washington. Fontane observed that Bismarck lacked that 'nobility of mind and character' which marked for Fontane the truly civilised and cultured man:

"Nehmen Sie Bismarck; so groß er ist und so voll ich ihn bewundere, das was Washington hatte und der ältere Pitt, das hat er nicht. Hochherzig und edelmütig sind am meisten die Franzosen ..." (116)

Fontane's very largely positive picture of Bismarck is confirmed in comment on the Kulturkampf. If we can judge from the few remarks made by Fontane in his correspondence ¹¹⁷ on the Kulturkampf (1871 - 1879) Fontane was not moved by any of the drastic measures taken by Bismarck to express outright disapproval. He was not unsympathetic to the Catholic point of view ¹¹⁸ but he probably shared the misgivings of protestant Germans at the special position Catholicism seemed to be claiming for itself within the newly established German Empire. Moreover it would have been illogical to single out Bismarck for criticism, since Fontane did not see the Kulturkampf as exclusively or predominantly of Bismarck's making. The anti-catholic moves enjoyed broad, almost unanimous, support from the liberal and - at least initially - the conservative parties. ¹¹⁹

On 13th July 1874 a catholic, by name Kullmann, shot at Bismarck, wounding him. No comment by Fontane on the incident is recorded. A few weeks later, however, in a letter to Zoellner, Fontane described how an elderly member of the Wangenheim family - who were catholic - took him on one side and intimated that Bismarck would now exploit any shooting incident to intensify his struggle against the catholics:

"Er (der alte W.) wollte ungefähr sagen: jeder Strolch, der aus einem Hinterhalt ein Pistol abfeuert, wird jetzt politisch ausgenutzt; die Moabiter Kugel war nichts anderes als die Kissinger Kugel und umgekehrt; aber man macht aus allem eine 'Bismarck-Kugel', um die Katholiken-Hetze fortsetzen zu können." (120)

The notion that Bismarck might exploit subsequent shootings for his own political ends in order to justify more drastic anti-catholic measures, struck Fontane as absurd:

"Ich wurde höchst unangenehm und zugleich traurig davon berührt. Es zählt dieses Haus zu dem Besten, Bravesten und Liebenswertesten, was ich in meinem Leben kennen gelernt habe, und doch! Wie gebrechlich sind wir, wie einseitig, wie urteils-unfähig, wenn das am grünen Holze solchen Hauses und solcher Herzen geschehen kann." (121)

Fontane's picture of Bismarck was that Bismarck, the honourable, if tough, statesman would not stoop to such underhand means. Another contemporary writer, Gustav Freytag, saw things rather differently:

"Die Katholikenhutz, welche jetzt von den Behörden und den 500 Reptilien des Kanzlers in Szene gesetzt wird, ist so dumm, daß es eine Schande ist." (122)

Research has indicated that Freytag's view - albeit inspired by hostility to Bismarck - was the more correct; he was more aware of the extent of Bismarck's control and manipulation of the German press than was Fontane.¹²³

Ignorance of Bismarck's influence on the press led Fontane to brush aside charges of manipulation brought against Bismarck by the Wangenheims as out of character. Only very much later was Fontane himself to call Bismarck a 'Mogelant'.

A number of apparently unrelated tendencies in Fontane's thinking conspired and combined to blunt any critical approach to the phenomenon of Bismarck. He was much too pre-occupied with the deleterious influence of the bourgeoisie to consider Bismarck's possible influence on social and political mores. Bismarck does not figure as largely in Fontane's picture of internal politics in Germany in the 1870's as one might expect: the major political developments of the period, the Kulturkampf and the anti-socialist legislation were not seen by Fontane as having been master-minded by Bismarck - the measures enjoyed, after all, the broad support of liberal public opinion. If Bismarck was to be criticised for these policies, so too were those who so vociferously supported him.

A further feature of Fontane's thinking which helps to account for the mainly uncritical approach to Bismarck, was his interest, his fascination even, in the exceptional, the outstanding individual.¹²⁴ Fontane was not alone in this: the interest in great men, in the 'Genius', was one of the intellectual hall-marks of the age. The view was widely held - promoted by the writings of such men as Carlyle in England, and Hegel, Treitschke, Nietzsche and Hermann Grimm in Germany¹²⁵ that it was the great individual, the Genius, the Hero who, by his achievements, made the crucial contribution to the progress of mankind. This fascination was frequently coupled with the idea that the outstanding individual (Genie), by virtue of his achievement and superior talent, ought not to be subject to the sort of restrictions devised for the disciplining of lesser mortals. The 'Genie' represented a higher form of human existence altogether who justifiably refused to be bound by the standards of the run of mankind - justifiably refused, because otherwise his outstanding contribution to the welfare and progress of mankind, whether it be in the field of politics, culture or thought, would be lost. This deferential attitude to 'Genius' was further linked with an observed fact of human life, namely, the tendency of the stronger to dominate the weaker and then impose their standards on the weaker. Fontane remarked:

"Carlyle hat Recht, der Einzelne bestimmt alles, darf alles, wenn er der Mann danach ist. Daran hängt's." (126)

Fontane accepted that the Genius would quite naturally seek to liberate himself from the restrictions mediocre generality sought to impose. Fontane's quotation from Carlyle is a statement of how he felt 'life was'. Such an acceptance of the idea of social darwinism, led to an abdication of moral judgement. Moral censure, the impulse to apply moral criteria, was blocked by the feeling that such criteria were irrelevant; to object on moral grounds to the attested fact that the strong tend to dominate the weak was, so it seemed to Fontane, pointless, unreal,

other-worldly. He felt that the facts of human nature had to be accepted, since they could not be changed. It had to be faced that in real life issues were not decided by the morality of the case, power and strength alone determined the outcome, as he was to point out to Count Philipp von Eulenburg:

"Wer mit einem Riesen anbinden will, muß selber einer sein." (127)

Bismarck was clearly one such genius, one of the outstanding men of the century: if he successfully imposed his superior will on an inferior parliament, then, Fontane felt, this was fully justified. If Bismarck refused to be called to order by the Speaker, this was not arrogant or morally objectionable:

"Es ist wie mit unserem Reichskanzler; heißt er Schnökel oder Hasemann, so muß er der Glocke des Präsidenten gehorchen; heißt er Bismarck, so muß er ihm nicht gehorchen." (128)

Bismarck, the statesman of international standing, the architect of the German Empire, is under no obligation to submit to the rules of the House that must govern the parliamentary behaviour of Hasemann and Schnökel, mediocre, run-of-the-mill politicians. Great men - if allowed free rein - acted for the benefit of the nation, to restrict them would be to injure the welfare of the nation.

The call for parliamentary government in Germany with Bismarck wholly responsible to, and dependent on, a majority in the Reichstag seemed to many contemporaries a jealous attempt to fetter a great man. What would have become of Germany if Bismarck had not been permitted to act unhindered by parliamentary majorities? Many contemporaries felt sure that Germany would have still been a third-class power, disunited and weak. Bismarck's regime, and not parliamentarism, was the condition of Germany's greatness.

Fontane, too, rejected the idea of parliamentary government for precisely these reasons:

"Der Kanzler ist ein Despot; aber er darf es sein, er

"muß es sein. Wäre er es nicht, wäre er ein parlamentarischer Ideal, das sich durch das Dummste, was es gibt, durch Majoritäten, bestimmen ließe, so hätten wir überhaupt noch keinen Kanzler und am wenigsten ein Deutsches Reich." (129)

Parliamentary government would have meant the subjection of Bismarck, the statesman, to the will of a majority that was made up of individuals manifestly inferior to Bismarck.¹³⁰ Fontane accepted and defended the pseudo-parliamentarian political structure of the German Empire dominated by Bismarck, well aware - and content - that Bismarck wielded considerable political power, since this seemed to be for the welfare of the German nation.

2. Summary(1871-1881)

While not assuming ideal proportions - for that ^{Bismarck} he lacked generosity and nobility of mind - Fontane admired Bismarck as a genius, an outstanding individual, a great statesman and a character of epic proportions. Fontane readily conceded that Bismarck was not exactly a 'parliamentary ideal', but, after all, he had united Germany and that, for the moment, was of greater practical significance than parliamentary ideals.

III : 1881-1890

a. Fontane the writer

In 1881 the fourth and final volume of the 'Wanderungen' was published; a further volume of historical studies in the same vein entitled 'Fünf Schlösser' appeared in 1889. The first of Fontane's murder stories 'Ellernklipp' - reflecting his interest in criminal psychology - was published in 1881, followed by 'Unterm Birnbaum'(1885) and 'Quitt'(1890). In 1882 the historical novel 'Schach von Wuthenow' was published in which the figure of Schach is seen as symptomatic of the aristocracy of the 1880's, although the action is set in 1806. Fontane turned to the problems of marriage between the young and the elderly in 'Graf Petöfy'(1884) and adultery in 'Cécile'(1887): both novels depict the upper classes. In the two novels 'Irrungen, Wirrungen'(1888) and 'Stine'(1890) Fontane portrays the failure of attempts by individuals to transcend class barriers between the aristocracy and the lower classes in pursuit of personal happiness. In 'Unwiederbringlich'(1891), set once more in an aristocratic environment, Fontane returns to the problem of fidelity and marriage.

b. Fontane's view of general developments 1881-1890

1. The Prussian aristocracy in the early 1880's

In the 1870's Fontane had become increasingly sceptical about the political influence of the aristocracy in Prussia; he rejected their narrow class interpretation of conservatism as reactionary, a travesty of true toryism. Such reservations, though powerful, were not powerful enough to counter the strong attraction the aristocracy still had for Fontane as aesthetic model of social refinement. The elegant and graceful, leisured life-style, the urbane, witty and cultured intercourse that Fontane associated with the aristocracy satisfied a deep aesthetic need in his personality.¹ The concept of 'aristocracy' was as much an aesthetic ideal as it was an ethical ideal. The conflict that had now arisen between these two aspects of his understanding of 'aristocracy', a conflict between his continued aesthetic attachment to the aristocracy and his growing reservations about their political role, was only resolved by separating the one from the other, the aesthetic-social ideal remaining thus unimpaired.

"...es gilt, politisches und gesellschaftliches Auftreten zu scheiden." (2)

He had, so he confided to Hertz his publisher, attempted in volume four of the 'Wanderungen' to steer

"...einen gewissen Mittelkurs zwischen Freisinnigkeit und Verbindlichkeit, zwischen Anerkennung des persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen und Anzweiflung des politischen Menschen in unsrem Landadel, inne zu halten..." (3)

Outspoken criticism of the pseudo-conservatism of the aristocracy is followed by warm words of appreciation of their refined manners and demeanour:

"...gesellschaftlich und persönlich aber haben es die 'Raubritter' von ehedem an nichts wirklich Ritterlichem jemals fehlen lassen und alles Gegensatzes gegen den Inhalt des vorigen Jahrhunderts unerachtet, die Form und den Ton eben dieses Jahrhunderts (dem des unsrigen so sehr überlegen) immer zu wahren und immer zu treffen gewußt." (5)

Fontane was in a dilemma:

"Die Kerle sind unausstehlich und reizend zugleich." (6)

We have already noted Fontane's objections to the so-called conservatism of the Prussian aristocracy, that, he believed, it was a conservatism motivated by purely sectional class interest, unrelated to the broader welfare of the nation, that their principal concern seemed to be to preserve - almost at any cost - the feudal position and influence of the aristocracy in the state, the social position and privilege of that class in German society, without making any concessions to modernity.⁷ These reactionary - not to say, feudal-absolutist tendencies in the Prussian aristocracy - induced Fontane to revise his ideas about bourgeois parliamentarism - with all its faults:

"es ist ein ganz ordinäres Geschäft, dies parlamentarische Politik-machen, und verdirbt den Charakter und verdimmt. Die Leute sehen alles nur noch in Fraktionsbeleuchtung. Und doch ist das Ganze ein Segen. So ein regierender Bredow oder Rochow, der einen nach Spandau schickte, wenn man ihm andeutete 'er sei ein Schafskopf' war auch kein Glück für Staat und Menschheit. Der absolute Staat mag noch so viel Vorzüge haben, er ist für ein freiführendes Herz doch eine Unerträglichkeit;" (8)

The aristocracy's exclusive claim to be the ordained ruling class in Prussia was not matched - in Fontane's experience - by any outstanding governmental ability. Positions of authority in the state were frequently the preserve of the aristocracy - Fontane quotes the example of H. von Grävenitz who was Reichsgerichtsrat in Leipzig⁹ - but their claims were based on totally erroneous assumptions:

"er (der absolute Staat) hat die Annahme zur Voraussetzung, daß Wissen, Macht, Herrscherbefähigung in Schichten steckt, während es doch einfach in den Individuen lebt." (10)

Yet, the aristocracy seemed to be completely unaware of the need for self-criticism, they seemed oblivious of their own mediocrity:

"Das Schlimmste aber ist ... daß die ganze Gesellschafts-sphäre, der diese Artikel entstammen, die darin nieder-gelegte Lebensanschauung teilt. Jeder Einzelne glaubt: 'es sei wirklich etwas damit' und hat nicht die kleinste Vorstellung davon, daß sowohl nach der Erscheinungs- wie nach der Geistes- und Talent-Seite hin, dies alles durch andre Gesellschaftsschichten weit überholt ist. Junge Kaufmannstöchter in New York sind viel eleganter, und jede kleine Künstlergenossenschaft verzapft denn doch

schließlich einen ganz andern Wein. Es wirkt alles pauvre und 'raufgepufft'; keiner glaubt mehr daran." (11)

An implicit belief in the innate superiority of the aristocracy was often combined with contempt for those from other lower classes of society, as Fontane knew from experience:

"Adelselementen, mit denen ich mich nicht stellen kann. ... alle diese Herren stehn noch auf dem 'verjohrnen' Standpunkt, wonach die Menschheit erst mit dem Baron anfängt. ... Dieser Provinzial-Adel schlägt immer einen Ton an, als ob man ein alter Hauslehrer wäre. Das fehlte gerade noch." (12)

The intellectual level of the conservative establishment as represented by the Kreuzzeitung, left much to be desired; it was, Fontane regretted, inferior to that of many bourgeois journals:

"In Potsdam kaufte ich mir gestern eine 'Deutsche Montags-Zeitung' ... Selbst dies Festgedicht ist relativ gut und eine Goethe-Leistung, wenn ich an das denke, was die Kreuz-Ztng. in solchen Fällen bringt, Alle elf Artikel sind von klugen, geist- und talentvollen Leuten geschrieben ... Ich schreibe dies alles im Hinblick auf die Kreuz-Ztng. und die conservative Partei." (13)

He quotes the following example:

"Zu der 'Armut' gehören auch zwei lange Artikel der Kreuz-Ztng., der eine (von dem ich schon schrieb) 'aus dem Taschenbuch eines preußischen Offiziers' der andre 'Ein Sommerfest auf der Pfauen-Insel'. Bei beiden sieht man in Abgründe, namentlich auch deshalb weil sie so präntensios auftreten. Daß sie langweilig und ledern geschrieben sind, versteht sich von selbst, auf so was leg' ich kein Gewicht, aber die Gesinnung, die Lebensanschauung, die aus beiden spricht, ist so traurig und so ridikül." (14)

The 'use' of religion in politics, the invocation of the eternal principles of the Christian religion to denounce opponents of conservatism as enemies of Christianity, was particularly offensive to Fontane:

"Die Kreuz-Ztng. erhielt ich heut; ich geniere mich aber sie zu zeigen oder gar in Gegenwart anderer zu lesen. Ich glaube, da liegt was drin, nämlich das, daß ein anständiger und gescheiter Mensch ... sie doch wirklich nicht lesen kann. Beinah nicht darf. Und diese Leute wollen das Land regieren! Bibelsprüche sind sehr was Gutes und Schönes, aber bloß mit'm Bibelspruch läßt sich das Geschäft nicht mehr machen. © High-Torytum der Rohrs, Bredows und Ledeburs." (15)

Fontane preferred to read liberal newspapers such as the 'Nationalzeitung' and the 'Vossische Zeitung'.¹⁶ He finally broke with the Kreuzzeitung:

"Mit ('Post' und) 'KZ' bin ich fertig, wie sie mit mir." (17)

Such developments indicate the extent of Fontane's alienation from established conservatism in Prussia and from the Prussian aristocracy.

At the beginning of the decade Fontane had been able to find warm words of appreciation of the social role ('gesellschaftliches Auftreten') of the Prussian aristocracy, they were models in 'Ton und Form' of social refinement.¹⁸ While he was still able to cite examples of such refinement¹⁹ his experience of the aristocracy, his close social contact with aristocratic circles, obliged him to revise his views in this respect too:

"Von Familie Heydebreck-Lepel ... habe ich ... keinen angenehmen Eindruck. Gott, das will Adel sein, will sich über gebildetes Bürgertum erheben. Es ist zum Lachen. Wie furchtbar, vor allem auch im Gesinnungspunkt, im Punkte feinen Takts und vornehmen Fühlens, sind diese Leute zurückgeblieben!" (20)

Fontane came to appreciate the company of certain members of the bourgeoisie; the aristocracy as a class clearly no longer corresponded to his idea of what constituted an aristocracy:

"Wir haben keine rechte Aristokratie, so daß man schließlich froh ist, bei einem christlichen oder jüdischen Parvenü unterkriechen zu können." (21)

The commercial middle class surpassed the aristocracy in elegance:

"Junge Kaufmannstöchter in New York sind viel eleganter." (22)

2. The 'Friedländer' affair

Fontane's critique of the Prussian aristocracy was gathering momentum in the early 1880's, but it was the experience of a close friend Georg Friedländer above all that disabused him of any hopes he may have still had about the Prussian aristocracy. Georg Friedländer

"...ein Mann von geachteter gesellschaftlicher Stellung, ein Richter, aus guter Familie, dekoriert mit dem eisernen Kreuz..." (23)

who had fought as a second lieutenant in the 1870/71 war, published an account of his experiences during that war in 1886.²⁴ Unfortunately for Friedländer, two officers referred to in the book, took exception to his description of their behaviour and accused him of defamation of character in a way that was 'offensive to their honour as soldiers' (ehrenrührig). In the first instance, a certain Major Meie threatened to take Friedländer to court, the 'Ehrengericht',²⁵ but the matter was - apparently - settled out of court.²⁶ The whole business was evidence of the alarming virulence of militarism and the privileged position of the military:

"Ed.v.Hartmann schrieb mal einen Aufsatz, in dem er den Gedanken durchführte: wie sonst der Katholizismus das Leben durchdrang und den Einzelmenschen von 'im Mutterleibe an' bis über das Grab hinaus in Händen hielt, stärkte, segnete, peinigte, opferte, so jetzt der Militarismus. Ihr Fall ist ein schrecklicher Beleg dafür." (27)

The concept of military honour was being perverted:

"Der militärische Rechts-, Anstands- und Ehrbegriff fängt an überzuschnappen; soll danach verfahren werden, so kann man nicht mehr 3 Zeilen schreiben, ohne sich an den Galgen zu liefern." (28)

Fontane was particularly concerned that the civil authorities seemed to be willing to sanction such proceedings against a civilian:

"Wo sind wir mit unsrem Staats- und Militär-Popanz angelangt, wenn jede natürliche, unbefangene Darstellung von persönlichen Erlebnissen, die sich geflissentlich des Übergreifens in andre Gebiete, jeder Kritik, jeder Spur von animus injuriandi enthält, halb und halb auf Hochverrat, jedenfalls aber auf Ungehörigkeit, auf Eitelkeit, Überhebung und Schädigung anderer Interessen gedeutet werden

"kann. Sie sagen an einer Stelle: 'es ist empörend' und dem kann ich nur zustimmen. In welche Abgründe von Neid, Kleinheit und Dummheit blickt man. Das Letzte ist das Schlimmste." (29)

Hardly a month had passed and Friedländer was faced with a second charge of defamation, this time brought against him by the commanding officer of the regiment to which he had been attached, General Otto von Wulffen.³⁰ The General objected apparently to being described by Friedländer as 'verblüfft'.³¹ Fontane's reaction to this second charge was very much as before, he emphasised, in a letter to Friedländer:

"...daß man als freier Mann, auch wenn man noch so lange des Königs Rock getragen, das Recht haben muß, so schreiben zu dürfen, wie Sie geschrieben, das ist mir klar und wenn staatlicherseits das bestritten werden sollte, so tut mir der Staat leid." (32)

Fontane's indignation was increasingly directed against the state which sought to exercise censorship, to suppress material with regard to the public image of the military. Indeed, as the 'case' proceeded, Fontane became more deeply disturbed at the way the military were able to encroach on, and effectively suspend, civil liberties; he was reminded of the worst excesses of the days of Frederick Wilkiam I (1713-1740), the notorious 'Soldatenkönig' when all resources - including press-gangs - were directed towards the building of a massive standing army:

"Lebe ich oder träume ich, leben wir unter Wilhelm I oder unter Fr.W.I, unter Moltke oder unter dem alten Dessauer, haben wir eben bei Sedan oder bloß bei Malplaquet gesiegt, sind wir in den Händen von Werbe-Offizieren oder im Schutze freiheitlicher uns unser Recht und unsre Würde garantierender Gesetze." (33)

It was the 'lawlessness' of it all that shocked Fontane, he even drew comparisons with the Spanish inquisition,³⁴ reflecting more his anger than any considered view.

Comparing conditions in Germany in the 1880's with those that prevailed in the 1820's and 30's Fontane noted with gratification:

"Im Ganzen leben wir in einer forschen und großen Zeit... wir sind aus dem Elend, der Armut und Polizeiwirtschaft heraus." (35)

but he complained that

"...neben unsrer neuen Größe läuft eine Kleinheit, eine Enge und Unfreiheit her, die die verachtete Stillstands- und Polizeiperiode der 20er und 30er Jahre nicht gekannt hat." (36)

The most striking difference was the vastly increased influence of the military:

"Besonders die militärische Welt überschlägt sich; es ist der verwöhnte Sohn im Hause, der, weil er am besten reiten und tanzen kann, sich unter Zustimmung der Eltern alles erlauben darf. Der Rest der Welt, wenn er eine eigne Meinung haben will, ist nur dazu da gescholten und verdächtigt, unter allen Umständen aber angepumpt zu werden." (37)

The officer corps exemplified - as Fontane now came to realise - some of the tendencies that he perceived in society at large:

"Von dieser militärischen Welt gilt in gesteigertem Maße das, was von der ganzen Zeit gilt: im Ganzen glänzend, im Einzelnen jämmerlich. Dabei mehren sich die Zeichen innerlichen Verfalls: Selbstsucht und rücksichtsloses Strebertum sind an die Stelle feinen Ehrgefühls und vornehmer Milde getreten und während in den Herzen Roheit und destruktive Ideen Fortschritte machen, zeigt sich nach außen hin ein toter, bei uns nie dagewesener Byzantismus." (38)

The military ethic was destroying the humane and liberal values that Fontane held so dear, values which he had tended to associate with the Prussian aristocracy (as with 'feinen Ehrgefühls und vornehmer Milde'). This selfsame class - from which the majority of officers in the Prussian army were recruited and which therefore set the tone - was now the target for unprecedentedly hostile attacks. Militarism with its 'überspannte Standesanschauungen'³⁹ and its 'Kastengeist'⁴⁰ had become the 'ethical' code of the Prussian aristocracy.

The case was also evidence of the arrogance of the Prussian officer corps. Fontane felt sure that Friedländer had only been challenged because it was known that he would be in no position to accept the challenge and thereby, according to the military code of honour, conceding the challenger's point:

"Aber sehen Sie, das ist gerade das Empörende, daß man recht gut weiß, daß Sie das nicht können, daß Sie Familienvater und Nicht-Pistolenschütze, sich diesen Affront gefallen lassen (41) und dadurch zur allerbilligsten Heldenschaft so und so vieler junger oder auch älterer Offiziere beisteuern müssen. Wären Sie ein Mann wie Fürst Pückler, oder hätte Fürst Pückler ein Büchelchen wie das Ihre geschrieben, keine Hand hätte sich erhoben, keine Lippe sich gerührt, selbst Meie hätte wohlweislich geschwiegen, denn das ganze Offizierscorps hätte gewußt, der schießt mit Seelenruhe 6 von uns über den Haufen, er hat den Charakter und die Geschicklichkeit dazu! Sie können sich nicht vorstellen, wie mich speziell auch dies reizt und ärgert." (42)

Friedländer's experience proved to be a major turning point in Fontane's political development,⁴³ it can be said to have initiated the shift towards the more radical democratic position he took up in the 1890's. Fontane learned a great deal about the nature of the Prussian state from his friend's experience:

~~also: 8 Nov. 1886~~ "Ich finde, daß Staat und Behörden auf dem Punkt stehen, in ihrem Übereifer sich beständig zu blamieren. Wenn man solch Buch, wie das Ihrige, nicht mehr publicieren darf ohne den 'Staat' an irgend einer Stelle zu kränken, so kann mir der ganze Staat gestohlen werden." (44)

Fontane had for some time been alive to the fact of, and the dangers of, militarism and had criticised and ridiculed it. The arrogance of the military and the social prestige enjoyed by the officer corps was, after all, nothing new. He was nevertheless depressed by the whole affair.⁴⁵ What depressed him was the final realisation that his friend's experience could not be lightly dismissed as an isolated incident. The militarism of Major Meie and General von Wulffen was not an aberration; he became gradually convinced -- despite himself⁴⁶ -- that Friedländer's brush with the military had revealed dominant trends in the Prussian army. He feared that things would get worse:

"die bis zur Karikatur getriebene Militäranschauung. ... Was sehen und erleben wir nicht gerade jetzt wieder und ich fürchte, wir sind erst am Anfang." (47)

Fontane also realised that the military wielded considerable influence within the apparatus of the Prussian state and that this influence stemmed from the domination of both army and state by the same class, the Prussian aristocracy. This class formed the ubiquitous link between army and state. This realisation precipitated a spate of critical comment of the Prussian state for its subservience to the military, criticism which represents the beginnings of Fontane's gathering hatred of 'Borussismus'.

"wenn Sie aber von Ihrer Person abstrahieren und den Fall als signatura temporis und nicht als bloß möglich in Preußen, sondern auch als charakteristisch (my italics) für Preußen ansehen, so muß man mit, als Patriot und Mensch blutige Tränen weinen. ... was empörte, hatte mit Ihrer Person nichts zu tun und war ein Achselzucken und fast ein Grauen darüber, daß man am Ausgange des 19. Jahrhunderts das in einem Staate erleben muß, der stolz ist auf seine Bildung, seinen Fortschritt, seine Freiheit. Da war die Inquisition nichts dagegen." (47a)

Friedländer's case was but one example:

"Seit Ihrer Publicierung höre ich nur noch von ähnlichen Schicksalen in ähnlichen Situationen." (48)

Fontane drew his conclusions:

"Der preuß. Staat kann keinen größeren Bewunderer haben als mich (daß er mir sympathisch wäre, kann ich nicht sagen), aber mitunter kriegt diese Bewunderung doch einen Knacks. Wenn ich an das Ehrengericht über Friedländer und nun jetzt an diesen Prozeß Carsten-Lichterfelde (49) denke, so erscheint mir dies ganze Staatswesen grotesk, karikiert ..." (50)

He had now been thoroughly disillusioned; his understanding of what the Prussian state represented had undergone radical and painful revision. Fontane had - in his historical studies - traced a number of underlying ethical principles in the emergence of Prussia, foremost among them were the twin ideas of 'justice' (Gerechtigkeit)⁵¹ and 'rule of law' (Gesetzlichkeit)⁵². Now, the Prussian state seemed to have abandoned any such ideas - it stood naked, bereft of principles and ideal inspirations:

"Alle reformatorische Macht ruht heutzutage beim Geldbeutel, Ideen gelten wenig, Recht gilt gar nicht.

Wer reich ist oder eine bestimmte Machtstellung einnimmt, kraft welcher er helfen und fördern kann, der kann aus sich heraus, so zu sagen direkt, viel Gutes schaffen, wer aber mit nichts kommt als mit Idee, Wahrheit, Recht, wer losgelöst von eigener und Anderer Selbstsucht eine 'Frage' durchfechten will, der kann gleich zu Hause bleiben. Es gibt nur noch persönliche, aber keine höheren Interessen, alles wird durch Furcht oder Vorteil oder Ehrgeiz bestimmt. Ihre Sache berührt eine Frage von allgemeiner Wichtigkeit, aber ehe sie nicht den Einzelnen persönlich drückt, wird der Einzelne nicht Lust haben, sich mit ihr zu befassen." (53)

The bitterness of Fontane's words are a measure of the degree of his disillusionment, of hopes long-nurtured, now dashed.

Yet this had not been Fontane's first reaction. When he had first heard from Friedländer - in November 1886 - Fontane's indignation had been matched by a belief that his friend's case would ultimately be vindicated. Accordingly, he had encouraged Friedländer to press his case:

"Ich kann nur sagen vorwärts und zwar stramm, schneidig, 'feste' ... und will man ... solche Veröffentlichungen ganz allgemein als Ketzerei verurteilen, so würde ich aufmucken, nicht nachgeben und bis an die höchste Stelle gehen. Und wenn es auch da nicht hilft, im Parlament und in der Presse einen heillosen Lärm machen." (54)

These words of encouragement were inspired by the - as yet-firm belief that:

"Wenn Sie ... das richtige Wort treffen, fest aber nicht schroff, entgegenkommend aber nicht schwach sind, so muß die Sache früher oder später zu einem für Sie guten Ausgang führen. ... Ich kann und will nicht glauben, daß wir bereits so weit herunter sind, um schlimmer als unter der Inquisition zu leben ..." (55)

Fontane even considered mobilising his various contacts in the War Office in support of Friedländer.⁵⁶ But, almost as soon as Fontane had decided to aid his friend in this way, he began to have doubts; he began to see that little would be achieved:

"Aber ich habe es doch alles wieder aufgegeben und stehe auf dem Standpunkt, den ich Anno 76 in verwandter Situation einnahm: es kommt nichts dabei heraus. Wenn man bei Beamten, Militärs, Adligen, Geistlichen nicht über ein Individuum, sondern über überspannte Standesanschauungen wie sie durch ein Einzelindividuum (oder mehrere) vertreten werden, beklagt, so kriegt man nie Recht,

"weil jeder glaubt, 'seinem Stand' nichts vergeben zu dürfen... Dabei steckt in jedem Menschen ein Philisterzug und eine Philisteranschauung, die darauf hinausläuft: 'na, ganz unrecht werden die Andern wohl nicht haben', wenigstens kann ich mich nicht entsinnen, daß in meinem langen Leben bei Gelegenheit ähnlicher Kränkungen und Unsinnigkeiten auch nur jemals ein Mensch auf meine Seite getreten wäre." (57)

Fontane had to accept that there was no resistance from within the army to such 'überspannte Standesanschauungen'.⁵⁸ The military establishment, however, had not vindicated Friedländer's case and upheld his freedom to comment, on the contrary, they had supported Meie ('ein furchtbarer Mensch... und kann einem die Kriegshelden etc. gründlich verleiden')⁵⁹ and von Wulffen:

"...wenn dann Exzellenzen und hohe Staatswürdenträger kommen und solchen Gedanken teilen und zu den ihrigen machen, so bin ich am Ende. Es ist etwas faul im Staate Dänemark und einem Götzenbilde zu Liebe, das sich mal 'Dienst' mal 'Ehre' nennt, werden Billigkeitsgefühl und gesunder Sinn begraben. Niemand hat den Mut direkt für Sie einzutreten; was Sie mir über Ihre Verwandten die von E's schreiben, ist nach dieser Seite hin charakteristisch. Ich hätte längst gesagt: 'macht was ihr wollt und bleibt mir gewogen' und hätte ihnen Uniform, Leutnantschaft, Kreuz, den ganzen Mumpitz vor die Füße geworfen." (60)

Ultimately Fontane saw that, given the character and ideology of those who dominated the Prussian state, there was little hope for Friedländer. His hopes of reform and renewal from within the aristocracy, the very basis of his conservatism, had been dealt a fatal blow. In this respect, the Friedländer case constituted an important turning point in Fontane's development, albeit late in life:

"...nachdem ich ein Lebenlang ein Hoffer, ein Erwarter, ein freudiger Inangriffnehmer aller möglichen Dinge gewesen, (bin ich) so zu sagen über Nacht ins Resignationslager übergegangen." (61)

This abandonment of hope launched Fontane, by releasing him from false hopes, into the radicalism of later life.

3. Fontane and the Prussian aristocracy in the late 1880's

After the 'Fall Friedländer' Fontane's comments on the Prussian aristocracy are negative on virtually all counts, his reservations as regards their political role and influence have now escalated into open and sustained opposition:

"Mit dem Adel, hohen und niedren, bin ich fertig..." (62)

He now avoided the company of conservative aristocrats, as he found their politics insufferable. He confessed that

"...es mir immer schwerer wird, Anschauungen ruhig hinzunehmen, die ich für verrückt oder 'raufgepufft' oder anmaßlich halte. Dergleichen alle 3 Jahr einmal zu hören, amüsiert mich, aber mit solchen Personen zu verkehren, ist mir unmöglich... Gesellschaft von der man nichts hat als Ärger und mitunter direkte Beleidigung." (63)

For culture and refinement Fontane now looked elsewhere:

"Ich habe auch unserem von mir aufrichtig geliebten Adel gegenüber einsehn müssen, daß uns alle Freiheit und feinere Kultur vorwiegend durch die reiche Judenschaft vermittelt wird." (64)

Fontane was deeply hurt that the conservative establishment had all but ignored him on his seventieth birthday, indeed, they appeared to regard him as something of a renegade.⁶⁵

He found it more and more difficult to reconcile his longstanding sentimental and aesthetic attachment to the Prussian aristocracy with the mounting feelings of anger and frustration and disappointment they now evoked in him.⁶⁶ But Fontane shed his illusions painfully:

"Das den Dingen scharf ins Gesicht sehn ist nur momentan schrecklich, bald gewöhnt man sich nicht nur daran, sondern findet in der gewonnenen Erkenntnis, auch wenn die Ideale darüber in die Brüche gingen, eine nicht geringe Befriedigung." (67)

However, Fontane's attachment, 'meine stille Liebe'⁶⁸ did survive, but now clearly separated and defined as a purely literary and aesthetic interest:

"Zu dem ist mir unser Adel, so sehr ich ihn menschlich und novellistisch liebe, politisch doch zu sehr gegen den Strich." (69)

Henceforth Fontane distinguished very deliberately between his literary attachment and interest in the aristocracy and his undiminished opposition to the perverted conservatism of the Prussian aristocracy. An indication of the degree of

detachment that Fontane had reached, is given by his likening his own interest in the aristocracy to that of a gardener's interest in exotic plants:

"Man kann sich viertelstundenlang an diesen merkwürdigen Gewächsen erfreuen, aber man kann es zu keiner Freundschaft und Übereinstimmung mit ihnen bringen." (70)

Gradually, the aristocratic ideal had been reduced, as layer after layer had been pared away: first, Fontane abandoned the aristocracy as a political elite, urging the readers of his 'Spreeland' to distinguish between

"...politisches und gesellschaftliches Auftreten." (71)

Soon this distinction became untenable, as Fontane found that the behaviour of the aristocracy did not measure up to his idea of what constituted a 'cultured class'. The distinction between the political and the social role of the aristocracy broke down in practice, as his strong objections to the political views of the average Junker soured the delights of social intercourse.

The distinction had been, nevertheless, an extremely important one for Fontane; he had for long believed that political views were of secondary importance, it was qualities of character, 'Gesinnung' that was all-important, that decided on the worth of a man. Hence, the perfect gentleman - even if he professed the most reactionary views - would remain a model of gentlemanly behaviour. Thus Dubslav von Stechlin, while giving expression to some pretty reactionary political sentiments, is portrayed, convincingly, as a deeply humane and warm-hearted old man.⁷² Fontane quotes two examples of such gentlemen in his memoirs: Schneider

"Was über den Menschen entscheidet, ist seine Gesinnung, Ehrlichkeit der Überzeugungen. Und die hatte Louis Schneider..." (73)

and a certain Major von Quitzow⁷⁴ but he is obliged to note that perhaps such gentlemen are a thing of the past.⁷⁵

At the end of a protracted process of disillusionment all that remained of the great ideal synthesis of political, ethical, social and aesthetic elements that made up Fontane's idea of the

'gentleman', was the ideal, suspended as it were, disembodied and no longer related to anything to be found in contemporary reality.

"Am liebsten bliebe ich in der Mark, deren Sandplateaus ich für besonders gesund halte, aber mir, dem Verherrlicher des Märkischen, ist alles Märkische so schrecklich, Diese eigentümlich anspruchsvolle Ruppigkeit, immer der Nickelgroschen mit Thalerallüren, ist mir unerträglich. Es beobachten und schildern, ist amüsant, aber mit drunterstecken, ist furchtbar." (76)

At times Fontane felt that his residual literary interest in the aristocracy was a weakness:

"Meine rein nach der ästhetischen und novellistischen Seite hin liegende Vorliebe bleibt dieselbe, aber Verstand, Rechts- und Selbstgefühl lehnen sich gegen diese Liebe auf und erklären sie für eine Schwäche." (77)

4. Fontane and the middle-classes

The continued prevalence of the 'Bourgeois' and the bourgeois mentality within the middle classes in the 1880's met with Fontane's unabated hostility:

"Ich hasse das Bourgeoishafte mit einer Leidenschaft, als ob ich ein eingeschworner Socialdemokrat wäre. 'Er ist ein Schafskopf, aber sein Vater hat ein Eckhaus.', mit dieser Bewundrungsformel kann ich nicht mehr mit." (78)

The typical 'Bourgeois' was given to, and in turn impressed by, fastidious displays of wealth:

"dieses Gewichtlegen auf gutsitzende Hosen" (79) as Fontane once referred to ^{it} humorously. Attachment to material wealth and the social prestige that came with such possessions were the supreme goals of the Bourgeois, and as such, preceded concern for more human qualities, such as generosity, warm-heartedness, naturalness. These qualities were inevitably given lesser importance in the bourgeois scale of values. Aristocracy had been replaced by plutocracy:

"Früher fing die Menschheit erst beim Baron an, jetzt bei dem, der Champagner bestellt und davon bin ich weit ab." (80)

The figure of Frau Kommerziennätin Treibel in the novel 'Frau Jenny Treibel' ⁸¹ is 'ein Musterstück von einer Bourgeoise' ⁸², the embodiment of the bourgeois mentality: while claiming that she believes in true love, she is very much opposed to the marriage of her son to the daughter of a none-too wealthy professor, although it is a love-match. Fontane explained the point of the novel:

"Titel: 'Frau Kommerzienrätin oder Wo sich Herz zum Herzen findet'. Dies ist die Schlußzeile eines sentimental Liebblingsliedes, das die 50jährige Kommerzienrätin in engerem Kreis beständig singt und sich dadurch Anspruch auf das 'Höhere' erwirbt, während ihr in Wahrheit nur das Kommerzienrätliche, will sagen viel Geld, das 'Höhere' bedeutet. Zweck der Geschichte: das Hohle, Phrasenhafte, Lügnerische, Hochmütige, Hartherzige des Bourgeoisstandpunktes zu zeigen, der von Schiller spricht und Gerson meint." (83)

Fontane had defined the bourgeois mentality as "das ohne rechten Lebensgehalt aufs Äußerliche gerichtete Dasein" (84)

Frau Jenny Treibel was such a woman who 'trotz Lyrik und Hochgefühle' was concerned 'ganz ausschließlich auf Äußerlichkeiten' ⁸⁵. Not that the priority accorded to wealth was at all conscious: the bourgeois mentality concealed its more fundamental allegiance to material values by deluding itself into thinking that it gave prior place to spiritual values and humane ideals. ⁸⁶ Fontane's definition of the 'bourgeois mentality' stressed the inner commitment to material values as the essence rather than the mere possession of wealth. ⁸⁷

It would, however, be incorrect to think that Fontane regarded the middle class as a whole as corrupted by pharisaic materialism; he now excluded from his strictures the haute bourgeoisie, the upper middle class:

"die Kaufmanns- und Banquierkreise" (88)

The grand, not to say, epic scale of the activities of modern German industrial enterprise fascinated him:

"Ich kann den Bourgeoiston nicht ertragen und in derselben Weise wie ich in früheren Jahrzehnten eine tiefe Abneigung gegen Professorenweisheit, Professoren-dünkel und Professorenliberalismus hatte, in derselben Weise dreht sich mir jetzt angesichts des wohlhabend- gewordenen Speckhökertums das Herz um. Wirklicher Reichtum imponiert mir oder erfreut mich wenigstens, seine Erscheinungsformen sind mir in hohem Maße sympathisch und ich lebe gern inmitten von Menschen die 5000 Grubenarbeiter beschäftigen, Fabrikstädte gründen und Expeditionen aussenden zur Colonisierung von Mittel-Afrika. Große Schiffsreederei, die Flotten bemannen, Tunnel- und Kanalbau, die Weltteile verbinden, Zeitungsfürsten und Eisenbahnkönige sind meiner Huldigung sicher, ich will nichts von ihnen, aber sie schaffen und wirken zu sehen tut mir wohl; alles Große hat von Jugend auf einen Zauber für mich gehabt, ich unterwerfe mich neidlos." (89)

Fontane associated great wealth with an ease of manner, a tolerance and generosity that he missed in bourgeois circles:

"Es haftet ja dem Gelde eine zauberhafte Macht an, auch im Guten, und das Absterben des Kleinlichen, daran die Deutschen auch jetzt noch leiden, ist eine der großen Segnungen großen Besitzes und großer Verhältnisse." (90)

As he became increasingly disillusioned with the aristocracy and embittered at their failure to give any positive lead to Germany, Fontane began to appreciate more and more the progressive role of the upper middle class (Großbürgertum): here was a vigorous, forward-looking intellectual and cultural elite which could replace the obsolete Junker caste and give Germany the leadership Fontane felt it needed so urgently:

"Zunächst freue ich mich immer, wenn ich Namen lese wie Lisco, Lucä, Gropius, Persius, Hensel, Thaer, Körte, Diterici, Virchow, Siemens, weil ich mir dabei bewußt werde, daß in diesen nun in zweiter und dritter Generation blühenden Familien, ein neuer Adel, wenn auch ohne 'von' heranwächst, von dem die Welt wirklich was hat, neuzeitliche Vorbilder (denn dies ist die eigentliche Adelsaufgabe), die, moralisch und intellektuell, die Welt fördern... (91)

All this was in stark contrast to the small-minded preoccupations of the Bourgeois and the narrow confines of the bourgeois mentality:

"Aber der 'Bourgeois' ist nur die Karrikatur davon, er ärgert mich in seiner Kleinstelzigkeit und seinem unausgesetzten Verlangen auf nichts hin bewundert zu werden. Vater Bourgeois hat sich für 1000 Thlr. malen lassen und verlangt daß ich das Geschmiere für einen Velasquez halte, Mutter Bourgeoise hat sich eine Spitzenmantille gekauft und behandelt diesen Kauf als ein Ereignis, alles was angeschafft oder wohl gar 'vorgesetzt' wird, wird mit einem Blicke begleitet, der etwa ausdrückt: 'Beglückter, du, der du von diesem Kuchen essen, von diesem Wein trinken durftest', alles ist kindische Überschätzung einer Wirtschafts- und Lebensform, die schließlich gerade so gut Sechserwirtschaft ist wie meine eigene. Ja, sie ist es mehr, ist es recht eigentlich. Ein Stück Brot ist nie Sechserwirtschaft, ein Stück Brot ist ein Höchstes, ist Leben und Poesie, ein Gänsebratendiner aber mit Zeltinger und Baiser-Torte, wenn die Wirtin dabei strahlt und sich einbildet, mich der Alltäglichkeit meines Daseins auf 2 Stunden entrissen zu haben,

"ist sechserhaft in sich und doppelt die Gesinnung,
die es begleitet. Der Bourgeois versteht nicht zu
geben, weil er von der Nichtigkeit seiner Gabe
keine Vorstellung hat." (92)

5. Fontane and liberalism

In the course of the 1880's Fontane moved perceptibly away from conservatism. He appears to have entered a phase of suspended animation, politically speaking, in which he could not bring himself to side with either the conservatives or the liberals. His reluctance to vote in the 1887 Reichstag elections reflect something of this dilemma.⁹³ He had modified -and differentiated - his previous hostility to the middle classes and to middle class liberalism. As he had begun to appreciate the middle classes as a potential elite to replace the discredited aristocracy, so too did his hostility to liberalism, which had been a prominent feature of his world-view in the 1870's, diminish. He now began to see it as the lesser of a number of political evils.

Fontane entertained hopes of a 'liberal' government under the ill-fated Frederick III:

"Die liberalen Intentionen waren gewiß die besten, und es mag dahingestellt bleiben, ob Preußen - All-Deutschland schon schwieriger - nicht nach einem solchen liberalen Programm zu regieren gewesen wäre. Ohne Adel, Geistlichkeit und Bürokratie geht es freilich nicht, aber es ist unzweifelhaft, daß wir in Preußen auch einen liberalen Adel, eine liberale Geistlichkeit und eine liberale Beamtenschaft haben. Mit diesen Elementen, die an Zahl wie geistiger Potenz der alten preußischen Regierungsgarde mindestens ebenbürtig sind, hätte man's unter Umständen versuchen können." (94)

But Fontane remained essentially uncommitted to any particular political party, although he described his overall position as that of 'national liberal'.⁹⁵ He still had too many reservations about liberalism to embrace it whole-heartedly; this is illustrated by two minor, but highly political incidents.

In 1888 Virchow, the famous pathologist and prominent member of the opposition Progressive Party stood as candidate for the post of Rector of the University of Berlin.

He was not elected. Fontane's comment is of interest:

"...ich freue mich...daß er nicht Rektor geworden ist. So feine Fragen lassen sich nicht nach einer liberalen Schablone beurteilen. Ein Rektor der Berliner Universität, der sozusagen dem preußischen König und deutschen Kaiser jeden Morgen in die Fenstern kuckt, muß gut mit ihm stehn. Unter Friedrich III hätt' er's werden können, jetzt nicht. Haben wir mal einen fortschrittlichen Kaiser, so mag sich der Spieß umdrehn." (96)

In 1893 the sculptor Begas was commissioned by Kaiser William II to design a national monument. The basic idea of Begas' design was the contrast between the Germany of feudal absolutism, represented by military insignia, weapons, helmets etc. and the constitutional Germany of his own day represented by the Imperial Seal, bearing the inscription 'Einheit, Gesetz, Verfassung' and a ballot box (Wahlurne). Fontane commented, with reference to the ballot-box in particular:

"...ich finde die konstitutionelle Gesinnungstüchtigkeit depreciiert..." (97)

Two incidents in which Fontane can hardly be said to have displayed a liberal point of view.

Fontane had grave doubts, too, about some of the tenets of liberalism; he was sceptical, for example, of the value of education for the masses and decidedly anti-enlightenment.⁹⁸ Fontane believed in strong, authoritative government rather than vague talk of self-determination which he regarded as impracticable:

"Aber doch von vornherein Verwirrung stiftend. Völker verlangen Bestimmtheiten und Befehle. Das 'ins Belieben stellen' geht kaum im Privatleben, im Staatsleben gewiß nicht." (99)

He continued to be deeply suspicious of much liberal talk which he tended to dismiss as so much 'Phrasenhaftigkeit': he had harsh words for the noted liberal daily the 'Kölnische Zeitung':

"...im Ganzen aber ist alles traurig liberale Schwabbelelei, Mittelgutsblech, Redensarten-Jahrmarkt." (100)

After reading Auerbach's correspondence ¹⁰¹ Fontane felt obliged to say, comparing Auerbach with the conservative writer Gerlach:

"Mit Auerbach wohl einverstanden und doch bedrückt von der öden liberalen Phrase, mit Gerlach fast niemals einverstanden und doch überall helle Bewunderung." (102)

It was the sterile and mechanistic regurgitation of liberal principles that no longer carried conviction which offended Fontane, a feature he later described as

"...den Doktrinarismus eines geistig und moralisch mehr oder weniger in Hochmut verstrickten Besserwissers..." (103)

There was little change in Fontane's dislike of the more radical Progressive Party. Although Fontane had a number of close contacts with the party - Friedrich Witte, a family friend since the 1850's was a Member of Parliament for the Progressive Party - and although he was himself theatre critic of the 'Vossische Zeitung' widely regarded as the principal organ of the party, he remained markedly unsympathetic to the party, its aims and strategy. ¹⁰⁴ The 'Vossische Zeitung', Fontane complained, was 'too clever by half in political matters' (politisch klugschmusig) ¹⁰⁵ and doctrinaire. ¹⁰⁶ The party seemed obsessed with constitutional, parliamentary and legal niceties:

"...die fortschrittliche Opposition, die alles von der Existenz eines 'Paragraphen', des Entsetzlichsten, was es gibt, abhängig macht, ist einfach ridikül." (107)

Fontane berated the party, 'der unglückselige Fortschritt' ¹⁰⁸ for attempting to harness, as Fontane saw it, the dying Frederick III to their own essentially oppositional policies:

"Die Fortschrittspartei operiert wieder mit gewohnter Geschicklichkeit; ich will niemanden herausfordern... aber daß die Fortschrittler schlechte Politiker weil schlechte Diplomaten und womöglich noch schlechtere Menschen- oder wenigstens Preußenkenner sind, das steht mir fest, das haben sie zu oft bewiesen. Zunächst gehen sie einer grausamen Enttäuschung entgegen und über ein Kleines einem großen Kladderadatsch." (109)

Their political strategy was, Fontane believed, the product of wishful thinking:

"Politik mag ich heute nicht mehr schreiben; nur mein Entsetzen über die grenzenlose Blindheit der Fortschrittler ist in einem beständigen Wachsen. ... Und daß es im Wesentlichen richtig ist, darüber kann doch nur ein Fortschrittler, dem immer das Prinzip und der Wunsch die einfachen Tatsachen verdunkelt, in Zweifel sein. Ewig Vogel Strauß mit dem in den Sand gesteckten Kopf." (110)

He blamed the Progressives for the confusion of Frederick III's brief reign through their influence on the Empress:

"...der neue Kaiser war bereits ein Sterbender, und so hatten wir nicht einen liberalen Regierungswechsel, sondern die alte Regierung blieb, in die nun 'vom Kabinett aus', d.h. durch die Kaiserin, fortschrittlich hineingewirtschaftet wurde. So daß Willkürlichkeit und Konfusion dieser ganzen Epoche den Stempel aufgedrückt haben." (111)

But it was the party's consistent opposition to Bismarck that most irritated Fontane.¹¹² Later, however, when Fontane's own reservations about Bismarck had developed, he found himself more in agreement with the 'Vossin' and the 'Fortschritts-partei':

"Seit Wochen bin ich wieder ganz Politik: Ost-Afrika, Geffcken, Morier, Samoa. Mir will alles nicht recht gefallen und so wenig ich mit dem Fortschrittsprogramm zu tun habe, so kann ich doch nicht leugnen, daß ich seit einem Vierteljahr in einem bis dahin unbekannt gebliebenen Grade auf Seiten meiner guten Vossin stehe." (113)

but the 'verdamnten politischen Unterschiede'¹¹⁴ between himself and the party remained.

6. Fontane and the working class

Throughout the 1880's the Social Democratic Party, the political organisation of the emerging industrial working class in Germany was proscribed, it was virtually an under-ground organisation. While it is true that Fontane expressed certain doubts as to whether such measures would succeed ¹¹⁵ - which could be taken to suggest cautiously expressed opposition - and while it is also true that Fontane was not unsympathetic to the egalitarian principles that underlay the socialist ideology ¹¹⁶ Fontane does not appear - from the absence of references - to have been troubled in his mind or moved to indignation by the treatment meted out to self-confessed socialists who were hounded like traitors.

The 1880's also witnessed the first steps towards the establishment of the welfare state, initiated by Bismarck (known in Germany, interestingly enough, as 'state socialism'). Fontane was clear enough in his own mind that the purpose of the legislation was

"den Staat vor den drohenden Gefahren zu sichern" (117) Yet, the measures - hailed by contemporaries as Bismarck's second greatest achievement after the founding of the German Empire - failed to excite Fontane's interest or enthusiasm, although he was not blind to their importance. ¹¹⁸ Indeed, by the 1890's the importance of the whole question of the integration of the working class into the capitalist state was so paramount that it is, in effect, the central political theme of his novel 'Der Stechlin'. ¹¹⁹

When the Social Democrats did once more emerge in the Spring of 1890 as a legal political organisation, the role of revolution, the revolutionary road to the establishment of a socialist society was prominent in their deliberations. ¹²⁰ Fontane rejected the idea that revolution was justified:

"Die, die jetzt auf dem Punkt stehen, alles auf den Kopf zu stellen, haben aber zu ihrem Umsturzgelüst auch nicht den geringsten Grund." (121)

While admitting that

"..es gibt eine Masse von Elend und Unglück." (122)

Fontane argued that such misery was

"...außer aller Beziehung zu unsren staatlichen und gesellschaftlichen Zuständen." (123)

He denied that social conditions gave rise to misery, claiming that it was more probably the result of indolence. He then went on to prove his point by quoting the case, not of the industrial worker, but of the middle class intellectual with literary pretensions seeking financial support while he completed his drama 'Menenius Agrippa'.¹²⁴

He affirmed:

"...für solche verrückten Zwickel, die durchaus auf ihre Façon selig d.h. reich und berühmt werden wollen, für diese sonderbaren Gestalten ist Staat und Gesellschaft nicht verantwortlich zu machen; were umgekehrt seiner Laune und seinem Hochmut nicht nachgeht, sondern ehrlich arbeiten will, für den ist gesorgt; der Staat ist keine Züchtungs- und keine Versorgungsanstalt für verrückte Genies. Ist mal ein wirkliches darunter und geht doch zu Grunde, so ist das beklagenswert, aber keine Veranlassung zu Revolutionen." (125)

The example Fontane quotes does not refer at all to the industrial working class and is therefore not entirely logical in the context. Indeed, Fontane then draws an analogy between his own position and that of the mass of the workers: he too, Fontane avers, has had to work for a living in the employ of exploiting capitalist millionaires:

"Aber nicht eine Minute ist mir der Gedanke gekommen, ihnen die silbernen Löffel vom Tisch nehmen zu wollen." (126)

Fontane may have felt, subjectively, as exploited as the industrial worker demanding revolutionary change, but his counsel:

"Man muß von seiner Arbeit schlecht und gerecht leben können, mehr ist nicht nötig. Und für all das ist jetzt über und über gesorgt, namentlich bei denen, die den Radau inszenieren." (127)

demonstrates his almost total ignorance of the material conditions in which the vast majority of the working class were obliged to live out their lives. Earlier in the year

Fontane had written to Friedländer:

"es scheint doch fast wie göttlicher Wille, daß sich der Mensch sein täglich Brot verdienen soll, der Minister natürlich anders wie der Tagelöhner, aber immer Arbeit mit bescheidnem Lohn" (128)

Fontane's "Arbeitsethos" hardly took account of the real circumstances of the "Tagelöhner" and rather underestimated the modesty of the Minister's emoluments.

Fontane had probably only seen workers at a distance in the street and not actually had an opportunity to examine either their working or living conditions. While he would have come into close and frequent personal contact with servants (Dienstpersonal), the world of the industrial worker probably remained uncharted territory. In his novel "Irrungen, Wirrungen" working people are depicted as living boisterous unproblematic lives - indeed, the scene outside the factory ('ein großes Etablissement, ein Walzwerk oder eine Maschinenwerkstatt') is not without its idyllic aspects:

"Es war Mittag, und ein Teil der Arbeiter saß draußen im Schatten, um die Mahlzeit einzunehmen. Die Frauen, die das Essen gebracht hatten, standen plaudernd daneben, einige mit einem Säugling auf dem Arm, und lachten sich untereinander an, wenn ein schelmisches oder anzügliches Wort gesprochen wurde. Rienäcker, der sich den Sinn für das Natürliche mit nur zu gutem Recht zugeschrieben, war entzückt von dem Bilde, das sich ihm bot, und mit einem Anfluge von Neid sah er auf die Gruppe glücklicher Menschen." (129)

Later Fontane must have read about Paul Göhre, the pastor who went to work in industry in order to see for himself what living and working conditions were like (perhaps Fontane even read Göhre's book 'Drei Monate Fabrikarbeiter')¹³⁰ since Göhre is referred to in the novel 'Der Stechlin'¹³¹ Fontane's familiarity with Göhre and his work must mean that he subsequently enhanced his understanding of the conditions of the working class considerably. For the moment, however, his conclusion - on the eve of May 1st demonstrations in Berlin - was that the 'Radau' was unnecessary.

Social progress was, after all, evident on all sides:

"Allem Schimpfen unerachtet, an dem man gelegentlich redlich teilnimmt, steht es doch so, daß die Welt nie glücklichere Tage gesehn hat." (132)

Fontane did not believe that conditions were bad enough to make mass support for socialist demands likely.¹³³

Fontane would thus appear to have had little sympathy with the revolutionary political aims of the socialist party in the 1880's - albeit due to his ignorance of actual conditions - although he did acknowledge that the socialist ideology was based on certain broad humanitarian and egalitarian principles that he found intellectually attractive. This intellectual assent to certain aspects of 'democracy' was paralleled by a shift in Fontane's literary interest towards the portrayal of ordinary working people and their environment:

"Nur Zerlei möchte ich doch noch sagen dürfen: der märkische Adel, den ich weiß Gott nicht überschätze, aber er ist in seinem Tun und seiner Lebenstüchtigkeit doch hoch interessant; auch der sogenannte 'gemeine Mann' ist doch interessant und voll Mut, Charakter und Freisinn (Tyrann für andre), das Bürgervolk erbärmlich und der Bourgeois 3mal erbärmlich." (134)

Frau Dörr (Irrungen, Wirrungen), Lene Nimptsch, Stine and her sister widow Pittelkow (in the novel 'Stine') and Thusnelda Lehmann¹³⁵: all are figures from the lower classes in society, Stine and her sister earn their living as seamstresses working at home for a Berlin firm.¹³⁶

Lehnert Menz, the hero of 'Quitt' (1890) is a wheelwright-cum-peasant farmer. None of the working class figures (working class in the broadest sense, i.e. not members of the property-owning capitalist middle classes) are socialists or political in any way. The only exceptions are Lehnert Menz who is a republican democrat¹³⁷ and the French socialist Monsieur L'Hermite, a rather shadowy but nonetheless entirely positive figure (also in 'Quitt') who played a prominent role as leader in the Paris Commune of 1870.¹³⁸

All the novels of the 1880's contain, either explicit or implicit, criticism of those who seek to uphold and preserve the existing class structure. Egalitarianism pervades Fontane's depiction of Berlin society in the novels of this period. His egalitarian stand-point is further evidenced in his sympathy for the democratic ideas of the Paris Commune, as represented by the figure of Monsieur L'Hermite, by his interest in the egalitarian socialism of the Mennonite settlements in America ('Quitt') and by his interest in the primitive 'communism' of the 'Likedeeler' pirates and the 'Störtebeker' legend, an interest that dates from the early 1880's.¹³⁹ Fontane had to some extent tired of writing about the upper class of Berlin society.¹⁴⁰ His interest turned towards the 'gemeine Mann', to ordinary working people, mainly women, who were to assume a new and important role in the last decade of his life.

7. Fontane and the political system

While momentous changes were taking place in Fontane's attitude to the Prussian aristocracy and the Prussian state in the course of the 1880's, his attitude to the political system with Bismarck as the all-powerful Chancellor, the Reichstag with its limited powers and the various parties remained fairly stable. The only change of consequence was his alienation from conservatism. In other respects Fontane's attitude to the parties remained as before, although several shifts in emphasis heralded more important changes in his political outlook in the last decade of his life.

His view of the Reichstag, for example, underwent considerable change. In the 1870's and 80's Fontane had had a fairly negative view of the idea of introducing parliamentary government in Germany; he regarded the notion that a majority in the Reichstag ('das Dummste, was es gibt') should be able to obstruct or overrule Bismarck's statesmanlike handling of the nation's affairs as intolerable. After all, the German Empire had not been established by parliament.¹⁴¹ His opinion of politicians and the party system could not have been lower.¹⁴² It was only as Bismarck's genius began to falter and Fontane began to fear a resurgence of aristocratic feudal autocracy that his attitude to parliament changed; he now saw it as the only effective counter-weight to the ubiquitous influence of the Prussian aristocracy.¹⁴³ His opinion of parliamentarians was, however, not affected, he continued to be of the opinion

"...daß das Parteileben den Charakter verdirbt... es verdirbt auch den Verstand." (144)

c. Fontane's view of Bismarck 1881-1890

1. 1881-1888

Fontane's view of Bismarck at the onset of the 1880's can be characterised as undiminished respect for Bismarck's political achievements and admiration for his outstanding abilities as politician, statesman and orator, mingled with a renewed realisation of some of the more negative aspects of his character, especially his lack of generosity in his dealings with political opponents:

"Er ist ein großes Genie, aber ein kleiner Mann." (145)
 Bismarck had demonstrated this meaner, and more ruthless side of his character in his harsh treatment ^{of} Count Botho zu Eulenburg.¹⁴⁶ Yet, such reservations¹⁴⁷ did not weigh heavily in the scales against Bismarck: his attitude remained overwhelmingly positive up into the late 1880-s when he began to subject Bismarck to more systematic criticism.¹⁴⁸

On the whole Fontane appears to have given general consent to the broad outlines of Bismarck's policies at home and abroad.

"Wer dieser Regierung opponiert, ist einfach borniert'. Hat mich riesig amüsiert. Denn so ungewöhnlich die Äußerung ist, so ist sie doch eigentlich richtig." (149)
 Fontane was irritated by the arrogance of those who claimed the right to criticise Bismarck, he had no patience with such 'negative' opposition to Bismarck:

"Die Vossin beschäftigt sich mit keinem Landesteil so viel, wie mit dem Hirschberger Tal... Politisch eine gräßliche Gegend, weil jeder Jammerlappen weiß, wie's Bismarck hätte machen sollen." (150)

Hence Fontane's dislike of the Progressives. He castigated the party, for example, for obstructing Bismarck's proposals to increase the strength of the army.¹⁵¹ The Progressive Party was prepared to approve the Bill on condition that Bismarck reduced the period of time covered by the Bill from seven to three years.¹⁵²

Fontane wrote:

"Ich...begreife die Fortschrittler nicht, die noch nicht genug Blamage weg haben und gewillt scheinen ihre Regierungsfähigkeit immer deutlicher zu zeigen. Man kann an ihnen recht studieren, wie wenig bei doktrinärer Rechthaberei, bei Betonung an und für sich guter und trefflicher Sätze herauskommt, wenn der Sinn für das Natürliche, das Nächstliegende fehlt. Freiheit, Sparsamkeit, Geldbewilligung: alles wundervoll; aber daß ich morgen meinen Kaffee ohne eingestippten Franzosen (oder er mich) trinke, ist wichtiger als die ganze Dreiherrlichkeit." (133)

As far as Fontane was able to judge, the international situation fully justified the measures that Bismarck wished to take:

"Außerdem scheint mir die politische Lage doch so zu sein, daß man jedem, der vorläufig noch warm sitzt, zurufen darf: 'Nimm's mit'. Wenn die alte Geschichte vom 'auf dem Vulkan tanzen' je zutraf, so in diesem Augenblicke. Ich traue der Geschichte nicht von heut' auf morgen." (154)

In his remarks Fontane overlooks the point that the Progressives were not opposed to the measures as such, but made their approval of them dependent on an extension of the powers of the Reichstag to scrutinise military expenditure. Fontane reaffirmed his confidence in Bismarck's handling of the situation:

"Ich habe das Vertrauen zu den Leuten unserer Regierung, daß sie nicht zum Spaß aus Deutschland ein Heerlager machen wollen. Sie tun, was sie müssen." (155)

However, Bismarck's Bill was defeated in the Reichstag: a majority of members favoured the three-year period and rejected Bismarck's seven-year period (Septennat), whereupon Bismarck dissolved parliament and elections were held on 21st February 1887.

In the course of the election campaign that followed Bismarck made a number of characteristically vicious and slanderous attacks on the Progressive Party, the party that had initiated parliamentary opposition to his 'Septennat'. He cast doubt on their patriotism and accused them of betraying the German nation; he went so far as to claim that they had been willing to hand over Schleswig-Holstein to the Danes in 1864.

This was too much, even for Fontane:

"...er(Bismarck) behauptet Fabelhaftes immer ins Gelache hinein und schneidet den besten Leuten flott drauf los die Ehre ab. Wie kann er den Fortschrittlern vorwerfen, sie hätten Schleswig-Holstein an Dänemark ausliefern wollen? Der reine Unsinn. In solchen Sätzen ergeht er sich beständig. Bei diesem rücksichtslosen Vorgehen trifft er's natürlich auch mal, aber das ist nicht anders, wie wenn ich mir's angewöhne, jeden Menschen, der in mein Zimmer tritt, einen Dieb zu nennen. Der Hundertste wird in die Knie fallen und ausrufen: 'bitte, verraten Sie's nicht', aber der polizeilich-kriminalistische Modus ist doch ungewöhnlich und wenig nachahmenswert." (156)

Bismarck's resort to patent lies, vicious imputations and malicious slander in order to discredit the opposition parties in the eyes of the electorate, deeply disturbed Fontane. What concerned him was the fact that Bismarck could indulge his enormous capacity for invective with complete impunity, uninhibited by either external or subjective constraints. Such means were justified by the supreme end, the vindication of Bismarck's policies and position as Chancellor, that was how Bismarck appeared to see it. It was as if Bismarck did not regard himself as subject to the same moral code as other mortals:

"Man hat das Gefühl, er glaubt sich, gottgleich, alles erlauben zu dürfen." (157)

a remark that calls to mind the passage in 'Cecile' in which Hedemeyer describes Bismarck as a Dalai-Lama and deplores his 'Omnipotenz'.¹⁵⁸

Fontane has moved from the view he held in the 1870's, namely, that outstanding individuals - by they statesmen, artists or poets - were in some way not subject to the limitations that conventional morality sought to impose, simply by the way such individuals transcended such limitations in their actions. The great individual was able to brush aside pettyfoggish moral objections to his behaviour with impunity since no-one could effectively challenge the offence, a state of affairs that Fontane felt people should accept. In 1879 he had written:

"Es ist wie mit unsrem Reichskanzler. Heißt er Schnökel oder

"oder Hasemann, so muß er der Glocke des Präsidenten gehorchen, heißt er Bismarck, so muß er ihr nicht gehorchen. Carlyle hat Recht, der Einzelne bestimmt alles, darf alles, wenn er der Mann danach ist. Daran hängt's." (159)

Fontane is now protesting against such an assumption. The great heroic individual Bismarck has misused his power and Fontane's moral sense has rebelled. Previously such 'Verdächtigungen' had saddened him, such behaviour had been regarded as a blemish on an otherwise admirable character, now Fontane was moved, as never before, to indignation.

Bismarck's slanderous electioneering tactics against the opposition had severely strained Fontane's admiration for him:

"Dazu kommt, daß der Bismarck-~~En~~thusiasmus, selbst bei seinen aufrichtigsten Bewunderern, immer mehr ins Wackeln kommt." (160)

In the event, Fontane did not feel able to cast his vote in support of Bismarck on the day of the election, he abstained.¹⁶¹ His reservations, reinforced by Bismarck's behaviour during the election campaign, precluded support for the Bismarck block parties, the cartel of Conservatives and National Liberals. Fontane thus withheld his vote from the parties that supported Bismarck for the first time since the 1860's, but he could not bring himself to vote for the opposition liberal party, the Progressives, either.

2. Bismarck and Kaiser Frederick III

On 9th March 1888 Kaiser William I died and Crown Prince Frederick became Kaiser Frederick of Germany. Although Fontane's initial impression had been on the whole a positive one,¹⁶² the Kaiser's proclamation 'An mein Volk'(12th March 1888), but more particularly his letter(Handschreiben) to Bismarck, confirmed Fontane's worst fears: the Kaiser's intentions, as Fontane interpreted them,¹⁶³ were tantamount to

"...eine totale Verurteilung oder doch mindestens Anzweiflung der gesamten Bismarckschen Politik." (164)

It was nothing less than

"...eine ganz deutliche Kriegserklärung...gegen Bismarck."(165)

If the Kaiser were to take steps to implement such a programme, it would mean either the dismissal of Bismarck and his Ministers or Bismarck's resignation. Either way, it would mean the dismantling of the whole edifice of Bismarck's policies:

"Soll nach diesem Programm gewirtschaftet werden, so bleibt kein Stein auf dem andern; nicht nur Bismarck, alle Minister erhalten eine IIb..." (166)

The declaration of war on Bismarck and his policies filled Fontane with fear and apprehension ('erschrecke ich davor'), since he felt sure the stage was now set for a major confrontation, he was sure that Bismarck would not stand idly by and allow his policies to be put on one side, he would retaliate.

"Bismarck kann das nicht ruhig einstecken." (167)

The political links between the Kaiser and the Progressive Party, the principal opposition and anti-Bismarck party, were believed to be especially close. Fontane had visions of Germany being plunged into an undeclared civil war between the Kaiser and the much strengthened parliamentary opposition on the one hand and Bismarck and his forces on the other:

"Aber ob es kurz oder lange dauert, viele solche Experimente, die, wenn weiter nichts, mindestens eine kolossale Stärkung der Opposition bedeuten, hält der Staat nicht aus. Keinesfalls können sie zu seinem Gedeihen beitragen." (168)

Fontane's concern was not so much that he felt the policies that

Kaiser Frederick had adumbrated to be bad for Germany. Fontane makes no comment on the substance of the programme, on the desirability or otherwise of the various measures. He was more concerned with the consequences of what he took to be a direct challenge to Bismarck's position as Reichskanzler. His prime concern was with the continued stability of the Reich,¹⁶⁹ which he saw threatened by 'liberal experiments'. Such was

"...das Bedrohliche dieser Situation." (170)

Fontane had no confidence in the political acumen of the Progressive Party,¹⁷¹ so that their intentions of ending the Bismarck regime and replacing it with a liberal regime under the auspices of the new Kaiser Frederick III filled Fontane with foreboding:

"Dilettantismus, wo noch eben ein Meistervirtuos die Geige spielte." (172)

was how Fontane expressed the contrast.

Fontane was angered too by the patronising tone adopted by the liberal 'Berliner Tageblatt' with its curt dismissal of Bismarck's achievements:

"Was ich 2 Stunden vorher in der Vossin in einer verhältnismäßig reservierten Sprache gelesen hatte, das tritt nun in aller Roheit, in aller Schnabernackfreude hervor. Falstaff tritt an den toten Percy heran und nachdem er sich überzeugt, daß er tot, piekt er mit seinem Säbel in ihm herum. Und hat nun Heldenblut an seinem Krötenspieß. Der Eindruck ist widerlich. Gestern noch der Mann, der den Erdball in Händen hielt, heute nur noch dazu da, - nach dem Größten das politisch in einem Jahrhundert geleistet worden ist(denn das Friederizianische ist kleiner und das Napoleonische flüchtiger gewesen) - sich von einem Judenbengel, hinter dem leider viele, viele stehen, sagen lassen zu müssen: 'er sei nur 'Diener' gewesen und könne, wenn er hübsch artig sein wolle, in seinem Dienstverhältnis bleiben.' Unerhört; furchtbar! Ein Mann wie Witte, der sich, trotz Parteistellung, die Fähigkeit und die Lust einen so großen Mann zu würdigen, nie hat nehmen lassen, muß vor Ekel ausspucken über solch Judenbengelgebahren. Und das sind die Blätter, wonach 'Geschichte' geschrieben wird. Diener und wieder Diener. Niederträchtiger Undank, Undank - und das ist das Schlimmste - mit hoher polizeilicher Erlaubnis! Nun werden sie wohl alle aus ihren Sümpfen und Höhlen herauskriechen, und ihm Mätzchen machen und ihn ausätschen. Nach meinem Gefühl kann und darf er das nicht aushalten." (173)

Strong language for Fontane, an indication of his anger at the unjust way that Bismarck was being treated, anger that was also inflamed by what he regarded as the machinations of Jewish circles, thus betraying a residual antisemitism that was not uncommon in conservative circles. Fontane himself felt very keenly the debt of gratitude owed to Bismarck by the German nation for his achievements, most notably the establishment of the German Empire ('dem Größten das politisch in einem Jahrhundert geleistet worden ist.'). This debt of gratitude still outweighed other considerations. He certainly did not share the hopes of the liberal democratic opposition, as represented by the 'Berliner Tageblatt' for progress towards parliamentary government under the new Kaiser, once Bismarck had been removed, a pre-condition of such progress, since he had always been implacably opposed to the idea of parliamentary government. Fontane probably failed to understand the political aims of the liberal opposition to Bismarck.

Fontane was further disgusted at the way former supporters of Bismarck were abandoning him, now that the new Kaiser had announced his intentions.¹⁷⁴ This indicates fairly clearly the extent to which Fontane supported Bismarck. In the face of the rank ingratitude and lack of loyalty of the opposition, whatever reservations Fontane may have had in his own mind about Bismarck, paled into insignificance, while his concern for the future of the Reich without Bismarck at the helm reinforced his feelings of solidarity with Bismarck.

All in all Fontane was profoundly relieved when the uncertainty was ended and the Kaiser died (15th June 1888); the end of the 'Interregnum'¹⁷⁵ meant a welcome return to Bismarckian normality:

"Im Ganzen darf man - unbeschadet tiefster Teilnahme - sagen: alles atmet auf; jeder hat ein Gefühl: der Dilettantismus, die Laune, die Geldvertuerei hat ein Ende und geordnete Zustände brechen wieder an.

Es ging nicht mehr so weiter. Ich glaube, selbst der 'Fortschritt' ist in seinem Herzen davon überzeugt..." (176)

But hardly had normality been restored than the 'Geffcken' affair erupted.

3. The Geffcken Affair 177

Extracts from the diary of the then Crown Prince Frederick, written during the Franco-Prussian war, appeared in the October issue of the prestigious 'Deutsche Rundschau'.¹⁷⁸ The extracts dealt mainly with the circumstances of the founding of the German Empire, highlighting the Crown Prince's overriding concern for the re-establishment of the 'Kaiserwürde' and his liberal intentions.¹⁷⁹ Bismarck, on the other hand, comes across as decidedly luke-warm about the 'Kaiserwürde' and the idea of unifying the north and south German states.¹⁸⁰ At one point, Bismarck is described as attempting to prescribe to the Crown Prince what views on the future structure of the Reich he should or should not express in public.¹⁸¹ It is also strongly implied that the Kaiser's decisions on matters of policy were almost entirely determined - by means of manipulation - by Bismarck, thus reducing the monarch to the level of an instrument of policy.¹⁸²

A few days after the October issue had come out, it was confiscated as containing 'treasonable material'.¹⁸³ Bismarck justified such extreme measures by claiming that the political content, namely, the extracts from the diary of the Crown Prince had been forged,¹⁸⁴ although he knew that this was not the case.¹⁸⁵

Bismarck regarded the publication as a premeditated attack on himself; he was thus determined to track down those responsible and discredit them, brand them as traitors, forgers and criminals. As Eyck commented:

"Er (Bismarck) wollte nur die Einleitung eines Verfahrens erzwingen, um seinen Gegnern an den Hals springen zu können ... die Justiz zur Dirne der Politik machen." (186)

On 30th September 1888 a certain Herr Geffcken - a close associate of the late Kaiser Frederick ¹⁸⁷ - was arrested in Hamburg, charged with treason and taken into custody.¹⁸⁸ From Fontane's first reaction to the news of Geffcken's arrest ¹⁸⁹ which expresses a degree of sympathy with the poor man's fate (though the situation provoked an incongruously humorous turn of phrase from Fontane), one might have expected Fontane to side with Geffcken against Bismarck, especially in the light of Fontane's known objections to Bismarck's 'polizeilich-kriminalistischer Modus'.¹⁹⁰ He clearly expected public opinion to condemn Bismarck's action:

"Das Merkwürdigste ist, daß wieder alles auf Bismarcks Seite tritt und daß gegen Geffcken und vor allem gegen den armen Kaiser Friedrich selbst, wieder die heftigsten Anklagen laut werden." (191)

But Fontane agreed with the public's verdict:

"Und leider muß ich sagen: ich fürchte, daß dies Volksurteil oder richtiger dies Urteil aller Gebildeten (mit Ausnahme der fortschrittlichen Judenschaft; denn es gibt bekanntlich auch sehr viel andre Juden) daß dies Urteil sag ich, wieder Recht hat." (192)

But the reason that Fontane then gave for saying that he agreed with public opinion, did not touch the rights or wrongs of the publication itself at all. What surprised Fontane was that Geffcken should have dared - by publishing extracts that so clearly implied criticism of Bismarck - to challenge Bismarck so directly:

"Er überschätzte sich und wollte nicht einsehen, daß er neben dem großen Mann doch nur ein Nachtwächter, ein dilettantischer Stümper war." (193)

Given the relative positions of Geffcken and Bismarck, Fontane even wondered whether Geffcken was not, perhaps, a little disturbed, suffering from delusions of grandeur:

"es muß doch etwas in ihm nicht recht in Ordnung gewesen sein." (194)

Fontane is completely lacking in sympathy for Geffcken whose fate he regards as much the consequence of Geffcken's own arrogance as anything else. The question of the correctness, or otherwise, of the publication of the extracts seems to be a side-issue; Fontane concentrates instead on the 'hybris' of Geffcken. This attitude is reminiscent of Fontane's view of Eulenburg's removal, as in the phrase:

"... dem Stärkeren die Wege kreuzen zu wollen, das verbiete sich im Leben wie in Politik: es sei nun mal so: Macht gehe vor Recht." (195)

Fontane's reactions to Geffcken's treatment would seem to indicate that Fontane had reverted to a position in which he - fatalistically ("es sei nun mal so") - accepted the authority and power of Bismarck.¹⁹⁶ The ensuing months were to witness, however, considerable modifications in Fontane's view of the case. Not three days after his comments to his wife, he wrote to Friedländer:

"Natürlich geht man im Übrigen im Tagebuch und Geffcken auf. Ein Bekannter von uns, der, trotzdem er Assessor und Reserveleutnant, nicht ganz mittutet, wurde vor ein paar Tagen mit der Frage empfangen: 'Nun, was sagen Sie zu dieser schamlosen Veröffentlichung!' Er war baff und schwieg. Ich werde täglich an Ihre Ehrengerichtsgeschichte erinnert, freie Menschen von natürlicher unbefangener Empfindung gibt es nicht mehr, alles steckt, zum Teil ohne es zu wissen ... in Staatspatentheit und Offiziosität. Es ist traurig. Übrigens bin ich weder mit der Veröffentlichung einverstanden, noch ein Schwärmer für Kaiser Friedrich. Nur ist die Veröffentlichung nichts 'Schamloses' und Kaiser Friedrich, ein so schlechter Praktikus er war, doch immerhin eine ideale Gestalt, der man ein Stück Respekt nicht versagen darf -" (197)

Fontane thus defended Geffcken against officially-inspired condemnation, although he was not entirely happy with the publication himself. The more he thought about the whole situation and its implications, the more concerned he became:

"Geffcken beschäftigt mich Tag und Nacht. Ich finde doch der Bogen wird überspannt und wir sind wieder der Zeit nah, wo es heißt: 'gib mir 2 Zeilen und ich bring ihn an den Galgen.' Vielleicht darf man schon dies nicht mehr schreiben." (198)

The suppression of criticism that had been a feature of absolutism in earlier times reared its ugly head in the present.¹⁹⁹ Bismarck had gone too far.²⁰⁰

An article critical of Bismarck which appeared a few weeks later in the conservative 'Deutsches Wochenblatt'²⁰¹ drew an enthusiastic response from Fontane: he wrote to the editor:

"Sie sollen sehn, daß ich noch 'mal ein strammer Mitarbeiter werde. Denn eigentlich ist Ihr Wochenblatt ein Blatt, in das ich hineingehöre, fast das Blatt. Ihre Haltung Bismarck und dem Immediatbericht gegenüber kann Ihnen nicht hoch genug angerechnet werden." (202)

It was the particular combination of respect - the 'Deutsches Wochenblatt' was a conservative weekly not notorious for its opposition to Bismarck - and restrained but firm criticism in Arendt's article that appealed to Fontane:

"...verehren, bewundern und doch eine Meinung und den Mut eines gelegentlichen Nein haben. So muß es sein." (203)

The 'Deutsches Wochenblatt' had felt compelled to criticise Bismarck's publication of the Immediatbericht because certain remarks in the report were felt to have discredited not just the late Kaiser, but the monarchy as an institution.²⁰⁴ That Prussian conservatives should take to criticising actions of the government, in this case, of Bismarck, seemed to Fontane to herald the tentative beginning of a new 'liberal' trend within conservatism:

"Das sind die Anfänge der Freiheit, nach der ich nun vierzig Jahre lang seufze..." (205)

However his hopes were premature.²⁰⁶

Fontane found himself increasingly alienated from official conservative opinion, increasingly in agreement with the views of the 'Vossische Zeitung', widely regarded as a journal of opposition:

"Seit Wochen bin ich wieder ganz Politik: Ost-Afrika, Geffcken, Morier, Samoa. Mir will alles nicht recht gefallen und so wenig ich mit dem Fortschrittsprogramm zu tun habe, so kann ich doch nicht leugnen, daß ich seit einem Vierteljahr in einem bis dahin mir unbekannt gebliebenen Grade auf Seiten meiner guten Vossin stehe." (207)

Fontane had up till now been out of sympathy with the policies of the 'Vossische Zeitung' as the mouth-piece of the Progressive Party.²⁰⁸ In a letter to Friedländer (9th January) in which he attempted to marshall his thoughts and feelings about Bismarck's role in the whole affair, Fontane began by expressing his disquiet about Bismarck's behaviour, suggesting that to hit out, as Bismarck had done at Geffcken, bordered on the paranoic:

"Mitunter wird man an Stimmen-hören und Verfolgungswahnsinn erinnert." (209)

However, a review of Bismarck's enemies persuaded Fontane that Bismarck's action against Geffcken was after all justified:

"Gewiß hat er schwere Feinde, gewiß ist hundertfältig eine Neigung da, sich gegen ihn zu verschwören und ihn zu stürzen und gewiß (oder doch fast gewiß) sind in Krieg und Frieden unglaubliche Dinge geschehn..." (210)

Fontane gives Bismarck the benefit of the doubt:

"Sie sehn, ich steh' im Letzten ganz auf Bismarcks Seite. Vielleicht, daß er in einer Woche, geladen mit Stoff, vor den Reichstag tritt und mal wieder eine jener Reden hält, die im Nu um den Aequator laufen." (211)

Bismarck's mistake, in Fontane's view, was to have acted precipitately, without first securing adequate proof:

"...je mehr ich glaube, daß viel Strafbares, ja furchtbar Strafbares vorliegt, je mehr hätte ich gewünscht, man hätte den Zeitpunkt abgewartet, um dann mit vernichtenden Beweisen vorgehen zu können. So bleibt alles im Dunkel und was vielleicht lediglich beleidigtes patriotisches Gefühl ist, wirkt wie kleine persönliche Gehäßigkeit. Dies beklage ich außerordentlich, es schädigt nicht nur Bismarcks Ruhm, sondern auch Deutschlands Ansehn." (212)

The conflict between Fontane's admiration for Bismarck and his concern at Bismarck's treatment of Geffcken was thus resolved in Bismarck's favour, though not without a struggle:

"...der Fürst - zu dessen schwärmerischen Verehrern ich trotz alledem und alledem, sogar trotz Geffckenprozeß gehöre..." (213)

Although the charge of treason ('Landesverrat') brought against Geffcken was dropped and he was formally acquitted (4th January), Fontane did not alter his opinion that Geffcken had been involved in some sort of conspiracy against Bismarck, perhaps not least

because he had no liking for the opposition to Bismarck from those who, like Geffcken, were associated with the late Kaiser Frederick and his liberal oppositional circle.²¹⁴ Fontane regarded Bismarck as the only guarantor of Germany's security in Europe; he therefore tended to regard the opposition to Bismarck as ready to risk that security:

"...es trifft ja nur den 'alten Ekel'(i.e. Bismarck) und ihn los zu sein, ist wichtiger als der Verlust von zwei, drei Provinzen." (215)

However, this was not Fontane's final word on the Geffcken affair: a full year later Fontane tipped the balance the other way into outright condemnation of Bismarck for using trumped-up charges to discredit opponents:

"Etwas Tolleres wie die Denkschrift bei Gelegenheit der Veröffentlichung des Kronprinzlichen Tagebuchs hat die Welt nie gesehn, so furchtbar verlogen, daß diesem klaren Kopf das Niedagewesene passierte, das Hineingeraten in völlige Konfusion. Geffcken(für den ich persönlich nicht viel übrig habe) Morier und die konsequente stille Befehdung Waldersees - lauter schlimme Kapiteln, so schlimm, daß man froh sein muß aus dieser Geschichte heraus zu sein..." (216)

The context had by now changed: Bismarck was no longer Reichskanzler, he had been obliged to resign by the young Kaiser William II; Fontane had learned, too, of other cases of trumped-up charges, of the use of the courts for political ends(Morier) and this had obliged him to revise his lenient interpretation of Bismarck's action in the Geffcken affair. He now roundly condemned Bismarck's behaviour as an outstanding, but sadly typical example of his maliciousness('Nicht-Edelmut').²¹⁷

4. Fontane and Bismarck: summary(1881-1890)

Fontane continued to be an enthusiastic admirer of Bismarck throughout the 1880's, he also continued to support Bismarck's policies and was horrified at the prospect of Bismarck being forced out of office under the new Kaiser Frederick III, a move that demonstrated, in Fontane's opinion, the ingratitude of the opposition to Bismarck for his achievements for Germany. His reservations about Bismarck's action against Geffcken, accused of treason, were short-lived. He believed that Bismarck's action had been justified, even when Geffcken had been acquitted by the courts, a view that Fontane was, however, to revise some twelve months later in the light of new evidence of Bismarck's use of the courts for his own political ends.

IV : 1890-1898

a. Fontane the writer

Fontane completed two novels that he had begun in the late 1880's: 'Frau Jenny Treibel' (1892) and 'Effi Briest' (1895). 'Frau Jenny Treibel' typifies the intellectual hypocrisy and ostentatious materialism of the 'Bourgeois'. 'Effi Briest' tells, in subdued tones, the tragic story of a young girl, Effi Briest, the daughter of a Prussian country squire (Junker) whose marriage to an unimaginative careerist civil servant (Landrat), also of aristocratic birth, is annulled when the husband discovers letters from a former lover. The lover is subsequently killed in a duel and Effi ostracised - two acts of barbarism that Fontane believed demonstrated the inhumanity of the Prussian code of honour and the obsolete morality of the Prussian aristocracy.

In 1893 the first volume of Fontane's memoirs entitled 'Meine Kinderjahre' were published, followed in 1898 - the year of his death - by a further volume 'Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig'. In 1895 Fontane began work on his last novel 'Der Stechlin' which was published in 1897: a political novel of the first order, it depicts and discusses the problem of the response of the aristocracy and the middle class to the challenge presented to the established order by the working class.

Fontane died on 20th September 1898.

b. Fontane's view of the general development 1890 - 1898

1. Fontane and the Prussian aristocracy

Fontane's attachment to the aristocracy had been reduced - in the course of the 1880's - to:

"eine rein nach der aesthetischen und novellistischen Seite hin liegende Vorliebe!" (1)

It was, he declared,

"eine Schwäche" (2)

but a weakness that persisted. He was still susceptible to the aesthetic charm of the aristocratic life-style, to the notion of 'aristocratic':

"allem Aristokratischen, auch wenn es schon einen kleinen Stich hat, wohnt ein mich aesthetisch befriedigendes Element inne, das mich momentan ganz gefangen nimmt." (3)

But, Fontane hastened to add:

"ich erhole mich aber meist rasch davon, namentlich dann, wenn ich einer politischen Prätension begegne, einer angeblichen Gesinnungstüchtigkeit, die nichts als Eitelkeit und einer 'Treue' die nichts als Vorteilswahrnehmung ist." (4)

The aesthetic illusion was now no more than a momentary relapse - the power of the illusion had ultimately been destroyed by the crass egoism of the aristocracy. Fontane was not, however, able to entirely suppress his fascination for individual aristocratic figures ("schließlich als Untergrund immer noch vorhandene Adelsvorliebe") 5

"Groß ist wieder der Prinz. Natürlich ist es, vom Standpunkt des modernen gebildeten Menschen aus, alles Unsinn was er sagt und doch bin ich glücklich, daß es solche Leute noch in der Welt gibt. Herrschen sie, so ist es schlimm, machen sie aber bloß Konversation in ihrem Stil, so ist es wundervoll." (6)

Fontane derived undisguised pleasure from such 'characters' as Graf Roedern:

"Ihre Mitteilungen über Graf Roedern haben mich aufs lebhafteste interessiert. Wie hoch steht er als Figur über Ihrem armen Prinzen! ... An Ihrem Grafen auf dem Rotherberg aber ist jeder Zoll ein Original;

"er interessiert, während der Prinz eigentlich langweilig ist. Solche Personen, die nicht mehr in unsre Zeit gehören, sind nur erträglich, wenn sie 'Persönlichkeiten' sind und ihre Rolle als nachgeborener Richard III geschickt durchspielen." (7)

Yet, it was only as 'eccentrics' and 'characters' that Fontane now found any pleasure in the company of aristocrats.

However, Fontane had not completely given up hope that the aristocracy might not abandon its single-minded and arrogant devotion to the pursuit of its own sectional advantage. Condemnation, born of bitter disappointment, alternated with hope of renewal: on 1st February 1894 Fontane wrote:

"...mit Schauern muß ich am Ende meiner Tage, all meinen Adels- und Prinzensympathien zum Trotz, einräumen, daß bei diesen ganzen Prinzlichkeiten wenig rauskommt und mitunter weniger als wenig. ...Zu einer gewissen natürlichen Unfähigkeit (Degenerierung) kommt die Unfähigkeit, die aus Dünkel und Vorurteil geboren wird. Wir haben oft über diesen Punkt gesprochen; es ist mir jetzt ganz klar, daß man in seinem Kreise bleiben und auf den Verkehr mit Hochgebornen verzichten muß. Kleinadel - besonders die Söhne des Militäradels, der der weitaus beste, weil frischeste ist - Kleinadel geht. So wie aber ernsthaft die Vorstellung 'wir gehören einer andern Menschensorte an' anfängt, ist es mit aller Umgangsmöglichkeit vorbei. Man hofft und hofft, bildet sich ein, einen Sonderfall zu erleben, so zu sagen eine Seele für die freiere Lebensauffassung zu retten - aber man täuscht sich jedesmal. Selbst die Klugen (und wie selten sind diese) sind grenzenlos borniert." (8)

And again in April of the same year:

"Von meinem vielgeliebten Adel falle ich mehr und mehr ganz ab, traurige Figuren, beleidigend unangenehme Selbstsüchtler von einer mir ganz unverständlichen Borniertheit, an Schlechtigkeit nur noch von den schweifwedelnden Pfaffen (die immer an der Spitze sind) übertroffen, von diesen Teufelskandidaten, die uns diese Mischung aus Unverstand und brutalem Egoismus als 'Ordnung Gottes' aufreden wollen. Sie müssen alle geschmort werden. Alles antiquiert!" (9)

Yet, the very same letter ends:

"Indessen der Krug geht so lange zu Wasser bis er bricht; in den eigenen Reihen dieser Leute wird es zur Revolte kommen und alle die, die das Herzen auf dem rechten Flecke haben, werden sich von den selbstsüchtigen Radaubrüdern scheiden." (10)

The same sentiment, the same hope is expressed in his memoirs 'Von Zwanzig bis Dreißig':

"Vielleicht weil ich - ich glaube manche gut zu kennen - an den Ernst dieser Rückschrittsprinzipien nicht recht glaube. Sie können eines Tages total umschlagen." (11)

Such hopes remained for the large part pious hopes, reality confounded such hopes and destroyed his

"...als Untergrund immer noch vorhandene Adelsvorliebe." (12)

Fontane confided to Friedländer:

"...ich komme in meinem, der vornehmen Welt einst so zugeneigten Herzen, immer weiter von meiner alten Liebe ab." (13)

It finally expired and gave way to antipathy:

"Sie wissen, daß ich früher in Bezug auf den Adel immer von einer 'unglücklichen Liebe' gesprochen habe. Damit ist es vorbei. Diese unglückliche Liebe hat sich in Abneigung oder wenn das zu viel gesagt ist, in äußerste Mißstimmung und Verdrießlichkeit verkehrt. Die Haltung des Adels, dabei über das Politische fast hinausgreifend, hat den Charakter des Unverschämten angenommen, nicht äußerlich, aber innerlich. Sie verlangen Dienste, man ist, immer mehr oder weniger, Pastor, Hauslehrer oder Inspektor; sie sind ganz unfähig Individuen richtig einzuschätzen; eine schaudervolle Mischung von Borniertheit, Dünkel, Selbstsucht erfüllt die ganze Sippe." (14)

In April of the following year (1897) Fontane wrote:

"Preußen - und mittelbar ganz Deutschland - krankt an unsren Ost-Elbiern. Über unsren Adel muß hinweggegangen werden; man kann ihn besuchen wie das aegyptische Museum und sich vor Ramses und Amenophis verneigen, aber das Land ihm zu Liebe regieren, in dem Wahn: dieser Adel sei das Land, - das ist unser Unglück." (15)

What factors had led Fontane to arrive at such a damning conclusion?

The aristocracy, 'das, was man den ersten Stand nennt', laid a prior claim, as the traditional ruling class, to political power in Germany, claims to leadership which were in stark contrast, in Fontane's view, with the proven abilities

of the aristocracy and was based on the fallacy of 'class' superiority:

"Die Welt hat vom alten Adel gar nichts, es gibt wenig, was so aussterbereif wäre wie die Geburtsaristokratie; wirkliche Kräfte sind zum Herrschen berufen, Charakter, Wissen, Besitz. Geburtsüberlegenheit ist eine Fiktion, und wenn man sich die Pappenheimer ansieht, sogar eine komische Fiktion." (16)

The aristocracy as a class were in Fontane's opinion conceited, incompetent and degenerate.¹⁷ The patriotism of the Junker, with their claims to represent the best and highest interests of the nation, was nothing less than a thinly veiled attempt to advance their own class interests as if they were those of the nation as a whole. What was good for the Junker was - apparently - also good for Germany!

"...ihre Vaterlandsliebe ist eine schändliche Phrase, sie haben davon weniger als andere, sie kennen nur sich und ihren Vorteil und je eher mit ihnen aufgeräumt wird, desto besser." (18)

He dismissed the conservative appeal to the virtue of 'Treue' as

"...nichts als Vorteilwahrnehmung." (19)

The Junker, Fontane observed sadly, seemed determined to preserve their own dominant position in German society even when this ran demonstrably counter to the more general interests of the nation:

"Es kommt all diesen Herrschaften - und beinahe muß ich sagen ohne Ausnahme - auch gar nicht auf Wahrheit, Erkenntnis und allgemeinen Menschenfortschritt, sondern bloß auf ihren Vorteil, ihre begünstigte Lebensstellung und befriedigte Eitelkeit an... Mein Widerwille dagegen ist in meinen alten Tagen in einem beständigen leidenschaftlichen Wachsen." (20)

Fontane challenged the claims of the Junker to leadership on two counts: they possessed neither the abilities nor the concern for the welfare of the nation; they were an obsolete class, seeking to preserve anachronistic feudal institutions and privileges:

"Ich habe nichts gegen das Alte, wenn man es innerhalb seiner Zeit läßt und aus dieser heraus beurteilt; der sogenannte altpreußische Beamte, der Perrückengelehrte des vorigen Jahrhunderts, Friedrich Wilhelm I., der Kürassieroffizier der mehrere Stunden Zeit braucht, eh' er

"sich durch sein eigenes Körpergewicht in seine nassen ledernen Hosen hineinzwängte, die Ober-Rechenkammer in Potsdam, der an seine Gottesgnadenschaft glaubende Junker, der Orthodoxe, der mit dem Lutherschen Glaubensbekenntnis steht und fällt - all diese Personen und Institutionen finde ich novellistisch und in einem Zeitbilde wundervoll, räume auch ein, daß sie sämtlich ihr Gutes und zum Teil ihr Großes gewirkt haben, aber diese toten Seifensieder immer noch als tonangebende Kräfte bewundern zu sollen, während ihre Hinfälligkeit seit nun grade hundert Jahren, und mit jedem Jahre wachsend, bewiesen worden ist, das ist eine furchtbare Zumutung." (21)

The upper middle class, the 'Großbürgertum' had in Fontane's eyes taken over from the old aristocracy the role of elite in German society:

"...zunächst freue ich mich immer, wenn ich Namen lese wie Lisco, Lucä, Gropius, Persius, Hensel, Thaer, Körte, Diterici, Virchow, Siemens, weil ich mir dabei bewußt werde, daß in diesen, nun in zweiter und dritter Generation blühenden Familien, ein neuer Adel, wenn auch ohne 'von' heranwächst, von dem die Welt wirklich was hat, neuzeitliche Vorbilder(denn dies ist die eigentliche Adelsaufgabe) die, moralisch und intellektuell, die Welt fördern und ihre Lebensaufgabe nicht in egoistischer Einpöklung abgestorbener Dinge suchen." (22)

But the aristocracy, oblivious of its own demise, continued to believe in its indispensability:

"Je mehr sie überflügelt werden, je mehr sie sich überzeugen müssen, daß die Welt andren Potenzen gehört, desto unerträglicher werden sie in ihren Forderungen." (23)

a point of criticism expressed by Pastor Lorenzen in Fontane's last novel 'Der Stechlin':

"Unsre alten Familien kränken durchgängig an der Vorstellung, 'daß es ohne sie nicht gehe', was aber weit gefehlt ist, denn es geht sicher auch ohne sie." (24)

while Czako, a liberal-minded young officer of aristocratic birth makes the same point self-critically:

"Unsere Leute gefallen sich nun mal in der Idee, sie hängen mit dem Fortbestande der göttlichen Weltordnung aufs engste zusammen. In Wahrheit liegt es so, daß wir sämtlich abkommen können." (25)

Not even the army which the Prussian aristocracy regarded as its own special reserve, would suffer if the aristocracy were to disappear:

"Die Bülows und Arnims sind 2 ausgezeichnete Familien,

"aber wenn sie morgen von der Bildfläche verschwinden, ist es nicht bloß für die Welt(da nun schon ganz gewiß) sondern auch für Preußen und die preußische Armee ganz gleichgültig und die Müllers und Schultzes rücken in die leergewordenen Stellen ein." (26)

The advent of the Industrial Revolution in Germany ushered in an era of momentous social change in German society: the liberal capitalist middle classes made a bid for political power(1848 Revolution and the Constitutional Conflict in Prussia 1862-1866) and had demanded constitutional reforms in the name of the German people to transfer political power from the aristocracy to themselves and thus to destroy the feudal structure of political power vested in the aristocracy in Prussia. As industrialisation gathered pace and great industrial establishments were set up, towns expanded, an industrial and urban proletariat was created, a class which in turn sought political power to liberate itself from exploitation and from oppression by the capitalist middle classes. The emergence of the working class as a political force to be reckoned with and the articulation of revolutionary demands posed a threat to both the aristocracy and the middle classes who now made common cause in defence of the social, economic and political status quo against the '4. Stand'. These changes, but more particularly the reaction of the Prussian aristocracy to these changes, are the theme of the novel 'Der Stechlin'.²⁷

The Prussian aristocracy had, on the whole, stubbornly refused to face up to the longer-term implications of these developments for their own position in society; in the short term they had perceived clearly enough the threat to their own position and had decided on resistance to all change as the best solution.²⁸ So doggedly had the Prussian aristocracy set their face against change that Fontane doubted whether they had even understood the nature or the magnitude of the changes to which they were so bitterly opposed. He compared the outlook of the Prussian aristocracy with that of Saxony and concluded:

"Alles, was zur Oberschicht der sächsischen Gesellschaft gehört, auch die, die Fortschritt und Sozialdemokratie mit Feuer und Schwert bekämpfen möchten - viel rücksichtsloser, als es in Preußen geschieht - , alle haben, mitten im Kampf, die neue Zeit begriffen, während die tonangebenden Kreise der ostelbischen Provinzen die neue Zeit nicht begriffen haben." (29)

At first reading it might appear that Fontane was pointing out that the upper classes in Saxony were demonstrating their keen grasp of the real issues of modern times by the determination and ruthlessness ('viel rücksichtsloser, als es in Preußen geschieht') with which they were defending property and privilege against the onslaughts of democracy (Fortschritt) and socialism (Sozialdemokratie).³⁰

The point that Fontane is making is a more subtle one, almost an example of subliminal suggestion: he is suggesting to his - hopefully conservative - reader that it is possible at one and the same time, to be implacably opposed to 'democracy' and 'socialism' and also appreciate the issues at stake and the motives of one's opponents, something Fontane felt the Prussian conservatives did not do. They had, he complained, closed their minds to new ideas and tended to dismiss the arguments of their political opponents as unworthy of consideration:

"Solche Silbersteins, selbst wenn sie fortschrittlich verrannt sind, sind doch einer entgegengesetzten Anschauung immer noch zugänglich; sie begreifen den gegnerischen Standpunkt und können ihn respektieren, auch wenn sie ihn bekämpfen." (31)

Such was the ideal situation - reminiscent of his views at the time of the Constitutional Conflict in Prussia in the 1860's - in contrast to the actual situation:

"Davon steckt in den mit Orthodoxie verquickten Hochtories keine Spur, sie verstehen ihren Gegner nicht, wollen ihn nicht verstehen und hören nicht einmal, was er sagt, sie sind vorweg mit ihm fertig." (32)

It was in this regard that Fontane considered the Saxon aristocracy to be superior to the Prussian aristocracy:

"Sie sind die Überlegenen, und ihre Kulturüberlegenheit wurzelt in ihrer Bildungsüberlegenheit, die nicht vom neuesten Datum, sondern fast vierhundert Jahre alt ist. Das gibt dann, auch im erbittertesten Kampfe der Interessen und Ideen, immer einen Regulator." (33)

Fontane was concerned that the 'Kampf der Interessen und Ideen' should take place, since this was the evolutionary path of progress; he was equally concerned that this process did not 'seize up' or be blocked, since this might make evolution impossible and revolution - or reaction - more likely.³⁴

The rigid attitude of the Prussian aristocracy was blocking the evolutionary process and making revolution more likely. While Fontane hoped to avoid either extreme - revolution or reaction - there were moments when he thought that revolution was inevitable and he welcomed the prospect:

"Es ist ganz vorbei mit dem Alten, auf jedem Gebiet... Mein Haß gegen alles, was die neue Zeit aufhält, ist in einem beständigen Wachsen und die Möglichkeit, ja die Wahrscheinlichkeit, daß dem Sieg des Neuen eine furchtbare Schlacht vorausgehen muß, kann mich nicht abhalten, diesen Sieg des Neuen zu wünschen." (35)

The Prussian aristocracy did not appear to even understand the nature of the challenge:

"Der x beinige Cohn, der sich ein Rittergut kauft, fängt an, mir lieber zu werden als irgend ein Lüderitz oder Itzenplitz, weil Cohn die Zeit begreift und alles tut, was die Zeit verlangt, während Lüderitz an der Lokomotive zoppt und 'brrr' sagt und sich einbildet, sie werde still stehn wie sein Ackergaul." (36)

Just to block the path of change was to invite disaster, Pastor Lprenzen says:

"Alles Alte, soweit es Anspruch darauf, sollen wir lieben, aber für das Neue sollen wir recht eigentlich leben. Und vor allem sollen wir ... den großen Zusammenhang der Dinge nie vergessen. Sich abschließen heißt sich einmauern und sich einmauern ist Tod. Es kommt darauf an, daß wir gerade das beständig gegenwärtig haben." (37)

The attempts made by the aristocracy to block change are compared to attempts to de-rail a train:

"Sie sind nur eine Störung, ein Hemmnis, ein aus Böswilligkeit oder Dummheit auf die Schienen gelegter Stein, der sich rühmen darf ein Eisenbahnunglück herbeizuführen, aber schon nach 2 Stunden ist die Strecke wieder frei und neue Züge machen ihren Weg." (38)

Such imagery suggests that attempts by the aristocracy to 'sabotage' progress would be futile - even although a minor disaster could be caused.

Fontane, nevertheless, realised that the aristocracy wielded enough influence to be able to effectively block the path of progress. The dominant influence of the aristocracy within the state administration and conservative government circles ensured that government policy did not run counter to their interests. The private and personal interest of the individual aristocrat, Fontane feared, took precedence over other more general interests in the formulation of government policy:

"Solche Personen (Prinz Reuß) haben eigentlich nur noch ein Recht als privateste Privatleute zu existieren, da kann jeder denken was er will, werden aber anderer Leute Interessen in solche Hände gelegt, so ist es schlimm. Daß wir jetzt - für mein Gefühl - einen so schrecklich zurückgebliebenen Eindruck machen, hat darin seinen Grund, daß Tausende solcher aus der Steinzeit stammende Persönlichkeiten herumlaufen, mit deren Anschauungen und in Egoismus wurzelnden Einbildungen die Regierung rechnen muß oder wenigstens nicht brechen will." (39)

Fontane was sure that the Junker would have defeated any attempts made by the ill-fated Kaiser Frederick III to steer a more liberal course, thus demonstrating their power.⁴⁰ The power and influence of the Prussian Junker was on the increase; you could speak of a resurgence of their political power; Dubslav von Stechlin observes:

"Es heißt immer, das Junkertum sei keine Macht mehr, die Junker fräßen den Hohenzollern aus der Hand und die Dynastie züchte sie bloß, um sie für alle Fälle parat zu haben. Und das ist eine Zeit lang vielleicht auch richtig gewesen. Aber heut ist es nicht mehr richtig, es ist heute grundfalsch. Das Junkertum - trotzdem es vorgibt, seine Strohdächer zu flicken, und sie gelegentlich vielleicht auch wirklich flickt - dies Junkertum ... hat in dem Kampf dieser Jahre kolossal an Macht gewonnen, mehr als irgendeine andre Partei, die Sozialdemokratie kaum ausgeschlossen, und mitunter ist mir's, als stiegen die seligen Quitzows wieder aus dem Grabe herauf. Und wenn das geschieht, wenn unsre Leute sich auf das besinnen, worauf sie sich seit über vierhundert Jahren nicht mehr besonnen haben, so können wir was erleben." (41)

Fontane was aware of the potential dangers of the resurgence of the Quitzow tradition. The Hohenzollern Margrave of Brandenburg, faced with a rebellion of his barons led by the Quitzows, had been obliged to restore his authority in the March of Brandenburg by inflicting a military defeat on the insurgents (1414). The Quitzows came thus to embody the spirit of rebellion (Fronde), of opposition to the power and authority of the Hohenzollern, who in turn embodied the principle of centralised state power. Fontane's attitude to the Quitzow tradition had vacillated: he had for a time hoped that the notion of opposition could be revived within the aristocracy by appealing to the Quitzow tradition.⁴² He finally abandoned the idea of actualising the tradition, realising that under the conditions that prevailed in the late 1880's and 1890's, a revival of such ideas would only promote the deleterious influence of the aristocracy and, far from establishing the idea of healthy vigorous opposition within the state, the Quitzow tradition would lead to further subordination of the Prussian state to Junker interest.⁴³ The power of the aristocracy, Fontane concluded, had to be broken:

"Es heißt unser Kaiser spiele sich auf Friedrich den Großen hinaus; ist es so, so sollte er lieber um eine Nummer weiter zurückgreifen und sich auf Fr. W. I hin ausspielen: diesen großen König könnten wir jetzt gebrauchen, selbst auf die Gefahr hin, daß ein Stück bürgerlicher Freiheit mit in die Quist ginge - denn Zerbrechen dieser aufgesteiften, falschen Adelsmacht muß nächste Aufgabe eines preußischen Königs sein..." (44)

The hopes that Fontane placed in the young Kaiser were, however, to be disappointed. Instead of curbing the Junker, the Kaiser allied himself to them, regarding them indeed as the mainstay of his power as Kaiser:

"Preußen - und mittelbar ganz Deutschland - krankt an unsren Ost-Elbiern. Über unsren Adel muß hinweggegangen werden... Worin unser Kaiser die Säule sieht, das sind nur tönerner Füße." (45)

An image that echoed Fontane's remarks to Friedrich Paulsen:

"Es steht mir nämlich fest, daß... alle diese Herrlichkeit (Preußentum), die bei viel Tüchtigem und Gescheitem, schließlich nur ein Götzenbild auf tönernen Füßen ist.." (46)

While Fontane was not unsympathetic to the general aims of Kaiser William II, he was appalled by the chosen means: the resurrection of the feudal alliance between the Emperor and his lords, the aristocracy.⁴⁷

"Er glaubt das Neue mit ganz Altem besorgen zu können, er will Modernes aufrichten mit Rumpelkammerwaffens.." (48)

The Kaiser's alliance with the Junker - the most reactionary section of German society - dashed any hopes that Fontane had of radical change from within the establishment:

"Im allgemeinen neige ich dem Heroenkultus zu und glaube an die Revolutionen von oben her, halte sie wenigstens für die besseren..." (49)

Yet, if Germany was to survive, there would have to be - Fontane was convinced - radical changes:

"Wir brauchen einen ganz andren Unterbau. Vor diesem erschrickt man; aber wer nicht wagt, nicht gewinnt. Daß Staaten an einer kühnen Umformung, die die Zeit forderte, zu Grunde gegangen waren - dieser Fall ist selten. Ich wüßte keinen zu nennen. Aber das Umgekehrte zeigt sich hundertfältig." (50)

It was the Prussian Junker, supported by the prestige and authority of the Kaiser, that constituted the main obstacles to such changes in Germany.

2. Fontane's critique of Wilhelminian society

Fontane's mounting opposition to, and ultimately his condemnation of, the aristocracy in Prussia - particularly in its role as an obstacle to progress and social change - was but one strand of a much broader canvas of criticism of German society under Kaiser William II.

From the early 1890's Fontane began to describe his own political development in terms of a latter-day evolution towards more radical political ideas. The conventional wisdom of national-liberal ideology was left behind, as he saw himself moving consciously and deliberately in the direction of 'democracy':

"In meinen alten Tagen indes bin ich immer demokratischer geworden." (51)

In what way did Fontane see himself as becoming more democratic? Was it anything more than the perhaps rather vague egalitarian aspirations of a middle class intellectual incensed by the incompetence and arrogance of those whose power and influence was only perpetuated by a rigid class structure?⁵² Fontane had always had a strong egalitarian instinct, while his objections to 'Geburtsaristokratie' and the 'Feudalpyramide' of German society were long-standing. For all his social egalitarianism Fontane recognised that elites would continue to play an important role in society:

"Die Welt wird noch lange einen Adel haben und jedenfalls wünsche ich der Welt einen Adel, aber er muß danach sein, er muß eine Bedeutung haben für das Ganze, muß Vorbilder stellen, große Beispiele geben und entweder durch geistig moralische Qualitäten direkt wirken oder diese Qualitäten aus reichen Mitteln unterstützen." (53)

The role of such an elite was to set a progressive example to the whole of society. In some respects Fontane saw the Großbürgertum as fulfilling this role,⁵⁴ where the hereditary aristocracy had failed.⁵⁵ Fontane's social egalitarianism did not clash with his understanding of the role of the elite, since the task of the elite was to give progressive political and moral leadership, and not - as the aristocracy had done - to exploit their position for their own selfish ends.

Yet, Fontane's 'democracy' was more than social egalitarianism. Egalitarian views, nurtured by a hostility to the feudal behaviour of the aristocracy was certainly a major factor in the 'democratisation' of Fontane, but his democratic evolution went much further than this: he reverted to the explicitly political and social radicalism of his earlier life, to the republican and democratic ideas of the 1830's and 40's. This reversion is given most and detailed expression in the second volume of his memoirs 'Von Zwanzig bis Dreiig'. Discussing the role of the monarchy and government in their relation to the will of the people, Fontane wrote:

"Eine Regierung hat nicht das Bessere bzw. das Beste zum Ausdruck zu bringen, sondern einzig und allein das, was die Besseren und Besten des Volkes zum Ausdruck gebracht zu sehen wnschen. Diesem Wunsche hat sie nachzugeben, auch wenn sich darin ein Irrtum birgt." (56)

The role of government was none other than to execute the declared will of the people, as represented by the 'Besseren und Besten des Volkes', a point that Fontane drives home by claiming that Bismarck's success as a statesman, as the architect of the German Empire, was due to his having grasped what the demands of the nation were and then devoting his energies to the execution of policies in conformity with those demands, instead of trying to resist them and frustrate the will of the people:

"Wenn spter Bismarck so phnomenale Triumphe feiern konnte, so geschah es, sein Genie in Ehren, vor allem dadurch, da er seine stupende Kraft in den Dienst der deutschen Volksseele lebendigen Idee stellte. So wurde das Deutsche Reich aufgerichtet, und nur so." (57)

Bismarck's achievement was thus considerably reduced, relativised and democratised. The notion that Bismarck had, by unifying Germany, been carrying out the aims of others - as opposed to the aims of the Prussian conservatives - was not new to Fontane: in the novel 'L'Adultera' (1882) Duquede inveighs against Bismarck accusing him of this very charge:

"...Exmittierung Österreichs, Aufbau des Deutschen Reiches ... Ekrasierung Frankreichs und Dethronisierung des Papstes! Pah, van der Straaten, ich kenne die ganze Litanei. Wem aber haben wir dafür zu danken, wenn überhaupt dafür zu danken ist? Wem? Einer ihm feindlichen Partei, feindlich ihm und mir, einer Partei, der er ihren Schlachtruf genommen hat." (58)

It was but one small step from this to the 'democratic' interpretation advanced by Fontane here, where the pre-condition of his success was the assent and enthusiasm of the German people for his policies, which was only possible if he, Bismarck, adopted their aims as his own.

The will of the people had thus become a central idea in the latter-day 'revolution' in Fontane's political thinking. He went on to assert that the will of the people would ultimately prevail against a recalcitrant government:

"Ist die Regierung sehr stark -- was sie aber in solchem Falle des Widerstandes gegen den Volkswillen fast nie ist -- so kann sie, länger oder kürzer, ihren Weg gehen, sie wird aber, wenn der Widerstand andauert, schließlich immer unterliegen. Die Schwäche der preußischen Regierung vom Schluß der Befreiungskriege bis zum Ausbruch des schleswig-holsteinischen Krieges bestand in dem beständigen Sichauflehnen gegen diesen einfachen Satz, dessen unumstößliche Wahrheit man nicht begreifen wollte." (59)

This new confidence in the power of the people stemmed from a radical re-interpretation of the revolutionary events of 1848 in Berlin, based on his reading of the memoirs of General Leopold von Gerlach;⁶⁰ Gerlach's account of the reaction of the authorities to the armed uprising in Berlin in March 1848 -- especially the fact that, according to Gerlach, the revolutionaries had had every prospect of forcing the army to abandon Berlin to the insurgents⁶¹ persuaded Fontane that:

"vorausgesetzt, daß ein großes und allgemeines Fühlen in dem Aufstande zum Ausdruck kommt -- (müssen diese Dinge) jedesmal mit dem Sieg der Revolution enden, weil ein aufständisches Volk, und wenn es nichts hat als seine nackten Hände, schließlich doch notwendig stärker ist als die wehrhafteste geordnete Macht." (62)

Fontane goes on to quote examples of successful popular uprisings: Sempach and Hemmingstedt (both cases in which mercenary armies led by knights were defeated by peasants' armies) from the past ⁶³ and Cuba in his own time. ⁶⁴ Fontane was insistent:

"Auflehnungen, ich muß es wiederholen, die mehr sind als ein Putsch, mehr als ein frech vom Zaun gebrochenes Spiel, tragen die Gewähr des Sieges in sich, wenn nicht heute, so morgen." (65)

Even defeat - and Fontane cites as his example the December uprising in Paris in 1851 which was crushed

"mit vernichtender und... überhaupt nicht zulässiger Gewalt" (66)

was only a temporary set-back. ⁶⁷

Fontane saw revolutions as a progressive force in history:

"Revolutionen gehen zum großen Teile von Gesindel, Va-banque Spielern oder Verrückten aus, und was wären wir ohne Revolutionen! Das sage ich, der ich eigentlich ein Philister bin." (68)

Only three years before Fontane had denied the need for revolution:

"Die, die jetzt auf dem Punkt stehn, alles auf den Kopf zu stellen, haben aber zu ihrem Umsturzelüst auch nicht den geringsten Grund." (69)

In the same year he had criticised a play by Fitger called 'Von Gottes Gnaden' for its depiction of class differences - albeit in the guise of an historical play:

"Aber alles in allem ist es Unsinn und ein Unrecht, zurückliegende Zeiten mit dem Maßstab von heute ausmessen und Standes- und Klassengegensätze statt sie verständig zu mindern, neu schärfen zu wollen." (70)

A year later Fontane - who now found himself increasingly in agreement with much of the criticism of contemporary society being voiced by the younger literary 'opposition' - was considerably more sympathetic to the notion of 'revolution':

"Ich will nicht behaupten, daß sie (young writers associated with the 'Freie Bühne') Unrecht haben, ich will zugeben, daß sehr vieles faul im Staate Dänemark ist und daß die jungen Leute ein gewisses Recht der Reform oder meinetwegen auch Revolution haben..." (71)

Thus Fontane re-asserted - after 40 years - his belief that popular revolution was justifiable and - more significantly - that in the long run such revolutions were irresistible. Far from fearful about political and social instability, Fontane positively welcomed the developing political and social polarisation that became an outstanding feature of Wilhelminian Germany in the 1890's and 1900's, the confrontation between the conservative establishment and the capitalist middle class on the one hand and the working class movement professing a broadly socialist outlook on the other:

"... in der schärferen Trennung von gut und böß, in dem entschiedenen Abschnwenken (namentlich auch auf moralischem Gebiet) nach rechts und links hin erkenne ich den eigentlichsten Kulturfortschritt, den wir seitdem gemacht haben." (72)

Fontane was becoming impatient for radical change:

"Mein Haß gegen alles, was die neue Zeit aufhält, ist in einem beständigen Wachsen ..." (73)

The Kaiser's clumsy attempts at personal rule, his invocation of the 'divine right of kings' reminded Fontane - and horrified him - of the dark pre-revolutionary days of James II of England and reinforced his desire for revolutionary changes in German society:

"Wenn ich Reden lese, wie sie Kaiser Wilhelm und nun gar erst (als Antwort) sein Bruder Heinrich in Kiel gehalten hat, so wird mir bei diesem Rückfall in Anschauungen, die noch über die Stuart-Anschauungen Jacobs II hinausgehn, himmelangst." (74)

Revolution was - Fontane became more and more convinced - the only way to defend liberty and prevent a revolution from the right:

"Haben Sie auch darin recht"

he wrote to the philosopher Friedrich Paulsen,

"daß mich das Gerlach-Buch zu was Falschem bekehrt hat, so können wir uns mit unsren Freiheitswünschen nur alle begraben lassen. Das entsetzlichste aller Dogmen, die Stuartleistung von der Gottesgnadenschaft der Könige, steht mal wieder in üppigster Blüte (siehe die beiden Reden beim Abschiedsmahl des Prinzen Heinrich)" (75)

In the face of such overt threats to the constitutional system in Germany, Fontane - almost in despair - saw revolution, a revolution that would sweep away the existing order, as the only hope for the future:

"...denke ich mir die 500 000 Repetiergewehre dazu, so weiß ich nicht, was mit der Menschheitsentwicklung werden soll, wenn ich nicht auf die bei Hemmingstedt hereinbrechenden Fluten oder auf ähnlich Elementares warten darf." (76)

Fontane had described the elemental forces of nature as allies of the insurgents:

"Im Teutoburger Wald, bei Sempach, bei Hemmingstedt, überall dasselbe; die Waldestiefen, die Felsen und Schluchten, die durch die Dämme brechenden Fluten sind eben stärker als alle geordneten Gewalten..." (77)

Fontane observed with mounting anxiety the feudal-absolutist tendencies in the Kaiser's style of government.⁷⁸ The government's attempt to curb comment on social and political matters, as contained in a bill, known as the 'Umsturzvorlage', to make illegal criticism of the monarchy, religion, private property, the institution of marriage and the family, brought home to Fontane (although the bill was defeated in the Reichstag) that:

"...all unsere Freiheiten und Rechte nur Gnadengeschenke sind, die uns jeden Augenblick wieder genommen werden können, Wir haben alles aus Kommiseration." (79)

Such insights reinforced Fontane in his view that political power must be wrested from the conservative establishment, military and civilian if liberty was to be preserved:

"Ehe nicht die Machtverhältnisse zwischen alt und neu zugunsten von 'neu' sich ändern, ist all unser politisches Tun nichts als Redensarten und Spielerei." (80)

The source of political power in Germany was the Kaiser and the leading figures in the conservative establishment, military and civilian; the influence of the Reichstag - although members were elected on the basis of universal suffrage - was limited. Elections were a farce, a waste of

time, since they changed nothing in the power structure:

"Diesen ganze Wahlkrämpel kann unmöglich der Weisheit letzter Schluß sein. In England oder Amerika vielleicht oder auch gewiß, aber bei uns, wo hinter jedem Wähler erst ein Schutzmann, dann ein Bataillon und dann eine Batterie steht, wirkt alles auf mich wie Zeitvergeudung. Hinter einer Volkswahl muß eine Volksmacht stehn, fehlt die, so ist alles Wurscht." (81)

By the late 1890's - towards the very end of his life - Fontane's critique of Wilhelminian society, which had gradually gathered momentum from unsystematic beginnings in the 1870's, had intensified and culminated in his outright rejection of the 'altregierenden Klassen'⁸² and the political ideas and moral values that dominated German society at the end of the nineteenth century:

"Alles, was jetzt obenauf ist... , ist mir grenzenlos zuwider: dieser beschränkte, selbstsüchtige, rappschige Adel, diese verlogene oder bornierte Kirchlichkeit, dieser ewige Reserveoffizier, dieser greuliche Byzantinismus." (83)

Fontane found himself in opposition: he was opposed to the anachronistic, yet by no means crumbling feudal class structure, to the preponderance of the aristocracy within the state and the army; he objected to their social prestige, to the rampant militarism⁸⁴ that had infected both public life and corrupted private mores;⁸⁵ he was opposed to the chauvinism⁸⁶ and crude glorification of so-called Prussian virtues and traditions (Borussismus) that passed as patriotism⁸⁷; he was opposed to the resurgence of absolutism under Kaiser William II, to the spread of 'byzantine' attitudes (Byzantinismus)⁸⁸ (that is, lack of 'Zivilcourage'); he was opposed to colonisation,⁸⁹ to the so-called 'civilising' mission of the West⁹⁰ which Fontane regarded as a pretext for Empire building;⁹¹ he was opposed to the prostitution of the Christian religion, especially official 'Thron und Altar' Prussian protestantism, for political ends.⁹²

Such is the formidable list of charges brought against

Wilhelminian society, a weight of charges that convinced Fontane of the need for change; he craved the dawning of the new age, 'eine neue Zeit'⁹³ when the old order would be swept away and the new order would be established

"...im Zeichen einer demokratischen Weltanschauung." (94)
Fontane conceived the political and social confrontation of his day as a struggle between what he called the 'old' order and the 'new' order; the antagonism of the 'old' and the 'new' runs, like a leitmotiv, through the novel 'Der Stechlin'.⁹⁵

The exact political and social constitution of the 'new' order, the 'new' age is not described, other than that it is democratic and the antithesis of all that Fontane hated in the existing order of society. How was this new age to be brought about? The achievement of the new age was associated very much in Fontane's mind with the working class and their political and social aims:

"Mit besonderem Vergnügen habe ich Keir Hardies Labour Leader durchgesehn. Alles Interesse ruht beim vierten Stand. Der Bourgeois ist furchtbar, und Adel und Klerus sind altbacken, immer wieder dasselbe. Die neue, bessere Welt fängt erst beim vierten Stande an. Man würde das sagen können, auch wenn es sich bloß erst um Bestrebungen, um Anläufe handelte. So liegt es aber nicht; das, was die Arbeiter denken, sprechen, hat das Denken, Sprechen und Schreiben der altregierenden Klassen tatsächlich überholt, alles ist viel echter, wahrer, lebensvoller. Sie, die Arbeiter, packen alles neu an, haben nicht bloß neue Ziele, sondern auch neue Wege." (96)

It seemed to Fontane that the working class alone in society had preserved fundamental human values:

"Die Menschheit fängt nicht beim Baron an, sondern, nach unten zu, beim 4. Stand; die 3 andern können sich begraben lassen." (97)

Fontane had been impressed by those - rare - members of the working class he had met,⁹⁸ while August Bebel, the parliamentary leader of the socialists in the Reichstag, was a man Fontane described as a man of 'Gesinnung und Intelligenz'.⁹⁹ He also respected other socialist parliamentarians:

"Er(Prinz Reuß) stimmt jeder reaktionären Maßregel zu, glaubt an den beschränkten Untertanenverstand und hat keine Ahnung davon, daß Frohme, Grillenbecher oder gar Bebel ihn 10 mal in die Tasche stecken." (100)

It was their struggle, both inside and outside the Reichstag, that inspired Fontane with hope for the future:

"Existierte nicht die Sozialdemokratie...so wäre die Situation auf absehbare Zeit wohl hoffnungslos; so, wie's liegt, ist wenigstens die Möglichkeit der Änderung gegeben, freilich auch zum Schlimmeren." (101)

Fontane sympathised with the socialists because they seemed to be the only party really determined to press for radical democratic change in German society, the only party that wished specifically to abolish the feudal structure and introduce popular progressive government and reorganise society on democratic principles. There is little evidence that Fontane took an interest in the more philosophical or ideological aspects of socialism or that he had any frequent contacts with the members of the party or even that he believed that the 'new' order would be socialist, although his interest in the Paris Commune and in certain aspects of socialism should not be forgotten, for example, his interest in Klaus Störtebeker.¹⁰² Perhaps Dubslav von Stechlin's conception - as described by Fontane - of his ideal

"...einem veredelten Bebel- und Stöckertum." (103) comes close to his own conception, a synthesis of the radically new (Bebel) and the regenerated old (Stöcker).¹⁰⁴

Fontane recognised that the humanitarian and egalitarian ideals that had informed his political thinking throughout his life could only be brought to realisation if society were radically changed. He saw too that his own ideals were close to the aims and aspirations of the socialists. The figure of Professor Hehnchen in the unfinished novel 'Die Preußische Idee' gives clear expression to the idea that socialism represented a synthesis of the 'alte Valuta' and 'das Neue' in Prussia:

"...die Sozialdemokratie sei die preußische Idee." (105) Fontane saw the struggle of the Social Democratic Party and the working class to change society as his own struggle. He did not wish for revolution, but he accepted that it might be unavoidable, that it might be the only means whereby the old order could be defeated:

"Mein Haß gegen alles, was die neue Zeit aufhält, ist in einem

"beständigen Wachsen und die Möglichkeit, ja die Wahrscheinlichkeit, daß dem Sieg des Neuen eine furchtbare Schlacht voraufgehen muß, kann mich nicht abhalten, diesen Sieg des Neuen zu wünschen." (106)

c. Fontane's view of Bismarck 1890 - 1898

1. Fontane and Bismarck's dismissal

Fontane's reaction to the developing crisis in relations between the young Kaiser William II and Bismarck - although referred to in his correspondence ¹⁰⁷ is not clear from the correspondence, neither is there any evidence as to his immediate reaction to Bismarck's dismissal on 20th March 1890 by the Kaiser. A few weeks later, however, Fontane confided to Friedländer:

"Es ist ein Glück, daß wir ihn los sind..." (108)
Not eighteen months previously Fontane had staunchly supported Bismarck in the face of massive criticism in connection with the Geffken affair; now, with an almost audible sigh of relief, he had abandoned the great Bismarck to his uncertain fate. What had brought about this most radical of changes in his attitude to Bismarck?

A series of political scandals - Fontane makes specific reference to Geffken, Morier and Waldersee ¹⁰⁹ - in the late 1880's had drawn attention to Bismarck's increasingly malevolent and highly personalised ("die häßliche Form kleinlichster Gehäßigkeit") ¹¹⁰ exercise of political power, especially his hounding of political opponents and critics of his policies. Fontane felt that such behaviour betokened a decline in Bismarck's abilities:

"Er war eigentlich nur Gewohnheitsregente, tat was er wollte, ließ alles warten und forderte nur immer mehr Devotion. Seine Größe lag hinter ihm." (111)

In view of this Bismarck's departure from the political scene was long overdue. His treatment of political opponents had considerably fuelled Fontane's reservations about certain unsavoury aspects of Bismarck's character. Moral censure of Bismarck - although it had surfaced at various points - had remained an undercurrent and had never constituted a major element of Fontane's attitude to Bismarck in the 1870's and 80's. His attitude to the great statesman had been

determined by an amoral ("Macht ist Recht") approach to the question of political power and morality. Moral considerations had also been inhibited by the overall political context: moralistic cavilling about Bismarck's lack of generosity, about his lack of fairness appeared incongruous in the context of his gigantic achievements as European statesman and as architect of the German Empire. Fontane was inclined to be indulgent in the circumstances.¹¹² Bismarck's continued presence at the helm of the ship of state guaranteed political stability and a firm and masterful handling of the affairs of state. There was, so it had seemed to many contemporaries, no viable alternative to Bismarck. Indeed, the alternative seemed to be chaos. Such considerations had taken precedence over any moral qualms Fontane may have had about Bismarck.

By the late 1880's the political context had changed: Bismarck's reputation as a politician and statesman was tarnished, he no longer symbolised firm, lucid and stable government, his great achievements were seen as belonging to another era and unable to compensate for present failings:

"...was er in den letzten 3 Jahren verzapft hat, war nicht weit her." (113)

Fontane described Bismarck's persecution of Geffken as

"das Niedagewesene (das diesem klaren Kopf passierte), das Hineingeraten in die völlige Konfusion." (114)

Far from preserving Germany from chaos, Bismarck seemed to be prepared to precipitate crisis after crisis to preserve his own power to direct affairs.

The difference between the young Kaiser and Bismarck came to a head and Bismarck was obliged to resign. The Kaiser promised less turbulent times. Fontane looked forward to more open and less conspiratorial style of government under a new Chancellor:

"...viele, viele Fragen werden jetzt besser, ehrlicher, klarer behandelt werden als vorher." (115)

Now that Bismarck had been removed, so too was the last inhibition removed and Fontane embarked on criticism of

Bismarck based on moral considerations. More particularly, Fontane criticised Bismarck for failing to set a moral example. He now attached such importance to moral qualities that he saw the key to Bismarck's fall from power in his lack of generosity:

"Bismarck hat keinen größeren Anschwärmer gehabt als mich, ... die Welt hat selten ein größeres Genie gesehn, selten einen mutigeren und charaktrevolleren Mann und selten einen größeren Humoristen. Aber eines war ihm versagt geblieben: Edelmut; das Gegenteil davon, das zuletzt die häßliche Form kleinlichster Gehäßigkeit annahm, zieht sich durch sein Leben ... und an diesem Nicht-Edelmut ist er schließlich gescheitert und in diesem Nicht-Edelmut steckt die Wurzel der wenigstens relativen Gleichgültigkeit, mit der ihn selbst seine Bewunderer haben scheiden sehn." (116)

Fontane's final comment can be taken to refer as much to his own reaction to Bismarck's dismissal as to his observation of the reaction of others. He resented, too, the way that Bismarck seemed to expect the public to support him regardless, even when his actions were clearly excessive, as in the Geffken case:

"...lauter schlimme Kapitel, so schlimm, daß man froh sein muß aus dieser Geschichte heraus zu sein, aus einer Geschichte, die sich schließlich derart auf die Forderung unbedingter Bismarckanbetung zuspitzte, daß alle freie Bismarckbewunderung darin unterging." (117)

The emphasis that Fontane was now placing on 'character' was to become a dominant feature of his attitude to Bismarck in the last years of his life, crucial as it was to his understanding of 'greatness'. Since Fontane does not make clear in what particular way Bismarck's 'Nicht-Edelmut' brought about his downfall, comment is difficult, but that the idea was an important one for Fontane can be seen from the fact that he reiterated the selfsame idea - in a more elaborate form - a year later:

"In der Zeitung interessieren mich jetzt sehr die Leitartikel über Bismarck. Ich finde sie ganz ausgezeichnet geschrieben und auch nicht zu streng in ihrem historischen Urteil. Ich finde nur, er ist nicht an seinen politischen Fehlern - die namentlich, so lange die Dinge in Fluß sind, sehr schwer festzustellen sind - sondern an seinen Charakterfehlern gescheitert." (118)

Thus far, the passage suggests that Fontane had broadened his view of the causes of Bismarck's demise, that, perhaps, he saw it now as a consequence of the clash of personality between the Kaiser and Bismarck in which he blames Bismarck for the clash. But this broader interpretation is excluded by the following sentence in which he returns to his previous idea of 'Nicht-Edelmut' as the essential cause:

"Dieser Riese hat was Kleines im Gemüt, und daß dies erkannt wurde, das hat ihn gestützt." (119)

What is noteworthy is that Fontane explicitly rejects the view that seems to have ^{been} dominant among contemporary commentators, that Bismarck's downfall was due to political mistakes; for Fontane the cause of Bismarck's downfall lay in his character, he discounted theories that attributed Bismarck's fall to political differences between him and the Kaiser, or rather, he saw such political differences as existed as more the expression of Bismarck's determination to dominate the young Kaiser and impose his interpretation. Did Fontane therefore mean when he wrote

"Dieser Riese hat was Kleines im Gemüt, und daß dies erkannt wurde, das hat ihn gestürzt." (120)

that the Kaiser had realised the nature of Bismarck's will to power and resolved to remove him? Or is the comment less specific and meant to refer more generally to the way in which Bismarck's autocratic, at times vicious behaviour had alienated even his most ardent admirers and supporters so that when Bismarck tendered his resignation to the Kaiser there were no pleas for him to stay in office and thus demonstrated Bismarck's isolation and powerlessness.

In later years (from 1894 onwards) the purely 'character' explanation of Bismarck's fall gave way to a more complex, more strictly historical explanation:

"Bismarck ist der größte Prinzipienverächter gewesen, den es je gegeben hat und ein 'Prinzip' hat ihn schließlich gestürzt, besiegt, dasselbe Prinzip, das er zeitlebens auf seine Fahne geschrieben und nach dem er nie gehandelt hat. Die Macht des hohenzollernschen Königtums (eine wohlverdiente Macht) war stärker als sein Genie und seine Mogelei." (121)

A few days later he wrote to Friedländer very much in the same vein:

"Über Bismarck und den Bismarck-Tag nur dies: dieser Tag bedeutet den Sieg eines Prinzips über das Genie. Beständig hat Bismarck redensartlich die Hohenzollern-Fahne hoch gehalten, im Stillen hat er drüber gelacht und das Loyalitätsprinzip, wie jedes andre, als einen Mumpitz angesehen. Und doch hat er lediglich der Macht dieses Prinzips weichen müssen." (122)

Bismarck's demise was linked in Fontane's mind with the isolation of the Prussian aristocracy from the people:

"...der Adel hat gar keine Wurzel mehr im Volke, das preußische Königtum aber hat, im Gegensatz dazu, in geradezu überraschender Weise seine Festgewurzeltheit bewiesen." (123)

He no longer saw Bismarck's character as the cause of his downfall; Bismarck had been obliged to cede to a superior principle, that of the political supremacy of the Kaiser.¹²⁴ Fontane was plainly intrigued, amused even, by the thought of Bismarck being exposed as a 'trickster' and a 'cheat' (Mogelant) and promptly being dismissed. Served him right!:

"Die Versöhnungsszene im Berliner Schloß scheint in Neuvorpommern sehr kritischen Augen begegnet zu sein. Ich stehe, in der ganzen Geschichte, von Anfang an auf Kaisers Seite; selbst die so viel getadelte 'Form' war einem Bismarck gegenüber unvermeidlich. Als Blücher nach Anno 15 in Berlin lebte, wollte niemand mehr mit ihm Karte spielen, worüber er unglücklich war und sich bei Fr.W.III beschwerte. 'Ja, lieber Blücher, die Herren sagen, Sie mogelten immer' worauf Blücher pfißig und verschämt antwortete: 'ja, Majestät, ein bißchen mogeln, ist das Beste.' Danach hat auch Bismarck gehandelt; 'ein bißchen mogeln' (d.h. ganz gehörig) ist ihm immer als das Schönste erschienen. Und wer diese Tugend hat, der darf sich nicht wundern, wenn er wieder bemogelt wird oder wenn ein Stärkerer ihm sagte 'Du, auf die Brücke trete ich nicht; ich kenne meine Pappenheimer, Du bist ein Mogelant und willst mich wieder bemogeln; aber ich spiele nicht mehr mit und sage einfach, mein königlicher Wille ist Trumpf.'" (125)

2. Bismarck in retirement

Fontane had little sympathy for what he saw as Bismarck's embittered stance in his enforced retirement; instead of accepting his fate, he did nothing but complain:

"Immer ich, ich, ich und wenn die Geschichte nicht mehr weiter geht, Klage über Undank und norddeutsche Sentimentalitätstränen." (126)

His self-pity, his petulance did little to restore his image in Fontane's eyes, only reinforcing his picture of Bismarck as 'ein kleiner Mann':

"Das ewige Sich-auf-den-Waisenknaben-und-Biedermeier-hin-Ausspielen ist gräßlich..." (127)

Bismarck was

"...eine Mischung...von Heros und Heulhuber, der nie ein Wässerchen getrübt hat..." (128)

He compared Bismarck to Schiller's wallenstein:

"Er hat die größte Ähnlichkeit mit dem Schillerschen Wallenstein (der historische war anders): Genie, Staatsretter und sentimentaler Hochverräter." (129)

Thus, while readily acknowledging Bismarck as 'Genie' and 'Staatsretter' Fontane saw in Bismarck's attacks on the person and policies of his successor Caprivi ¹³⁰ behaviour that bordered on treason: not content with having been removed from office, Bismarck was attempting to perpetuate his political influence by open feud with the Kaiser and his ministers. This Fontane compared to Wallenstein's treasonable intention to break allegiance to the Emperor and, by way of secret negotiations with the Emperor's enemies, the Swedes, make himself King of Bohemia.

Linked with the notion of Bismarck the 'Hochverräter' was the idea of Bismarck the arch double-dealer. Fontane formulated a provocative historical thesis ¹³¹ which stated that Bismarck's loyalty to the Prussian Crown, his posture as a staunch defender of the principle of monarchical government was a sham; that in reality he used the monarchy as a cloak for the furtherance of his own political ends and that of the Prussian aristocracy, namely, the consolidation of the power of the aristocracy. This interpretation of Bismarck's political

career and the real aims of his policy was perhaps suggested by the theme of Wildenbruch's play 'Quitzwons'.¹³² The theory was, that Bismarck's aim - despite declarations of loyalty to the monarch¹³³ had been to strengthen the power of the aristocracy in Prussia so as to ultimately be able to usurp the position of the Kaiser and 'restore' political power in Prussia to the Junker.

"Ja, ich verpflichte mich, einen Essay zu schreiben, in dem ich nachweise, daß Bismarck nach einem von Dietrich von Quitzow hinterlassenen politischen Testament das Deutsche Reich aufgebaut hat, um auf diese geniale Weise die Hohenzollern zu stürzen und dadurch die märkischen Radaubröder von damals an dem Nürnberger Burggrafentum ein für allemal und zwar großartig zu rächen. Es war auch schon alles fertig: da im letzten Augenblick, merkte Wilhelm der II die Lunte und stürzte den Verschwörer mit Hilfe der Sozialdemokratie. Soll ich solchen Essay schreiben? Ich kann es!" (134)

The Kaiser was, however, able to remove Bismarck without encountering opposition or resistance from any quarter, a fact that Fontane interpreted as, among other things, demonstrating the weak and isolated position of the Junker in German society.¹³⁵ Bismarck is seen now - in the light of this theory - not so much as the great individual, the statesman and politician, the unifier of Germany, but as the outstanding representative of the political power and vested interest of the Junker class, a class whose power Fontane was bitterly opposed to, since he regarded them as the principal obstacle to changes that were imperative.¹³⁶ This signifies an important shift in Fontane's perception of Bismarck's political role, a shift that goes some way to account for the unsympathetic view Fontane had of Bismarck in the last years of his life.

However, such a shift stopped short of what might have developed into a far-reaching re-examination of the whole direction of Bismarck's policies and their impact on developments in Germany. What remains is a negative character

picture of Bismarck, an overwhelming impression of Bismarck the
'Prinzipienverächter' ¹³⁷, Bismarck the 'Schlauberger',

"...dieser beständige Hang, die Menschen zu betrügen, dies
vollendete Schlaubergertum ist mir eigentlich widerwärtig,
und wenn ich mich aufrichten, erheben will, so muß ich
doch auf andre Helden blicken." (138)

3. Fontane's view of Bismarck in the 1890's

Fontane's view of Bismarck grew progressively and rapidly more negative in the 1890's: his conduct in retirement - Fontane spoke of Bismarck as 'unsren Zivil-Wallenstein' ¹³⁹ - provoked Fontane into making some of his most damning remarks about Bismarck. The feud with the Kaiser and Bismarck's constant sharp-shooting at official policy confirmed Fontane in his impression of Bismarck as a man who was totally lacking in attachment to any principles - as demonstrated by his attacks on government policy - save that of the preservation of his own power:

"Dem Zweckdienlichen alles unterordnen ist überhaupt ein furchtbarer Standpunkt, und bei ihm ist nun alles noch mit soviel Persönlichem und geradezu Häßlichem untermischt, mit Beifallsbedürftigkeit, unbedingtem Glauben an das Recht jeder Laune, jedes Einfalls..." (140)

Duplicity stood out as one of Bismarck's most objectionable traits:

"Danach hat auch Bismarck gehandelt; 'ein bißchen Mogeln' (d.h. ganz gehörig) ist ihm immer als das Schönste erschienen." (141)

Bismarck's clandestine use of government funds, the so-called 'Welfenfonds', also known as the 'Reptilienfonds', to bribe an apparently free and independent press to serve - unseen - his political ends, ¹⁴² was but one instance of his large-scale deception of the German public:

"...der kleine sehr witzige und kolossal malitiöse Aufsatz über den Welfenfonds... Ich will auch nicht sagen, daß die Generalmalice gegen die Gebräuche des nun verflossenen Bismarckschen Regimes...unstatthaft sei, jene Mogeleyen sind himmelschreiend..." (143)

Fontane's abhorrence of Bismarck's 'Mogeleyen' was only just kept in check by Fontane reminding himself of Bismarck's positive achievements for Germany:

"...man muß sich immer wieder all das Riesengroße zurückrufen, was er genialisch zusammengemogelt hat, um durch diese von den krassesten Widersprüchen getragenen Mogeleyen nicht abgestoßen zu werden. Er ist die denkbar interessanteste Figur, ich kenne keine interessantere, aber

"dieser beständige Hang, die Menschen zu betrügen, dies vollendete Schlaubergertum ist mir eigentlich widerwärtig..." (144)

Fontane also objected to the way Bismarck exploited his position to secure and advance his personal financial interests, a point of criticism he had levelled at the Prussian aristocracy generally. Fontane calls him a 'Vorteilsjäger'¹⁴⁵, a 'Pferdestall-Steuerverweigerer'¹⁴⁶ and censures him for his 'kolossale Happigkeit'.¹⁴⁷ In none too serious vein Fontane compared Bismarck with the pirate Störtebeker, a comparison that Störtebeker survives with more honour than Bismarck!

"An diesem Vorabend des Bismarck-Tages beschäftigt mich unpatriotischerweise mein neuer Freund Klaus Störtebeker mehr als der ihm nicht ganz unverwandte Altreichskanzler. Beide waren 'Stürzbecher' und ein Schrecken ihrer Feinde. Selbst mit Religion und Kirche haben sich beide befaßt, wenn es gerade vorteilhaft war. Nur war Bismarck nie 'Likedeeler'; er behielt immer möglichst viel für sich. Zur Strafe dafür kriegt er jetzt so viel Geschenke, daß er sie nicht unterzubringen weiß. Am meisten scheint er sich über die japanische Vase zu ärgern." (148)

Recognition of Bismarck's genius as a statesman, gratitude for his achievements on the one hand, strongly felt objections to Bismarck's character on the other hand: these are the two main - and quite distinct - strands in Fontane's assessment of Bismarck:

"Wo ich Bismarck als Werkzeug der göttlichen Vorsehung empfinde, beuge ich mich vor ihm; wo er einfach er selbst ist, Junker und Deichhauptmann und Vorteilsjäger, ist er mir gänzlich unsympathisch." (149)

The double-stranded nature of Fontane's attitude to the figure of Bismarck is well reflected in the following passage:

"Bismarck-Tag mit wahren Hohenzollernwetter... Es ist Schade, daß dieser Tag - wenigstens in meinen Augen - doch nicht das ist, was er sein könnte. Und das liegt - noch einmal nach meinem Gefühl - an Bismarck. Diese Mischung von Übermensch und Schlauberger, von Staatengründer und Pferdestall-Steuerverweigerer(er glaubte die Stadt Berlin wollte ihn zugleich ärgern und bemogeln) man merkt er hat selber öfters hinter der Tür gestanden) von Heros und Heulhuber, der nie ein Wässerchen getrübt hat - erfüllt mich mit gemischten Gefühlen und läßt eine reine helle Bewunderung in mir nicht aufkommen. Etwas fehlt ihm und

"gerade das, was recht eigentlich die Größe leiht." (150)

A similar approach to the complex phenomenon Bismarck had been adopted by the Polish writer Sienkiewicz in an appreciation of Bismarck he had written for the cultural weekly 'Die Gegenwart'.¹⁵¹ Fontane enthused:

"Eine Perle aber befindet sich unter diesem minderwertigen Material, eine Perle von so hohem Wert, daß der Kohlnur und ähnliche berühmte Steine daneben verschwinden. Verfasser ist ein Pole(lächerlicherweise Romanschriftsteller): Henrik Sienkiewicz. Auch nicht annähernd Ähnliches ist, was Tiefe der Erkenntnis angeht, bisher über Bismarck gesagt worden. Es ist, wenn ich nur einen Schimmer von Bismarck habe, einfach nicht zu übertreffen. Schlägt alle Historiker aus dem Felde; schlechtweg großartig." (152)

To the translator of Sienkiewicz's article on Bismarck, Gustav Karpeles, he wrote:

"Da ich dem Verfasser nicht danken kann, will ich Ihnen danken dafür, daß Sie mir durch Ihre Kenntnisse des Polnischen diesen Hochgenuß vermittelt haben. Es ist nicht bloß das weit weitaus Bedeutendste und Richtigste, was über Bismarck gesagt worden ist, auch wohl je gesagt werden wird. Es ist überhaupt das Bedeutendste, was ich von Erfassung einer historischen Persönlichkeit je gelesen habe, die berühmtesten Historiker nicht ausgeschlossen. Ich bilde mir ein, ihn, Bismarck, nach zahllosen kleinen und großen Zügen ganz genau zu kennen, und bin die helle Bewunderung, daß ein Fremder ihn so treffen konnte. Das ist dichterische Intuition." (153)

Sienkiewicz's article, while emphasising and giving due recognition to Bismarck's considerable practical and 'creative' abilities as a statesman and politician, in short, as a genius, criticised him for his complete failure to inform his politics with any higher moral purpose. The maxim 'Macht geht vor Recht' is identified as the crux of Bismarck's political philosophy:

"Es ist ganz gleichgültig, ob Fürst Bismarck wirklich gesagt hat: 'Macht geht vor Recht' oder nicht. Die vox populi, die ihm die Losung zuschreibt, sieht in ihm die Verkörperung dieses Gedankens, und sie sieht richtig. Denn er war unzweifelhaft die Seele und der Ausdruck seiner gesamten Politik. Und dieses Prinzip führte Bismarck nicht nur selbst, sondern dank den unerhörten Erfolgen gab er ihm auch den Schein einer positiven Wahrheit. Er verallgemeinerte es, drängte es der Menschheit auf und erniedrigte das moralische Niveau des europäischen Lebens so tief, wie es keiner vor ihm seit Jahrhunderten getan hatte." (154)

Sienkiewicz condemned Bismarck for his deleterious influence on political morality - and made Bismarck personally responsible for this. Fontane may have agreed with this view, he never expressed such a view himself and did not make any link between the influence of Bismarck's regime and the moral tenor of the age. The explanation for this is to be found in the fact that Fontane was perhaps too critical of other sections of German society, notably, the 'Bourgeoisie', to ascribe the moral deterioration, purely and simply, to the influence of one man, Bismarck.

Sienkiewicz also pointed to the role of 'hatred' in Bismarck's character and to the way in which it inspired his policies:

"Bismarck stellte sich sogar den Deutschen nur zur Hälfte als Verkörperung der Kraft dar - zur anderen Hälfte aber als die Personifikation der verschiedenen Gefühle des Hasses, beginnend mit dem tatsächlich antichristlichen und zugleich parvenühaften Haß gegen das große und wehrlose Volk und endend mit dem Haß gegen die verschiedenen Parteien in Deutschland, die eine der seinigen entgegengesetzte Politik getrieben haben." (155)

Fontane, too, had condemned Bismarck for his ruthlessness and hatred of his political opponents. He lacked the essential moral qualities of a truly great man:

"Ich bin kein Bismarckianer, das Letzte und Beste in mir wendet sich von ihm ab, er ist keine edle Natur." 156.

A letter written to Heilborn two days after the death of Bismarck indicates the extent of Fontane's indifference to Bismarck:

"ich könnte eher ein Gedicht auf den Scharfrichter Krauts... machen als auf Bismarck. ... Krauts, das wäre doch wenigstens verrückt, Bismarck ist bloß langweilig, also das denkbar Schlimmste. Da muß viel Wasser die Spree runter, eh Bismarck wieder ein Stoff geworden ist. Dann freilich ein gehöriger." (157)

Fontane's final word on Bismarck is an ethical judgement on Bismarck the man. The enthusiastic admiration of Bismarck which had been the bed-rock of Fontane's approach to Bismarck,

was no longer vital enough to sustain a positive view of Bismarck in the face of his character deficiencies. This latter development - the decline in the esteem that Fontane felt for Bismarck's achievements as a statesman, most notably, his role as 'founder' of the second German Empire - was linked with a minor revolution in his political and historical thinking, namely, in his re-valuation of the role of the masses in history, and in particular with regard to the Revolution of 1848 and the founding of the Empire in 1871. According to this re-valuation Bismarck's greatness lay not in his achievement as architect of the Empire as such, but more in his ability to grasp what the nation was demanding. Bismarck was the great success he was, because he was executing the will of the people.¹⁵⁸ The role of the great historical 'individual' - a view that Fontane had subscribed to in the 1870's - was now correspondingly demoted; Bismarck was now the 'Werkzeug der göttlichen Vorsehung'.¹⁵⁹ One of the corner-stones of Fontane's admiration of Bismarck was thus removed.

Summary: Fontane and Bismarck 1890 - 1898

Once Bismarck was no longer at the centre of political power, Fontane's criticism of Bismarck gathered pace. His attacks on Kaiser William II's policies and his generally bitter stance in retirement confirmed Fontane in his impression of Bismarck as a cantankerous unprincipled old man, attached to nothing save that which furthered his own power and influence. He began to see Bismarck more as a representative of the hated reactionary Junker class who, while declaring its loyalty to the Hohenzollern house, had been working to promote the political power of the Prussian aristocracy at the expense of the monarchy. Bismarck was seen as a latter-day Dietrich von Quitzow. Fontane's esteem for Bismarck's achievement was also considerably reduced by his democratic revaluation of Bismarck's 'executive' role in the founding of the German Empire. Both these circumstances greatly reduced Fontane's admiration for Bismarck. His final rejection of Bismarck was based on his lack of those qualities of spirit and heart that constituted greatness, 'Adel der Gesinnung'.

At no point after Bismarck's dismissal does Fontane embark on a comprehensive discussion of what has been referred to as Bismarck's political legacy (Bismarcks Erbe), more particularly with regard to his influence on the development of political mores and attitudes in Germany. Bismarck's autocratic regime has commonly been cited by historians as one of the major causes of the political 'immaturity' of the German middle classes and therefore, indirectly, the root-cause of their largely anti-democratic stance in the Weimar Republic. Bismarck's anti-parliamentarianism is held responsible for the fact that the Kaiser retained crucial constitutional power and that workable representative political institutions had not been evolved. Theodor Mommsen wrote:

"Der Schaden der Bismarckschen Periode ist unendlich größer als ihr Nutzen, denn die Gewinne an Macht waren Werte, die bei dem nächsten Sturm der Weltgeschichte

"wieder verlorengelassen; aber die Knechtung der deutschen Persönlichkeit, des deutschen Geistes, war ein Verhängnis, das nicht mehr gutgemacht werden kann." (160)

He did not link this development explicitly with Bismarck's influence. Bismarck is never - for Fontane - the all-powerful, all-pervading evil influence that certain liberal critics - such as Mommsen - saw. Fontane was aware, however, that considerable re-adjustment would be required on the part of the public in their attitude to government once Bismarck was no longer Chancellor:

"Bismarck's Regiment, eine Genialitätsepisode, hat uns daran gewöhnt an oberster Stelle mit dem Ausnahmefall zu rechnen, diesen als Regel zu nehmen, die Regel ist aber die Mittelmäßigkeit, die geistige und die moralische Dürftigkeit, an andern Orten wahrscheinlich noch mehr als bei uns und das muß unser Trost sein." (161)

But Fontane does not seem to have been of the opinion that Bismarck's 'Regiment' had done permanent damage to the German body politic or had corrupted political attitudes, even enslaved the German spirit. Perhaps his hope in the increasing influence of the progressive forces in German society made him more sanguine than Mommsen.

V : Fontane's view of Bismarck: summary and conclusions

Fontane had no one single attitude to Bismarck: it could not be said that he either admired Bismarck without reservation or that he rejected him out of hand. Fontane's attitude to Bismarck was not monosyllabic, but complex and differentiated. But then Bismarck himself was a complex figure, a man of contradictions, possessed of both outstanding abilities and loathsome character traits. He was a many-sided phenomenon, whose achievements and personality - both inextricably intertwined - evinced a peculiarly confusing combination of both decidedly negative and positive characteristics. The co-existence of positive and negative, what might almost be termed the 'duality' of Bismarck, had impressed itself on Fontane. Bismarck was at one and the same time 'Staatsretter und sentimentaler Hochverräter' ¹⁶².

"Werkzeug der göttlichen Vorsehung... (und)... Junker, und Deichhauptmann und Vorteilsjäger". (163)

He was 'Heros und Heulhuber' and 'Staatengründer und Pferdestall-Steuerverweigerer', ¹⁶⁴ he was 'eine Mischung von Übermensch und Schlauberger', ¹⁶⁵ 'ein großes Genie, aber ein kleiner Mann'. ¹⁶⁶ Fontane made almost no substantial comment on Bismarck that did not include both negative and positive points.

To the complexity of the Bismarck phenomenon must be added the complexity of Fontane's own approach to Bismarck: he had a decidedly 'aesthetic' view of Bismarck (he was impressed by the epic dimensions of Bismarck's personality and achievement), he had an intellectual view of Bismarck (he admired his abilities as an orator), he also had a moral view and a broadly political view. These various standards were brought to bear on the different aspects of Bismarck's character and political career; forming a parallelogram of conflicting factors, in Fontane's mind. Conflicting and shifting priorities made Fontane's evaluation of Bismarck no easy task; as he himself admitted:

"Seine aus jedem Satz sprechende Genialität entzückt mich immer wieder, schmeißt immer wieder meine Bedenken über den Haufen, aber bei ruhigem Blute sind die Bedenken doch auch immer wieder da." (167)

At one moment Fontane was captivated by Bismarck's oratorical power, thrilled by his intellect, delighted by his humour and wit, an enthusiastic admirer of his unrivalled statesmanship, the next moment he was appalled by Bismarck's ruthlessness and autocratic exercise of power, demonstrating a total lack of sensitivity and generosity, a characteristic that Fontane placed very highly. Fontane confessed his difficulties in making up his mind about Bismarck:

"Er(Bismarck) hat das Deutsche Reich aufgebaut; so wie man mehr sagen will, verheddert man sich." (168)

The fact that he admired some aspects of Bismarck in no way contradicted or disqualified his very real objections to other aspects. Each aspect of Bismarck evoked a different reaction from Fontane: he was thus attracted by certain qualities in Bismarck's personality and repelled by others, he supported some aspects of his political achievement and disapproved of others.

In order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of Fontane's attitude to Bismarck it will be necessary to examine his attitude to a number of aspects seen, in the first instance, quite separately, to establish what values and ideas informed each approach and then finally to establish what over-all balance Fontane struck between the competing priorities of aesthetic, intellectual, moral and political values.¹⁶⁹ This will be done under two broad headings: Fontane's assessment of Bismarck's policies followed by his view of Bismarck's character.

a. Fontane and Bismarck's policies

At no point in the course of Bismarck's long career, leaving aside Fontane's opposition to Bismarckian conservatism in 1848,¹⁷⁰ did Fontane express grave reservations as to the substance and general direction of the policies that Bismarck was pursuing, either first as Prussian Prime Minister in the 1860's or later as Chancellor of the North German Confederation or finally as Chancellor of the German Empire. We must assume from the lack of adverse comment, that his policies met with Fontane's broad approval.

However, it must be ^{said} that Fontane, despite the value of his many insights, was not primarily a political commentator,¹⁷¹ at no point did he embark on a detailed analysis of Bismarck's policies. At most Fontane quarrelled with the details or the manner in which Bismarck implemented his policies; here Fontane's criticism was directed mainly at the measures Bismarck took against individuals to underpin changes in policy, for example, the summary removal of personnel from the administration who might be opposed to his new policies, a common theme in the Bismarck discussion in the novels.

Bismarck's most outstanding and lasting achievement in the view of contemporaries was the unification of the north German and south German states to form the second German Empire, 'Deutsches Reich' as a major European power. This was a powerful and unreservedly positive factor in Fontane's assessment of Bismarck. As a result both Bismarck's personality and his achievement assumed almost superhuman dimensions, so that the more negative aspects of Bismarck's character and political style appeared insignificant in comparison with the magnitude of his achievements. In later years when Fontane began to question and re-examine the problem of Bismarck, it was his achievements as a statesman that constituted the immovable positive pole in the duality of positive and negative.¹⁷³ Not until the late 1890's was this aspect of Fontane's view of Bismarck relativised by his 'populist' interpretation.¹⁷⁴

Neither the anti-catholic 'Kulturkampf' nor the anti-socialist legislation, nor the change-over from free trade to protectionism and the consequent split of the national liberals nor the piecing together of a colonial empire seem to have aroused Fontane's disapproval, although he was sceptical about the effectiveness of the anti-socialist measures and later expressed misgivings about colonialism,¹⁷⁵ None of these policies carried out under Bismarck's direction appear to have materially influenced Fontane's view of Bismarck. Not even Bismarck, the European statesman, the 'ehrlicher Makler' of the Berlin Congress is referred to, while his social welfare legislation (various bills in the 1880's), widely acclaimed as his second greatest achievement, is not mentioned in Fontane's correspondence.¹⁷⁶ As long as Bismarck was Chancellor Fontane supported his policies, at most he had 'Bedenken'. It would be a mistake to look for the source of Fontane's final rejection of Bismarck in his attitude towards Bismarck's achievements as a statesman. He shared the confidence of many of his fellow countrymen in Bismarck's abilities, Bismarck could be trusted to do what was in the best interests of Germany at home and abroad. Fontane's assessment of Bismarck's policies in the 1870's and 1880's was sympathetic and largely uncritical, he was more often than not critical of those who opposed Bismarck. There is no evidence that Fontane shared the criticism of Bismarck's policies voiced by conservatives in his novels. The political structure of Germany under Bismarck, Fontane believed, was basically sound, what misgivings he had about conservatism and the role of the Prussian aristocracy in German society did not affect his picture of Bismarck. He saw no cause for alarm.¹⁷⁷

However, when Bismarck was dismissed (20th March 1890) Fontane welcomed it:

"Es ist ein Glück, daß wir ihn los sind..." (178)
The last three years of his long career as Chancellor had been distinguished by lack of direction and coherence:

"Er war eigentlich nur noch Gewohnheitsregente, tat was er wollte, ließ alles warten und forderte nur immer mehr Devotion... Was er in den letzten 3 Jahren... verzapft hat, war nicht weit her." (179)

Preoccupied with the elimination of political opponents, actual and potential, Bismarck had allowed policy to drift. Fontane had great hopes that things would change under the new Kaiser and this was one of the reasons why he welcomed Bismarck's departure as long-overdue.¹⁸⁰ However, although Fontane sympathised with much William II was seeking to do,¹⁸¹ he disagreed profoundly with the military means the Kaiser had chosen to carry out his ambitious policies.¹⁸² If the Kaiser hoped to mobilise the nation in support of his plans, Fontane believed that he was going about it the wrong way. Fontane reflected not without a touch of nostalgia for Bismarck's authoritative leadership:

"Bismarck hätte das Zeug dazu gehabt." (183)

He thus still acknowledged Bismarck's superior political genius, even if his over-all opinion of him was fairly low. His objections to Bismarck's methods were deep-rooted and only balanced by Bismarck's considerable political achievements:

"...man muß sich immer wieder all das Riesengroße zurückrufen, was er genialisch zusammengemogelt hat, um durch diese von den krassesten Widersprüchen getragenen Mogeleyen nicht abgestoßen zu werden." (184)

Bismarck's public opposition to the Kaiser and his policies after he had been dismissed, struck Fontane as particularly disloyal, as Bismarck had always loudly proclaimed his attachment to the principle of monarchical government while he had been Chancellor:

"Beständig hat Bismarck redensartlich die Hohenzollern-Fahne hoch gehalten, im Stillen hat er drüber gelacht und das Loyalitätsprinzip, wie jedes andre, als einen Mumpitz angesehen." (185)

Bismarck's policies were characterised by a contempt for principles,¹⁸⁶ and the complete absence of moral or ethical purpose:

"Dem Zweckdienlichen alles unterordnen ist überhaupt ein furchtbarer Standpunkt." (187)

Fontane's high regard for Bismarck's political genius which had been a dominant consideration in his attitude to Bismarck in the 1870's and 1880's, paled significantly in the 1890's. No more was Bismarck the mighty architect and builder of the German Empire, other factors were as important:

"Wenn später Bismarck so phänomenale Triumphe feiern konnte, so geschah es, sein Genie in Ehren, vor allem dadurch, daß er seine stupende Kraft in den Dienst der in der deutschen Volksseele lebendigen Idee stellte.

So wurde das Deutsche Reich aufgerichtet und nur so." (188)

Bismarck's greatness lay in the fact that he had employed his abilities in the service of the nation, fulfilling its demands:

"Wo ich Bismarck als Werkzeug der göttlichen Vorsehung empfinde, beuge ich mich vor ihm; wo er einfach er selbst ist, Junker und Deichhauptmann und Vorteilsjäger, ist er mir gänzlich unsympathisch." (189)

but Bismarck, the Junker, the protagonist of Junker interests Fontane found contemptible.

Bismarck symbolised, in his person, the power and the strength that had established the Empire, but that achievement, however great in its day, was an extremely limited achievement in terms of human progress. What human aspirations, what lasting moral values did Bismarck's Germany stand for that were valid for the future? Fontane seems to have shared the uneasy feelings of some contemporaries that Bismarck's achievements belonged in some way to the past and had little relevance to the present or the future.¹⁹¹ Sienkiewicz had concluded his appreciation of Bismarck with the following words:

"...daß die Einigung Deutschlands vielleicht wirklich das Werk dieses Mannes gewesen sein konnte, daß aber in Zukunft Deutschland nicht in seinem Geiste fortleben kann." (192)

Fontane would have agreed.

b. Fontane and Bismarck's character

Fontane's concept of 'Gesinnung' lies at the centre of his morality: it was an ideal combination of human qualities, first and foremost deep, warm-hearted humanity, independence of mind and strength of character, generosity, tolerance and naturalness (lack of affectation and false airs), the absence of narrowmindedness, pre-conceived notions, egotism, arrogance, prejudice and dogmatism. It was an ideal of human conduct that in many ways resembled the idea of the perfect gentleman with all that implied of elegance, culture and refinement, but combined with the human qualities listed above.¹⁹³

The man of 'Gesinnung' was the supremely civilised human being; as such, the notion transcended political values, in Fontane's view, so that both Major von Quitzow, a conservative, and August Bebel, a socialist, could both be regarded and admired by Fontane as men of 'Gesinnung'.¹⁹⁴

With the ideal of 'Gesinnung' as his standard, Fontane approved all that promoted the human qualities that went to make up 'Gesinnung', while equally disapproving of all that militated against it. Bismarck, too, was measured by this standard and found wanting. He lacked the essential 'nobility of character', even at a time when Fontane's admiration for Bismarck was at its height in other respects.¹⁹⁵ The weight of Fontane's criticism of Bismarck fell not - as we have noted - on his policies, but on his character, and his political style which Fontane took to be an expression of his character.¹⁹⁶ Up into the late 1890's Bismarck's political genius reconciled Fontane to the rough-edges of his strong personality, indeed, they were seen - and accepted - as the inevitable and essential ingredients of his towering personality.¹⁹⁷ Statesmen of Bismarck's ilk were rarely

"sittliche Größen und Biedermänner" (198)

As Fontane remarked to Friedländer, reflecting his own view:

"Blücher, Wrangel, Bismarck, Prinz Ferdinand Karl - das sind die Leute, die das Volk will; fromme brave Prinzipienreiter sind dem Volke allemal odiös und mit Recht. Es sind immer unerquickliche Erscheinungen, selbst da noch, wo sie uns mit Achtung erfüllen, ein Fall, der sehr selten vorkommt." (199)

Fontane tended to the view that Bismarck's political achievements had only been possible because he was tough and ruthless, without Bismarck's ruthlessness there would have been no Empire.²⁰⁰

He thus accepted - as minor irritants - the rougher and more abrasive traits in Bismarck's character as unavoidable, as a part of Bismarck's powerful personality. These minor aspects were, however, to figure more prominently as Fontane's sense of what was appropriate and fair was repeatedly offended by Bismarck's treatment of opponents, not that he disputed Bismarck's right to dispose of opposition - in both the Eulenburg and Geffcken affairs Fontane supported Bismarck²⁰¹ - but he did regard the methods employed, slander and false accusations (Verdächtigungen) as objectionable. At the time Fontane gave Bismarck the benefit of the doubt, since he knew that Bismarck had many enemies, he therefore accepted that such measures, especially as he did not know all the facts of the case, might have been necessary. Not until after Bismarck's resignation did Fontane fully realise the depths to which Bismarck was prepared to stoop to achieve his political ends, in the case of Geffcken and Morier Bismarck had levelled false charges at them in order to discredit them in public.²⁰² Fontane was appalled.²⁰³

Fontane's reservations grew as it became more apparent that Bismarck's actions were no longer guided by general considerations but were the result of haphazard manoeuvres designed to forestall possible opposition and thus to retain his own power intact. This reinforced Fontane's view of Bismarck as a supreme 'Prinzipienverächter'.²⁰⁴ There were, as yet however, a number of redeeming features that kept the negative points in check. Fontane continued to be thrilled by Bismarck's skill and power as a speaker:

"Auch Bismarck hat zweimal 5 Spalten lang gesprochen, das erste Mal über die Lasker-Sargent-Frage (Repräsentantenhaus-Adresse), das andre Mal über Staatssozialismus und den Parlamentarismus wie er ist und wie er sein soll. Beide Reden wieder der reine Zucker. Wenn er niest oder Prosit sagt, finde ich es interessanter als die Rede-weisheit von 6 Fortschrittlern." (205)

Bismarck, appearing before the assembled Reichstag to deliver a momentous speech, embodied for Fontane his influence as a European statesman, the leader of Germany as a world power:

"Aber Bismarck, während er zur Welt sprach und die vorläufigen Schicksale derselben vielleicht bestimmte.." (206)

His formal abilities as an orator impressed and delighted Fontane:

"Hast Du vielleicht gelesen, daß er neulich gesagt hat: 'der Kaiser wolle fernliegende Dinge beständig in der Luftlinie erreichen, das ginge aber nicht, und der Weg unten sei mühsam und voller Hecken und Gräben.' Er ist der glänzendste Bildersprecher und hat selbst vor Shakespeare die Einfachheit und vollkommenste Anschaulichkeit voraus." (207)

Fontane always found what Bismarck had to say stimulating and significant, whether he agreed with the sentiments expressed or not: 208

"Unser Berliner Leben ist seit 4 Wochen etwas schläfrig verlaufen, und wäre nicht der alte Löwe in Friedrichsruh (Bismarck), der dann und wann durch die Wüste brüllte, so ließe sich von Langerweile sprechen. Darin ist sich Bismarck in und außer dem Amte gleichgeblieben, daß 'was er auch packt, er packt's interessant.' " (209)

After the funeral oration delivered by Bismarck on the death of William I Fontane wrote:

"Nun hat Bismarck gesprochen und der ganze Sonntag, so bedeutend er war, kommt mir schon abgestanden vor." (210)

The profound aesthetic and intellectual pleasure Fontane derived from Bismarck's speeches played an important role in sustaining his admiration for Bismarck:

"Seine aus jedem Satz sprechende Genialität entzückt mich immer wieder, schmeißt immer wieder meine Bedenken über den Haufen..." (211)

Bismarck's command of the German language was one of those aspects of Bismarck Fontane most admired:

"Bismarck hat keinen größeren Anschwärmer gehabt als mich, meine Frau hat mir nie eine seiner Reden oder Briefe oder Äußerungen vorgelesen, ohne daß ich in ein helles Entzücken geraten wäre..." (212)

Bismarck's considerable intellectual powers

"...das Riesenmaß seines Geistes stellt noch wieder das seines Leibes in Schatten." (213)

and his humour were further redeeming features: Fontane confessed:

"...ohneden Humor wäre er früher unerträglich gewesen." (214)

After Bismarck's resignation (March 1890) Fontane's assessment of his character became increasingly negative. His attacks on the Kaiser demonstrated a lack of loyalty and the shallowness of his attachment to the principle of monarchical government. Revelations as to Bismarck's deception in the Geffcken affair and his use of the 'Welfenfonds' to finance press corruption ('Jene Mogeleyen sind himmelschreiend')²¹⁵ reinforced Fontane in his low opinion of Bismarck:

"...dieser beständige Hang, die Menschen zu betrügen, dies vollendete Schlaubergertum..." (216)

Bismarck's self-pity, his complaining in retirement was pathetic:

"Diese Mischung...von Heros und Heulhuber, der nie ein Wässerchen getrübt hat." (217)

Fontane was unable to admire such a figure:

"...erfüllt mich mit gemischten Gefühlen und läßt eine reine helle Bewunderung in mir nicht aufkommen. Etwas fehlt ihm und gerade das, was recht eigentlich die Größe leiht." (218)

Nor were other features of Bismarck's character and behaviour while in office forgotten by Fontane:

"...bei ihm ist nun alles noch mit soviel Persönlichem und geradezu Häßlichem untermischt, mit Beifallsbedürftigkeit, unbedingtem Glauben an das Recht jener Laune, jeden Einfalls und kolossaler Happigkeit." (219)

Bismarck may still have been acknowledged by Fontane as something of a political genius, but he was tainted with the rude manners of a bully, he was the

"...geniale Kraftmeier im Sachsenwald." (220)

Bismarck's formidable intellectual powers, his physical strength, his energy and skill, his redoubtable personality remained unquestioned,²²¹ but, as Fontane wrote to Friedländer:

"Ich bin kein Bismarckianer, das Letzte und Beste in mir wendet sich von ihm ab, er ist keine edle Natur." (222)

True greatness was a quality that was denied Bismarck, he lacked those noble qualities of character that constituted for Fontane 'greatness'. While his political achievements, above all the founding of the Empire, would remain, but they provided no moral inspiration. Bismarck's own character was devoid of moral uplift:

"Wenn ich mich aufrichten, erheben will, so muß ich auf andere Helden blicken." (223)

A few months before his death in September 1898 Fontane defined 'greatness' in the following manner:

"...groß ist doch schließlich nur, wer die Menschheit um ein paar Kilometer weiterbringt." (224)

In this light even Bismarck's political achievements appear limited.

3. Fontane's view of Bismarck in the context of his over-all picture of the political development in Germany

Considerable attention has been paid to the evolution of Fontane's general political and social thinking in an attempt to determine whether changes here influenced his view of Bismarck. Could it be said, for example, that Fontane's move away from conservatism had any effect on his view of Bismarck? Did his hostility to liberalism make him any more inclined to support Bismarck?

On the whole there is little to suggest that Fontane's view of Bismarck was dependent on, or influenced by, extraneous factors, that is to say, factors not directly related to Bismarck. His attitude to Bismarck seems to have been determined solely by his perception of Bismarck's behaviour. Fontane's attitude to Bismarck was not influenced by his alienation from conservatism in the late 1880's nor by his disillusionment with the Prussian aristocracy or the Prussian state. Bismarck was seen as separate, as above, such developments. It is, however, the case that Fontane's hostility to the doctrinaire liberalism of the 'Fortschrittspartei' made him unsympathetic to the party's attacks on Bismarck; such attacks usually mobilised Fontane's feelings in defence of Bismarck.

The most radical change followed Bismarck's resignation. Once Bismarck was no longer Reichskanzler, Fontane's support for him fell abruptly away. As long as Bismarck was Chancellor, the supreme effective authority and power in Germany, Fontane had feared that any outright challenge to Bismarck's power would plunge Germany into political convulsions, as the struggle for power ensued, that would permanently weaken Germany internally and externally. Once Bismarck had been removed, this constraint was lifted, the fear of instability was removed and Fontane felt free to express criticism in a less inhibited fashion.

In retrospect Fontane began to see Bismarck's political aims in a more limited light: he appeared as the defender of Junker interests and, since Fontane was bitterly opposed to the Junker, it was inevitable that his regard for Bismarck should suffer.

C. Bismarck in the novels of Fontane

Introduction

In most of Fontane's novels references are made to Bismarck. Fontane wrote to Maximilian Harden:

"In fast allem, was ich seit 70 geschrieben, geht der 'Schwefelgelbe' um, und wenn das Gespräch ihn nur flüchtig berührte, es ist immer von ihm die Rede wie von Karl oder Otto dem Großen." (1)

In some cases, the references amount to no more than a brief aside, a mention of Bismarck's name; in others, Fontane allows his characters to indulge in extensive and lively debate on Bismarck and his policies.² Discussions at length of Bismarck predominate in the novels of the 1880's; prominent in this context is the portrayal of conservative opposition to Bismarck from within the Prussian establishment.

I : The Berlin novels of the 1880'sa. L'Adultera (1882)

Van der Straaten, a Berlin financier and banker, is giving a dinner at his home for a small circle of friends. His wife, Melanie, who together with her sister is also present, subsequently elopes with Ebenezer Rubelin, a friend of the family; hence, the title of the novel 'L'Adultera'.

Present at the dinner are Major von Gryczinski, a member of the Prussian general staff (married to Melanie's sister), Baron Duquede, a retired Prussian diplomat (Legationsrat), Reiff, a senior official in the police administration (Polizeirat), and two artists, Gabler and Schulze, patronised by van der Straaten. The assembled company thus represents a cross-section of Berlin upper class society.

The conversation over dinner turns to prospects for peace in Europe and Bismarck's foreign policy. In the course of the ensuing discussion Duquede launches into a brilliant attack on Bismarck and his policies.

The burden of Duquede's criticism of Bismarck is that he has - in Duquede's view - abandoned the principles of Prussian conservatism and all but embraced the programme and principles of his political opponents, the National Liberals: Bismarck's espousal of the German nationalists' aim to create a united Germany and his subsequent establishment of the German Empire; his 'alliance' in the Reichstag with the Liberals and their influence on governmental policy and within the administration, his far-reaching concessions to constitutional liberal demands and democratic ideas: all this signalled a renunciation of traditional conservative ideas. Duquede describes Bismarck's programme as 'revolutionärer Radikalismus'.³

To Duquede it is clear that the substance of Bismarck's policies is inspired by borrowed liberal principles:

"Exmittierung Österreichs, Aufbau des Deutschen Reiches... Ekrasierung Frankreichs und Dethronisierung des Papstes! Pah, van der Straaten, ich kenne die ganze Litanei. Wem aber haben wir dafür zu danken, wenn überhaupt dafür zu danken ist? Wem? Einer ihm feindlichen Partei, feindlich ihm und mir, einer Partei, der er ihren Schlachtruf genommen hat. Er hat etwas Plagiatorisches, sag' ich, er hat sich die Gedanken anderer einfach angeeignet, gute und schlechte..." (4)

This betrayal of conservatism is all the more despicable since Bismarck claimed to be a loyal servant of the King of Prussia, and a staunch defender of the principle of monarchical government:

"...hinter den altehrwürdigen Formen unseres staats-erhaltenden Prinzips, hinter der Maske des Konservatismus." (5)

Duquede points out spiritedly that with Bismarck's 'beständiger Flaggenwechsel', it was difficult to be sure what principles he stood for: was he a German nationalist or a loyal Prussian, was he a liberal or a conservative, a supporter of protestantism or catholicism?

He goes on to accuse Bismarck of lack of intellectual originality:

"Ein unendlicher Mangel an Erleuchtung, an Gedanken und vor allem an schöpferischen Ideen." (5)

a fact that Duquede regards as amply demonstrated by Bismarck's blatant plagiarism of liberal ideas; he reinforces the point by maintaining that anyone could have done what Bismarck had done with the same resources Bismarck had at his disposal:

"Er hat sich die Gedanken anderer einfach angeeignet, gute und schlechte, und sie mit Hilfe reichlich vorhandener Mittel in Taten umgesetzt. Das konnte schließlich jeder, jeder von uns: Gabler, Elimar, du ich, Reiff..." (7)

Duquede's opinion of Bismarck's achievements is so low that he hardly credits him with anything: the wars of 1864 and 1866, the victory over France and the establishment of the German Empire are all, in his view, not so much the fruits of Bismarck's contriving political genius, as of his immense good fortune:

"Der Fürst hat Glück gehabt...Glück gehabt! Allerdings. Und zwar kein einfaches und gewöhnliches, sondern ein stupendes, ein nie dagewesenes Glück. Eines, das in seiner kolossalen Größe den Mann selber wegfrisst und verschlingt.

"Und sowenig ich geneigt bin, ihm dies Glück zu mißgönnen, ich kenne keine Mißgunst, so reizt es mich doch, einen Heroenkultus an dieses Glück geknüpft zu sehen." (8)

Admiration of Bismarck which revered him as the mighty architect of the German Empire (Duquede later refers to Bismarck in this capacity ironically as 'unsern Reichsbaumeister'),⁹ was entirely misplaced; not only this, but, as Duquede warns, the fervour and intensity of devotion to Bismarck bordered on idolatry:

"Ja, meine Freunde, den Heroenkultus haben wir, und den Götterkultus werden wir haben. Bildsäulen und Denkmäler sind bereits da, und die Tempel werden kommen. Und in einem dieser Tempel wird sein Bildnis sein und Göttin Fortuna ihm zu Füßen. Aber man wird es nicht den Fortunatempel nennen, sondern den Glückstempel."
(10)

Who is this Duquede? Baron Duquede, 'ein altmärkischer Edelmann',¹¹ had been an official, 'Legationsrat' in the Prussian diplomatic service - traditionally the preserve of the aristocracy - before he had been forcibly retired by Bismarck in 1866.¹² Duquede's own version is somewhat different, he indignantly maintains:

"Ich habe den Dienst dieses mir widerstrebenden Eigennützlings(Bismarck) längst quittiert." (13)

While no reason is given for his dismissal by Bismarck, it is probably on account of his opposition, as a conservative-minded Prussian aristocrat, to Bismarck's ending of the Constitutional Conflict by a massive concession to parliament, control of the state budget, a revolutionary measure indeed! In this respect Duquede's fate, as a fictional character, bears some resemblance to that of Count Arnim who was also a member of the diplomatic service, latterly Prussian ambassador in Paris and a well-known and prominent conservative opponent of Bismarck's foreign policy towards France. Count Arnim was dismissed by Bismarck in 1874.

Duquede is characterised as a man who habitually belittles and denigrates:

"Er war über sechzig...und durfte sich, wie um anderer

"Qualitäten so auch schon um seiner Jahre willen, seinem hervorstechendsten Charakterzuge, dem des Absprechens, Verkleinerns und Verneinens, ungehindert hingeben. Daß er infolge davon, den Beinamen 'Herr Negationsrat' erhalten hatte, hatte selbstverständlich seine milzsüchtige Krakeelerei nicht zu bessern vermochte." (14)

Duquede's hostility to Bismarck dates from his own dismissal from the service by Bismarck:

"Er empörte sich über alles, am meisten über Bismarck, von dem er seit 1866, dem Jahre seiner eigenen Dienstentlassung, unaufhörlich versicherte, 'daß er (Bismarck) überschätzt werde.'" (15)

Duquede's opposition is - it is implied - part personal enmity, part irascibility, but although his opposition is motivated by resentment of Bismarck (and this in turn is linked to the way Bismarck treated him) he nevertheless represents, in the context of the novel, ideas and political values that constituted a formidable opposition to Bismarck in the 1870's, an opposition that was not, as in Duquede's case, inspired by personal feelings of hatred, but by the impression that Bismarck had compromised the principles of traditional Prussian conservatism.

Obviously Baron Duquede is a fictional character, but the question still remains as to how 'correct' or 'accurate' is the picture of conservative opposition to Bismarck that Fontane paints in the novel? Is the figure of Duquede and are his views a colourful figment of Fontane's creative imagination, or does he express views that can be said to be - historically speaking - characteristic of contemporary conservative opposition to Bismarck?

Fontane described his intentions in 'L'Adultera' as to give a picture of life in the upper classes of Berlin society in the 1870's.¹⁶ He was concerned that the picture he presented should be true to life:

"...ich bin bemüht gewesen, das Leben zu geben, wie es liegt." (17)

Contemporary critics were impressed by the detailed evocation of upper class life:

"Das Merkwürdigste bei dieser Novelle ist, daß der Verfasser dem Leser alles Interesse an der eigentlichen Verwicklung raubt, um ihn durch die Fülle der feinsten Studien aus dem Berliner Gesellschaftsleben zu entschädigen... Freilich ist der Schluß, die Gestaltung des Ehelebens der beiden Ehebrecher, eine sehr bedeutende psychologische Filigranarbeit. Aber der Hauptreiz liegt in der unvergleichlichen Schilderung des Berliner Lebens der höheren Stände." (18)

How true to life then, within his overall concern for realism, is Fontane's picture of conservative opposition? In order to answer this question we must first examine the nature of conservative opposition to Bismarck. It originated in 1866 when Bismarck brought the Constitutional Conflict between the authority of the King and the authority of Parliament to an end by accepting the principle of parliamentary control of the state budget. Many conservatives in Prussia were opposed to such concessions - and thus to Bismarck who had made them - as dangerous and a grave threat to the Prussian state, on the grounds that such concessions would lead to an increase in the political influence of the middle classes and reduce the power of the monarch and also that of the army and the civil service, both threatened with transformation into instruments of Parliament, no longer of the King. (Both the army and the civil service were incidentally bastions of the Prussian aristocracy). The further development of Bismarck's policies, especially his prominent role in the establishment of the German Empire, made many conservatives deeply suspicious of his intentions. Bismarck's adoption of the German nationalist cause signalled to them the abandonment of traditional Prussian interests while his close alliance with the national liberals in the 1870's confirmed the impression that Bismarck had allbut joined the liberal camp and was implementing their programme. Duquede, the fictional conservative puts it like this:

"Exmittierung Oesterreichs, Aufbau des Deutschen Reiches... Ekrasierung Frankreichs und Dethronisierung des Papstes! ... Wem aber haben wir dafür zu danken...? Wem? Einer ihm feindlichen Partei, feindlich ihm und mir, einer

"Partei, der er ihren Schlachtruf genommen hat. Er hat etwas Plagiatorisches, sag ich, er hat sich die Gedanken anderer einfach angeeignet..." (19)

The substance of conservative criticism of Bismarck's role as founder of the 'Deutsches Reich' is to be found here, albeit slanted towards a criticism of Bismarck's lack of originality in borrowing his political programme from his opponents. But compare Duquede's diatribe with the following passage from a letter by General Roon to Moritz von Blanckenburg, both prominent Prussian conservatives:

"Durch Bismarcks Verdeutschung à tout prix ist mir mein preußisches Programm unbrauchbar geworden; mit ihm gegen den liberalen Strom wäre allenfalls noch eine Weile gegangen; gegen beide, das geht über meine Kräfte." (20)

Duquede expresses in exaggerated manner his contempt for Bismarck's achievements:

"Das konnte schließlich jeder, jeder von uns..." (21)

Roon, in the same letter, reflects something of the disdain of conservatives for Bismarck's role:

"Die Erfolge von 1866 oder vielmehr die an diese Erfolge geknüpften Illusionen von allgemeiner Versöhnung der politischen Gegensätze haben uns das erste Bein gestellt, so daß unsere Politik ins bedenklichste Stolpern und Schwanken geraten, woraus uns zu erretten der Heldensprung von 1870/71 nicht gedient hat..." (22)

Duquede describes Bismarck's political programme as one of 'revolutionärer Radikalismus' ²³ giving superb expression to conservative objections to Bismarck's policies and strategy: his dependence on the national liberals for a working majority in the Reichstag, the appointment of liberals to key government posts in the liberal era, all this convinced many conservatives that Bismarck had embarked on a programme of radical, not to say, in the longer term, revolutionary dimensions. ²⁴ Was not the introduction of universal male suffrage a revolutionary move, an unnecessary concession to odious democratic notions? As Blanckenburg, the parliamentary leader of the conservatives feared:

"Will er dies Werk allein mit den Liberalen vollziehen, so führt es unfehlbar zur Republik." (25)

Bismarck's resolute pursual of the Kulturkampf with its extension of secular state control into areas hitherto reserved to the influence of the Church, alienated much conservative support:

"Man kann den Liberalen nicht gerecht werden, wenn man nicht ihr ganzes Programm erfüllt, und dazu gehört in erster Linie die Zerstörung der Kirche und Schule." (26)

A further point of opposition was the 'Kreisordnung' (Local Government Reform) of 1872 which was bitterly opposed by the Prussian aristocracy:

"Alvensleben schrieb dem König, die Kreisordnung drohe mit ihren revolutionären Tendenzen den Thron zu stürzen und das Königtum in eine Republik zu verwandeln." (27)

Bismarck was apparently supporting legislation that threatened to change Prussia into a republic.

The creation of the German Empire roused considerable fears among the conservatives that they would be permanently majorised by the liberals in the Empire. Blankenburg feared:

"Daß die Mehrheit des neuen Reichstages vollständig verlaskern muß, da es unmöglich ist, von dort andere Elemente zu bekommen." (28)

He feared that the liberal majority would use its power - granted by the renegade Bismarck - to reduce the army:

"Am Militäretat zu sparen und die Dienstzeit herunterzusetzen, das bleibt das Bestreben aller Liberalen.." (29)

Duquede thus expresses fairly accurately the fears of the traditional conservatives in Prussia with regard to Bismarck's policies.

Duquede accuses Bismarck of 'beständiger Flaggenwechsel',³⁰ and this too was a feature of contemporary criticism of Bismarck: what was Bismarck, a liberal or a conservative? To the conservatives he appeared a liberal, to the liberals he sometimes appeared to be a flexible conservative, at other times a stubborn right-wing conservative. Blankenburg complained:

"er (Bismarck) ..redet mit den Konservativen konservativ und mit den Liberalen liberal..." (31)

Duquede at one point in his attack on Bismarck compares Bismarck with Gengis Khan, the Mongol Emperor; Bismarck's achievements, Duquede asserts, are

"Taten mit gar keiner oder mit erheuchelter oder erborgter Idee haben etwas Rohes und Brutales, etwas Dschingis-khanartiges. Und ich wiederhole, ich hasse solche Taten." (32)

While the weight of Duquede's attack is on Bismarck's borrowed policies, the allusion to the brutality of the Mongol Emperor and the link between Bismarck and the mighty Gengis Khan touches on a further feature of conservative opposition to Bismarck, namely, on his autocratic, not to say, tyrannical exercise of political power and especially his rough handling of political opponents, including those who opposed him from the right. Blanckenburg noted:

"Ottos (d.h. Bismarcks) Herrschsucht soll seit Deinem Abgang unerträglich geworden sein, gar keinen Widerspruch duldend." (33)

Bismarck's treatment of Graf Arnim, a prominent leader of the conservative opposition, is the most outstanding example. A further hint of the association between oriental brutality and Bismarck's conduct is contained in the reference to Bismarck flying 'die Piratenflagge', the black flag of the Chinese pirates that harrassed shipping in the South China Sea.³⁴

Although no more than a play on words in the context of Duquede's tirade, the description of Bismarck's policies as 'Ein Umsatz-und Wechselgeschäft'³⁵ is a reference to a further feature of conservative criticism of Bismarck, namely his alleged abuse of his position to indulge, with the advice of his banker friend Bleichröder, in the speculative acquisition of shares. Duquede describes Bismarck as an 'Eigennützligng'³⁶ which can only refer to this aspect of conservative criticism. A series of articles in the 'Kreuzzeitung' entitled 'Ära Bleichröder - Camphausen - Delbrück', a title which gave prominence to the links between the liberal administration and banking and finance circles,

suggesting that they were the real powers in Germany in the 1870's, accused Bismarck and other members of the government of stock exchange speculation - an activity normally associated in conservative circles with Jews (Bleichröder was a Jew). In the same year (1876) the editor of the conservative 'Reichsglocke' openly charged Bismarck with granting special favours to certain property companies in return for 'financial considerations.' ³⁷

Both in substance, image and allusion Duquede's tirade against Bismarck can be regarded as giving a fairly complete and concise picture - almost a thumb-nailsketch - of the conservative opposition to Bismarck and his policies. Even this cursory comparison of the points made by Duquede and the main features of conservative opposition has indicated this clearly.

Does the Bismarck discussion serve any particular purpose in the novel? The Bismarck discussion is in itself of no greater significance within the novel than the discussion of the Spanish painter Murillo or the debate on Wagner. Fontane was concerned to paint a picture of the Berlin upper class and to evoke the intellectual atmosphere that prevailed within that class. After-dinner conversation, the forum of much debate, was the principal means of evoking such an atmosphere, and as such not merely a device but true-to-life. Fontane noted to a friend:

"Bei Wangenheims wurde vier Stunden politisiert, ohne daß die Worte: ultramontan, Carlisten, Hauptmann, Schmidt, Kullmann, auch nur ein einziges Mal genannt worden wären. Es ging immer, namenlos, ins Allgemeine hinein, unter fleißiger Heranziehung Chinas und Japans, Rußlands und Nordamerikas." (38)

We have seen how Duquede's fiery contribution to the after-dinner conversation at the home of van der Straaten, was in essence, a fairly accurate resumé of the main points of conservative opposition to Bismarck. As such, it would have fulfilled Fontane's aim of giving a largely true-to-life picture of the political views of the upper class.

Fontane was, however, not just concerned to give a correct account of the political controversy that was engaged in across the dinner table within the upper class; as much a part of the atmosphere was the style and wit of the conversation, a conversational style in which intellectual humour sparkled in the rapid to-and-fro of argument, in which the development of outrageously improbable, but highly amusing lines of argument dominated and serious discussion of the issues was subordinate. An example of this tendency for style and form to put serious discussion at risk is the beginning of the Bismarck discussion: as some exquisite Italian wine is being served, the conversation turns to the prospects for peace in Europe and to the possibility of war between France and Germany. Van der Straaten inclines to the view that war with France is imminent, Major von Gryczinski disagrees, dismissing such fears as typical stock exchange rumours and pointing out that if international conflict were imminent, then it would be a war between Russia and England, not between France and Germany. Polizeirat Reiff concurs, adding that Bismarck is primarily concerned to maintain peace in Europe and not to precipitate war.

All the points made this far in argument are serious, entirely valid points: van der Straaten's fear of war with France is no humorous aside, it is a reference to the notorious instability of relations between France and Germany in the 1870's, punctuated as the decade was by a series of war scares, culminating in the 'Krieg-in-Sicht! crisis of 1875. Speculation as to war

"...binnen heut und drei Monaten haben wir Krieg." (39) is supported in the further course of the conversation, not by reference to political developments in France and Germany as one might expect in a serious discussion of the prospects for peace, but by pointing to the indisputable fact that Prussia had always tended to get involved in wars in June when civil servants were on their annual holiday:

"Im Juni haben wir die Sache wieder fertig und wenigstens eingerührt. Es zählt jetzt zu den sogenannten berechtigten Eigentümlichkeiten preußischer Politik, allen Geheimräten, wozu, in allem was Karlsbad und Teplitz angeht, auch die Kommerzienräte gehören, ihre Brunnen- und Badekur zu verderben. Helgoland mit eingeschlossen." (40)

Not exactly a serious contribution to the discussion! but it is not intended to be, it is instead an amusing and entertainingly absurd reason why war should break out in June. Anticipating objections from Major von Gryczinski, van der Straaten hastens to add, scoring a major triumph:

"Ich bitte dich, sage nicht nein, wolle mir nicht widersprechen. Ihr, die ihr's schließlich machen müßt, erfahrt es erfahrungsgemäß immer am spätesten." (41)

He concludes: not without an air of considerable confidence:

"Irgend was Benedettihaftes wird sich doch am Ende finden lassen, und Ems liegt unter Umständen überall in der Welt." (42)

The bantering tone of the remark 'irgend was Benedettihaftes' betrays its purpose as an entertaining intellectual provocation; van der Straaten is, after all, an admirer of Bismarck and presumably not suggesting that Bismarck is busily scouring the globe for pretexts for war in time for the summer holidays: the whole picture is intended as a preposterous piece of entertainment, which is not to overlook the fact that a substantial point is also being made by van der Straaten, namely, that Bismarck's consummate skill as a diplomat includes the starting of wars at points in time favourable to Germany.

Reiff's counter-argument is in much the same vein: a valid point is made, namely that Bismarck wishes to preserve peace in Europe, but, once again, the thesis is supported by reference to a factor that obviously can have no influence whatsoever on Bismarck's decision to go to war: Reiff argues that Bismarck is most unlikely to go to war, since a fourth war would put at risk his considerable financial gains from the first three. The effect is heightened by Reiff's (Fontane's) use of gambling terminology:

"Ich wette, daß er nicht Lust hat, seinen hochaufgespeicherten Doppelschatz immer wieder auf die Kriegskarte zu setzen. Er gewann 1864 - nur eine Kleinigkeit - ,

"doublierte 1866 und triplierte 1870, aber er wird sich hüten, sich auf ein six-le-va einzulassen." (43)

The image of Bismarck, not as statesman, but as gambler, increasing his stakes from war to war until he has amassed enough of a fortune to become peace-loving and cautious is an equally irrelevant and light-hearted rejoinder to van der Straaten's argument about civil servants. Reiff's point is clinched by his allusion to the tale of the 'Fischer un sine Fru' with its risqué implications.⁴⁴

Duquede's image of Bismarck as the 'Glücks-Tempelherr'⁴⁵ whose graven image is installed in temples up and down the land - an image that is developed quite logically from his remarks on the role of luck in Bismarck's achievements - is also an elaborate intellectual edifice which, while it adds nothing of consequence to the actual argument, is a beautifully sustained image. The idea is far-fetched and highly amusing; here we have exaggeration, grotesque over-statement as a principle of intellectualised entertainment.

Other images are employed in the course of the conversation with the same intention: Bismarck is described as a

"Kanonier mit ewig brennender Lunte..., jeden Augenblick bereit, das Kruppsche Monstregeschütz eines europäischen Krieges auf gut Glück hin abzufeuern." (46)

This is a cartoon-like image. The ironic, mock-heavy use of 'Fremdwörter' constructions

"Exmittierung Österreichs..., Ekrasierung Frankreichs und Dethronisierung des Papstes!" (47)

add to the humorous tone of the conversation, while Duquede's introduction of exotic references to Gengis Khan and the black flag of Chinese pirates are points of high melodrama.

The Bismarck discussion is a combination of a number of serious points made about Bismarck and a larger number of mock points introduced as light relief. The presentation of a number of very substantial political arguments is thus embedded in a series of outrageous witty images and notions whose sole purpose is repartee. The humour of these images derives from the glaring

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discrepancy between the mock arguments being advanced and the real situation. Thus, while a major part of the Bismarck discussion is taken up with intellectual jousting, the points correspond in substance to various aspects of the contemporary political scene. Duquede's attack on Bismarck - his more lurid images aside - reflect fairly accurately the main features of right-wing conservative opposition to Bismarck in the 1870's.⁴⁸

Can any conclusions be drawn from the Bismarck discussion in 'L'Adultera' about Fontane's own attitude to Bismarck? Does the discussion throw any light on his own views? There is no obvious link between Fontane's largely positive appreciation of Bismarck in the 1880's and the prominence given to Duquede as a voluble exponent of conservative opposition to Bismarck. There is no reason to think that Fontane agreed or sympathised with Duquede's political views, although very much later in life he was to express his own objections to Bismarck in much the same way as Duquede.

b. Cécile (1887)

Bismarck is the main topic of conversation at a dinner party given at the home of Pierre von St. Arnaud, a prematurely retired Prussian army colonel,⁴⁹ and attended by a small, but select number of friends: Frau Baronin von Shatterlöv, General von Rossow, Kriegsministerialoberst von Kraczenski, Herr von Leslie-Gordon (an army engineer), Geheimrat Hedemeyer and Sanitätsrat Wandelstern. The company is a cross-section of the Prussian aristocracy in the civil administration and the military establishment with the addition of two bourgeois elements Hedemeyer and Wandelstern, all present are conservatives and all are united in their opposition to Bismarck:

"Beinah alle waren Frondeurs, Träger einer Opposition quand meme, die sich gegen Armee und Ministerium und gelegentlich auch gegen das Hohenzollerntum selbst richtete." (50)

Fontane's description of the 'St. Arnaudschen Kreis' is not strikingly positive:

"Gordon nahm an und war nicht ohne Neugier, bei dieser Gelegenheit den St. Arnaudschen Kreis näher kennen zu lernen. Was er, außer dem Hofprediger, bis dahin gesehen hatte, war nichts Hervorragendes gewesen, ziemlich sonderbare Leute, die sich allenfalls durch Namen und gesellschaftlich sichere Haltung, aber wenig durch Klugheit und fast noch weniger durch Liebenswürdigkeit ausgezeichnet hatten." (51)

Sanitätsrat Wandelstern's opposition to Bismarck - it is suggested - is inspired chiefly by his hatred of Schweningen Bismarck's personal physician (professional jealousy?)⁵² while both St. Arnaud and Hedemeyer are portrayed as motivated by personal grudges in their opposition to Bismarck (both were dismissed - in effect - the one from the army, the other from the civil service). The impression created is thus one of a group of - almost professional - malcontents.

The conversation is monopolised by two figures, Geheimrat Hedemeyer and General von Rossow, both lively opponents of Bismarck, though each from different points of view: Hedemeyer represents liberal opposition, while von Rossow represents conservative opposition to Bismarck. As such, these two figures

stand for important contrasting currents of contemporary opposition to Bismarck.

Hedemeyer was dismissed from the Prussian civil service in the 1860's

"...schon unter Mühlner kaltgestellt." (53)

probably on account of his outspoken anti-catholic views. As a victim of Bismarck's policy of removing uncooperative political opponents from within the civil service - suffering therefore the same fate as that other opponent of Bismarck, Legationsrat Duquede - Hedemeyer's opposition is not without its personal dimension. Equally von Rossow's opposition is depicted as motivated by personal enmity

"...seine vom Ärger diktierte Beredsamkeit." (54)

(While von Rossow has not been affected by Bismarck's 'Personalpolitik', he did nevertheless object very strongly to the fact that Bismarck systematically preferred outsiders 'Fremde' for positions of importance in the army administration, thus discriminating against those from his own background and class, namely, the Prussian aristocracy.) Taking his cue from a passing reference to the inscription on a stone column at Herzburg 'Nach Kanossa gehen wir nicht' (the actual topic under discussion at this juncture is the quality of the loach served at a certain hotel at Herzburg) Hedemeyer launches into a fiery ('Ich hasse das') and protracted tirade against Bismarck. Bismarck's chief crime, in Hedemeyer's eyes, is that he abandoned the struggle against the evil forces of ultramontane catholicism (Kulturkampf) and has thus betrayed the great principles of protestantism: freedom of thought and conscience. Not only had the struggle been abandoned, but Bismarck is actually cooperating with the catholics in parliament:

"Nach Kanossa gehen wir nicht! O nein, wir gehen nicht, aber wir laufen, wir rennen und jagen dem Ziele zu und überliefern einer beliebigen und beständig wechselnden Tagesfrage zuliebe die große Lebensfrage des Staats an unsern Todfeind. Die große Lebensfrage des Staats ist unsere protestantische Freiheit, die Freiheit der Geister." (55)

Hedemeyer has a high regard for Falk, chiefly responsible for the anti-catholic measures associated with the Kulturkampf:

"Ein Wunder, daß Falk mit einem blauen Auge davongekommen ist, er, der einzige, der den Blick für die Notlage des Landes hatte, der einzige, der retten konnte." (56)

(Falk was later dismissed by Bismarck to make way for a rapprochement with the Catholic Church.)

Hedemeyer interprets Bismarck's abandonment of the Kulturkampf as a symptom of Bismarck's more basic lack of principle, as a move calculated to gain momentary political advantage:

"Es sind das die natürlichen Folgen der Prinzipienlosigkeit oder, was dasselbe sagen will, einer Politik von heut auf morgen, des Gesetzmachens ad hoc. Ich hasse das. ... Ich hasse das...mehr noch, ich verachte das." (57)

Bismarck appears prepared - as Hedemeyer sees it - to sacrifice the very principles upon which the Prussian state is founded, freedom of thought and conscience; this Hedemeyer cannot forgive. (General von Rossow has, in contrast, very different views on the vital question of the survival of the Prussian state.)⁵⁸ Hedemeyer represents the liberalism of a by-gone age, of 'Vormärz', of Fontane's youth with its grand vision of universal progress towards freedom, a progress in which the Germanic nations of Europe were seen as the van-guard and champions of that freedom, as was demonstrated at the time of the Reformation when they threw off the hated tyranny of Popish Rome and established freedom of thought and conscience. Hedemeyer, too, refers to 'protestantische Freiheit' meaning that measure of liberation of man's spirit that protestantism had achieved whereas the Roman Catholic church symbolised the continued subservience of the individual conscience to the dogma and authority of the Church.⁵⁹ The German people were seen, in this historical perspective, as laying claim once more in their struggle for freedom to the Germanic freedoms of their ancestors. Hedemeyer has a picture of the German people as essentially a freedom-loving people, ill-disposed to submit for long to

tyranny, a view common among liberal thinkers in the 'Vormärz' period:

"Wir sind kein Volk, das seiner Natur und Geschichte nach einen Dalai-Lama ertragen kann..." (60)

Hedemeyer asserts. His political vocabulary is that of the 1830's and 40's inspired by the verse of Herwegh:

"Und was wir am willfährigsten opfern, das ist die freie Meinung, trotzdem keiner unter uns Älteren ist, der nicht mit Herwegh für den 'Flügelschlag der freien Seele' geschwärmt hätte. Wie gut das klingt! Aber haben wir diesen Flügelschlag? Haben wir diese freie Seele?"(61)

This pre-1848 view of the German political character is belied, as Hedemeyer regrets, by current attitudes, more especially to the figure of Bismarck:

"Wir haben einen Dalai-Lama, dessen Schöpfungen - um nicht zuzugagen Hervorbringungen - wir mit einer Art Inbrunst anbeten. Rund heraus, wir schwelgen in einem unausgesetzten Götzen- und Opferdienst." (62)

The German nation has sacrificed its ancient love of freedom and turned to idolatry; admiration for Bismarck and his achievements have reached the proportions of a religious cult and Bismarck is likened to an oriental demigod, the Dalai-Lama, a view also expressed by Duquede.⁶³ All political power is concentrated in the person of Bismarck, a power that is secured by the abdication on the part of the public of 'die freie Meinung'. Hedemeyer laments the decline of old liberal ideas, the absolute power of Bismarck and the Bismarck cult:

"Was wir haben, heißt Omnipotenz. Nicht die des Staates, die nicht nur hinzunehmen, die sogar zu rühmen, ja, die das einzig Richtige wäre - nein, wir haben die Omnipotenz eines Einzelnen." (64)

This unique concentration of power in Bismarck's hands, 'die Diktatur Bismarcks'⁶⁵ meant that Bismarck was able unchecked to bend the administration to his own purposes with catastrophic consequences:

"Aber soviel bleibt: Übergriffe sind zu verzeichnen, Übergriffe nach allen Seiten hin, und so viel Übergriffe, so viel Fehlgriffe." (66)

a point that Fontane echoes in a letter to Friedländer:

"Bei diesem rücksichtslosen Vorgehen trifft er's natürlich mal... Man hat das Gefühl, er glaubt sich, gottgleich, alles erlauben zu dürfen..." (67)

Hedemeyer claims that Bismarck's dictatorial exercise of power dates from the Arnim trial.

Count Harry von Arnim was Prussian ambassador in Paris, a prominent and able conservative opponent of Bismarck's foreign policy and feared by Bismarck as a potential political rival, an alternative Chancellor to himself. Bismarck's success in having Count Arnim branded as a traitor and having him brought to trial (1874) is, for Hedemeyer, the beginning of a fateful development in Germany. Encouraged by his success in the Arnim case, Bismarck proceeded - so Hedemeyer's interpretation - to establish himself as virtual dictator by ruthless exploitation of his position to remove all known opponents, measures which Hedemeyer refers to as 'Übergriffe, so viel Fehlgriffe'.⁶⁸

"Freilich wer diesen Dingen, direkt oder indirekt, durch Jahrzehnte hin nahegestanden hat, der sah es kommen, dem blutete seit langem das Herz über ein System des Feilschens und kleiner Behandlung großer Fragen. Und wo die Wurzel? Womit begann es? Es begann, als man, Arnims kluge Wortend mißachtend, einen Hochverräter aus ihm stempeln wollte, bloß weil ein Brief und ein Rohrstuhl fehlte." (69)

Arnim had been accused of removing confidential state papers for his own personal - and political - use.⁷⁰ To Hedemeyer Arnim's only crime is that he stood up for what he believed in and dared to express his views openly in opposition to Bismarck, exercising the rights of a free man:

"Was aber fehlte, war kein Brief und kein Rohrstuhl, sondern einfach Unterwerfung. Daran gebricht es. Arnim hatte den Mut seiner Meinung, das war alles, das war sein Verbrechen, das allein. Aber wenn es erst dahin gekommen ist, meine Herren, daß jede freie Meinung im Lande Preußen Hochverrat bedeutet, so sind wir alle Hochverräter, alle samt und sonders." (71)

Hedemeyer abstracts the act of opposition to Bismarck from the circumstances (Arnim's differences with Bismarck over policy towards France) and regards the act itself as significant, as an act of opposition. Arnim with his courageous opposition to

Bismarck takes on an almost symbolic significance: Arnim becomes the symbol of that protestant freedom of thought and conscientious objection, of the 'Flügel Schlag der freien Seele' whose demise under Bismarck Hedemeyer deplures so much. Ironically Arnim, the conservative Prussian aristocrat becomes the symbol of free speech and the right to opposition under Bismarck. He represents a challenge to Bismarck's authority within Germany that Hedemeyer feels is so lacking. He feels that if only there had been more men like Arnim who were prepared to stand up to Bismarck, then the present parlous state of affairs would never have evolved. Bismarck would not have been able to establish such control over the administration and would thus have been prevented, by an independent civil service, from pursuing policies which he, Hedemeyer, considers catastrophic. The ousting and ostracisation of Arnim as leader of the conservatives was the beginning of Bismarck's 'Omnipotenz'; Arnim's defeat spelt the end of any effective opposition to Bismarck.

The significance which Hedemeyer attaches to Arnim's opposition to Bismarck is not without its problematic: Hedemeyer's own political position is that of the liberal, his belief in the cardinal value of liberty, in freedom of thought, speech and conscience mark him out as representing, albeit within the Prussian context, the main current of European liberalism. Yet, Hedemeyer, who enthused with Herwegh, looks to Arnim, the Prussian conservative, to save Germany from Bismarck. It is curious that Hedemeyer makes no mention of the liberal opposition, he does not date the beginnings of Bismarck's 'Omnipotenz' from the failure of the liberal opposition, it simply does not figure, it is of no consequence. Hedemeyer the liberal has apparently no confidence in liberal opposition to Bismarck, he has lost faith in the ability of organised liberals to control Bismarck. In this situation he looks to such figures as von Arnim: right-wing Prussian conservative opposition to Bismarck becomes the only hope for restraint, even removal, of Bismarck. The protestant conservatives become, in their

opposition to Bismarck, the only defence of Hedemeyer's protestant liberalism.

Prussian conservatives opposed Bismarck for a variety of reasons, the chief of these being the belief that he had betrayed the bedrock principles of Prussian conservatism by adopting the political goals of his opponents, the national liberals. The prominence of certain liberal appointments made by Bismarck in the liberal era (most notably Delbrück) created the impression among conservatives that Bismarck was engaged in a plot to advance 'bourgeois' persons and deprive the Prussian aristocracy of their traditional positions within the army and the civil service. Their opposition to Bismarck was anti-bourgeois, anti-liberal, in defence of conservative aristocratic privilege and the principle of monarchical government. This placed Hedemeyer in a dilemma: how was this opposition, inspired by largely sectional interests and decidedly anti-liberal sentiments, to serve the more general purpose of securing those protestant liberties that Hedemeyer believed in? If the conservative fronde associated with Arnim had been successful and had deposed Bismarck, installing Arnim as Chancellor, then the prospects for a liberal development in Germany would have been, indeed, gloomy. General von Rossow, representing the conservative opposition to Bismarck, that is to say, those forces to whom Hedemeyer looked for secur, rejects the liberalism of Hedemeyer out of hand. He stands for the patriarchal, authoritarian, feudal corporate state, the very antithesis of Hedemeyer's liberalism.⁷² Such is Hedemeyer's dilemma, a dilemma that is not spelt out in the novel, but which is implicit in the confrontation of Hedemeyer's and von Rossow's views of the state.

Hedemeyer's dilemma is, in part, a reflection of Fontane's own dilemma with regard to Bismarck. In the course of the 1880's Fontane came to realise that Bismarck's influence on events in Germany, his autocratic and increasingly arbitrary exercise of political power was no longer to the benefit of Germany. His control of power had given rise to a number of disturbing trends, more particularly, Fontane

was concerned at the unscrupulous way Bismarck used his power to pursue and destroy political opponents, real, potential or imaginary, and to suppress unwelcome opposition from whatever quarter. He was concerned at the demise of 'free speech' and the spread of 'Byzantinismus' (reverential loyalty, subservience to authority). He thus came to appreciate the positive need for restraints on Bismarck. This is reflected in his evolving attitude to the figure of Count Harry von Arnim.⁷⁴ Like Hedemeyer, liberal opposition to Bismarck did not count for very much with Fontane; he tended to dismiss as too negative and too sterile the opposition of the Progressives, while the socialists were as yet too weak, so that by a process of elimination conservative opposition to Bismarck came to represent for Fontane - as for Hedemeyer - the only feasible alternative to Bismarck.

Fontane looked to contemporary conservative opposition as an effective and necessary counter-balance to Bismarck's influence. With this new-found realisation of the need for opposition to Bismarck went an interest in, and a search for, historical precedents of aristocratic opposition to the authority of the Prussian state.⁷⁵ Fontane deals at length, and in a very positive manner, with the Quitzow rebellion in his book 'Fünf Schlösser', reflecting his view that opposition and rebellion by the aristocracy to the authority of the central power was an entirely healthy phenomenon.⁷⁶ Transposed to the contemporary situation this would mean that Fontane hoped to encourage the healthy tradition of opposition to centralism, that is to say, of the Prussian conservatives to Bismarck's 'Omnipotenz'.

Yet, here too, Fontane found himself in a dilemma, with which he was to struggle for many years: the very class in which he placed most hopes of opposition and leadership, the Prussian gentry, seemed determined to put sectional interest and the defence of their privilege before the common weal. If they succeeded in curbing Bismarck, it would probably mean a period of renewed conservative reaction. Fontane ultimately realised

that any hope of change emanating from the conservative propertied class, revolution from above, was vain.

The figure of Hedemeyer represents the earlier stage of Fontane's own political evolution in the 1880's, with his growing concern at Bismarck's misuse of power and the search for feasible opposition to Bismarck as a counter-weight. Yet the dilemma of relying on conservatives to defend liberal values is not perceived by Hedemeyer; he betrays a marked lack of awareness of the ideology and vested interest that informed the opposition of many Prussian conservatives to Bismarck. He assumes that all present at the dinner party have - as he had - enthused for Herwegh's political lyrics:

"...trotzdem keiner unter uns Älteren ist, der nicht mit Herwegh für den 'Flügelschlag der freien Seele' geschwärmt hätte." (77)

He tends to see opposition to Bismarck as something positive regardless of the political motives. Opposition is thus abstracted and viewed as something in isolation from other factors. Hedemeyer seems blithely unaware that the very same conservatives who in their opposition to Bismarck he sees as expressing the hatred of the German people for tyranny, would be quite prepared to suppress precisely those liberties that Hedemeyer feels are so threatened by Bismarck. Fontane is plainly very aware of the dilemma, as is clear from his portrayal of General von Rossow as militantly anti-liberal.⁷⁸ It was a dilemma which, in the early 1880's reflected Fontane's own position, a dilemma which, however, he resolved by realising that the conservative opposition was no answer to the problem of Bismarck's power.

The figure of Hedemeyer does, however, reflect a more enduring feature of Fontane's perception of political developments, that is, his tendency to under-estimate the importance of ideology, the question of the substance and content of a particular world view as distinct from political style. Fontane tended to judge political phenomena on their more general character and style, rather than on an examination of

their ideology or political programme. He approved of certain political phenomena because he sympathised with the style and character, not necessarily because he agreed with the more specific political or ideological content involved. At one point Fontane lists those classes of opposition to the status quo that he regarded as valid (1894) and included in his list both the Junker and the socialist opposition:

"Die Junker-, die Zentrums- und die sozialdemokratische Opposition lasse ich mir gefallen, da ist Muck drin; die fortschrittliche Opposition, die alles von der Existenz eines 'Paragraphen', des Entsetzlichsten, was es gibt, abhängig macht, ist einfach ridikül." (79)

The point that Fontane is making is that he approves of the spirited style and manner of the opposition of these parties ('da ist Muck drin'), whereas he is irritated by the petty-fogging legalistic opposition of the Progressive Party. Fontane can thus approve of opposition that encompasses two mutually hostile and exclusive ideologies, conservatism and socialism. Fontane makes a similar comment on the role of the National Liberals which indicates the extent to which Fontane placed importance on manner and style and general character and not on the actual political content:

"Die Tunnel-Leute waren, wie die meisten gebildeten Preußen, von einer im wesentlichen auf das national-liberale Programm hinauslaufenden Gesinnung, und bis auf diesen Tag ist es mir unerklärlich geblieben, daß, mit Ausnahme kurzer Zeitläufte, diese große politische Gruppe keine größere Rolle gespielt und sich nicht siegreicher als staatsbestimmende Macht etabliert hat. Es hat dies nach meinen Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen weniger - wenn überhaupt - an den Prinzipien unseres deutschen Whiggismus gelegen als an dem Ton, in dem diese Prinzipien vorgetragen wurden. Der Fortschritt ist auch rechthaberisch doktrinär, aber er vertritt mehr den Doktrinarismus eines rabiaten Konventiklers als den eines geistig und moralisch mehr oder weniger in Hochmut verstrickten Besserwissers, und das Hochmütige verletzt nun mal mehr als das Rabiate. Politiker mögen diese Sätze belächeln, es wird ihrer aber auch geben, die etwas Richtiges darin erkennen." (80)

Fontane explains the failure of the National Liberals in terms of their manner and their approach.

Fontane's tendency to equate a few fundamental ideas and impressions with the substance of a political movement is illustrated by his remarks to James Morris, his long-standing English friend, about the Labour movement in Britain.⁸¹ Fontane's reaction to the Labour Leader is in terms of his over-all impression, his impression that here everything was 'echter, wahrer, lebensvoller', the workers 'packen alles neu an' and have 'nicht nur neue Ziele, sondern auch neue Wege.' The Times in contrast is 'tot und eingefroren', 'keine neuen Ideen, kein neuer Stil', whereas the Leader breaks through the 'Schablone'. Vitality and newness, a break with convention and tradition, are the two basic ideas that Fontane associated with the socialism of Keir Hardie's Labour Leader. At no point does Fontane refer to specific aims or goals which he agrees with, at no point does he discuss the specific issues that were raised in the journal, or relate them to the Labour movement in Germany. Socialism, the Labour movement, political issues do not figure in his comments at all; he is not concerned with the details of issues, for him 'new ideas', even 'novel presentation' ('In dem Leader ist die Schablone durchbrochen') come to represent 'das Neue'.

The Labour movement came to symbolise for Fontane, in rather abstract and general terms, the new era, its aspirations and hopes, as opposed to the present era which he described as 'altbacken' and 'tot'. Fontane did not identify closely with the aims of the socialist parties, but he did sympathise strongly with their opposition to what he regarded as a stagnant, morally decadent and obsolete social order. In much the same way, Hedemeyer does not identify closely with the aims of the conservative opposition to Bismarck (indeed, he seems hardly to have perceived these aims clearly) but supported whole-heartedly the idea of opposition to Bismarck by conservatives.

Hedemeyer not only represents certain aspects of Fontane's own political development, but reflects a certain tendency on the part of Fontane to overlook ideological content in

political views, a tendency, too, to somewhat idealised generalisations. Fontane, who felt so ill at ease with abstractions, tended to impute - in a rather abstract way - qualities to particular political groupings so that these groupings then came to represent in a very generalised manner certain values or principles. Conservatism in the 1860's had represented for Fontane an ethical outlook linked to the concept of the cultured gentleman, while now in the 1890's socialism came to represent the 'new era' that would sweep away the old obsolete order.

Hedemeyer represents liberal protestant opposition to Bismarck, while General von Rossow represents conservative Prussian opposition to Bismarck, opposition to Bismarck from within his own class the Prussian aristocracy. The only thing they have in common is their opposition to Bismarck whom they both regard as having betrayed essential Prussian traditions (in this sense they are also both Prussian particularists) and yet their opposition arises from diametrically opposed political philosophies.

General von Rossow dismisses Hedemeyer's militant liberal protestantism as irrelevant to the major questions of the day. whereas for Hedemeyer 'unsere protestantische Freiheit, die Freiheit der Geister' is the 'große Lebensfrage', for General von Rossow it is no more than a 'Redensart'⁸²

"Und das, mein lieber Hedemeyer, ist genau das, was ich die protestantische Freiheit der Geister nenne. Wir können in die Kirche gehen und nicht in die Kirche gehen und jeder auf seine Fassung selig werden. Ja, meine Freunde, so war es immer im Lande Preußen, und so wird es auch bleiben, trotz allem Kanossa-Gerede. Das Interesse hält immer gleichen Schritt mit der Angst, und Angst ist noch nicht da. Jedenfalls ist es keine Frage, daran die Welt hängt oder auch nur der Staat." (83)

For General von Rossow the major issue of the day is not catholicism or protestantism or anything to do with religion; the key question is the survival of the 'state', the 'state' is his basic point of reference:

"Aber was soll das dem Staat. Der verlangt andres." (84)
he remarks, dismissing parliamentarism. He wishes to preserve

the Prussian state as established by Frederick the Great, a state which was founded on the army and militarist traditions:

"(Der Staat) hängt an was ganz anderem. 'Die Welt ruht nicht sicherer auf den Schultern des Atlas, als der preußische Staat auf den Schultern seiner Armee...', so lautete das friderizianische Wort, und das ist die Frage, worauf es ankommt. Da, meine Herrschaften, liegt Tod und Leben. Der Unteroffizier, der Gefreite, die haben eine Bedeutung, nicht der Küster und der Schulmeister; der Staboffizier hat eine Bedeutung, nicht der Konsistorialrat." (85)

Just as the Prussian army is the 'rocher de bronze' on which the Prussian state was founded, so the Prussian aristocracy is the back-bone of the officer corps. The Prussian aristocracy looked on the officer corps as its own reserve; Bismarck, von Rossow contends, is betraying this crucial principle, the principle upon which Frederick the Great had built Prussia into a major power. Bismarck was abandoning this longstanding Prussian tradition, thus jeopardising the survival of the 'state':

"Ich habe keine Veranlassung, damit zurückzuhalten und aus meinem Herzen eine Mördergrube zu machen. Ich meine das Kabinett, das sich's zur Aufgabe zu stellen scheint, mit den Traditionen der Armee zu brechen. Wenn ich von der Armee spreche, spreche ich selbstverständlich von der friderizianischen Armee." (86)

Bismarck(referred to here obliquely as 'das Kabinett') is seen as undermining the central role of the Prussian aristocracy within the Prussian state by depriving it systematically of its privileged access to the officer corps, by replacing the traditional principle of an officer corps recruited from the aristocratic families of Prussia who, over centuries, had been linked to the Prussian monarchy by bonds of service and sacrifice, by the principle of 'Talent und Wissen', a decidedly bourgeois principle:

"Der Chef(i.e. Bismarck), trotz altem livländischen Adel, der hingehen mag, ist, von meinem Standpunkt aus, ein homo novus, der der unglückseligen Anschauung von der geistigen Bedeutung der Offiziere huldigt. Alles Unsinn. Wissen und Talent ruinieren nur, weil sie bloß den Dünkel großziehen. Berlei Allotria sind gut für Professoren, Advokaten und Zungendrescher, überhaupt für alle die, die sich Parlamentarier nennen. Aber was soll das dem Staat? Der verlangt andres. Auf die

"Gesinnung kommt es an, auf das Gefühl der Zusammengehörigkeit mit dem Stammlande, das nur die haben, die schon am Cremmer Damm und bei Ketzler-Angermünde waren. Aber das wird jetzt übersehen, übersehen in einer mir ganz unbegreiflichen Weise. Denn die höhere Disziplin ist lediglich eine Frage der Loyalität." (87)

He stresses:

"Was uns heutzutage fehlt, und was wir brauchen wie das liebe Brot, das sind alte Familien und alte Namen aus den Stammprovinzen. Aber nicht Fremde..." (88)

von Rossow re-asserts the indispensable role of the Prussian aristocracy as a feudal warrior caste⁸⁹ and administrative elite, in a situation where he feels that the privileges of his class are being wittled away by the pernicious influence of Bismarck who is seen as attacking the very fabric and structure of the Prussian state. This Bismarck was doing by appointing his own creatures, recruited from outside the ranks of the aristocracy - von Rossow refers to them as 'Fremde' - to posts of importance, thus systematically reducing the influence of the old-established families in Prussia within the apparatus of the state.

Although he is not mentioned by name, it is probable from the context that this section refers to the measures Bismarck took against Count von Arnim, the von Arnims being one of the oldest and most respected families in Prussia. On this point both Hedemeyer and von Rossow agree: while Hedemeyer talks of

"...Übergriffe..., Übergriffe nach allen Seiten hin, so viel Übergriffe, so viel Fehlgriffe." (90)

von Rossow complains

"...unter welchen Mißgriffen und Schädigungen man zur Besetzung maßgebendster Stellen schreitet. Ich meine vom Generalmajor aufwärts. Alles, was sich dabei 'höherer Gesichtspunkt' nennt, ist Dummheit oder Verrantheit oder Willkür. Und in manchen Fällen auch einfach Klüngel und Clique." (91)

Fontane seems to have been especially alive to that brand of opposition to Bismarck that was provoked by his efforts to extend his control over all branches of the administration. Such attempts aroused considerable resentment against Bismarck with the conservative officials, those most directly effected.⁹²

Fontane made this aspect of Bismarck's regime the subject of a short narrative piece entitled 'Nach der Sommerfrische' (1880) in which the 'hero' Hofrat Gottgetreu - the model conservative civil servant - is evidently very proud of the fact that his department has been able to withstand attempts by Bismarck to absorb them, bring them under his control. Gottgetreu regards himself and his colleagues as maintaining well-tryed and well-established civil service traditions against the innovator Bismarck:

"Ja, meine Teure, keinem anderen Zweige der Verwaltung möcht' ich angehören; es ist der einzige, darin noch die Traditionen einer alten und besseren Zeit lebendig sind, ebenso der einzige, mein' ich, an dessen Aufsaugung und Einverleibung von seiten des Fürsten (Bismarck) noch nicht gedacht worden ist." (93)

Bismarck was certainly conscious of the need to mould the administration to his own designs; this he did by placing his own protegees in important positions.⁹⁴

General von Rossow can therefore be considered to represent the opposition of the Prussian military establishment which was resentful of the way in which Bismarck - the 'homo novus' - claimed authority over the General Staff in the name of the 'Kabinett' (a parliamentary institution!) and gave preference in his appointments to outsiders who were not members of old-established Prussian aristocratic families. Von Rossow stands in that tradition of militant anti-parliamentarism⁹⁵ and anti-liberalism

"Kanossa hin, Kanossa her. Preßfreiheit, Redefreiheit, Gewissensfreiheit, alles Unsinn, alles Ballast, von dem wir eher zu viel als zu wenig haben." (96)

a tradition that was to play a fateful role in the demise of the Weimar Republic.⁹⁷

c. Irrungen, Wirrungen (1888)

As in previous novels, so too in 'Irrungen, Wirrungen' there is a conservative Prussian aristocrat Baron Osten von Wietzendorf by name, who is notorious for his hostility to Bismarck:

"Ist doch derselbe, der mit Bismarck auf dem Kriegsfuß steht." N III p.123

Fontane's description of 'Onkel Osten', as given indirectly through the comments of Leutnant von Wedell, are, however, entirely positive:

"Charmanter alter Herr und Bon-Garcon, aber freilich auch Pfiffikus." (99)

Over supper - lobster and champagne - at Hillers, one of Berlin's most exclusive restaurants ¹⁰⁰, Onkel Osten, who is entertaining his nephew Botho von Rienäcker, implies in the course of enthusing about the army that it was the army that played the decisive role in the creation of the German Empire:

"Mein Rittmeister war Manteuffel, derselbe, dem wir alles verdanken, der uns die Armee gemacht hat und mit der Armee den Sieg." (101)

Botho's luke-warm reply

"Gewiß, man kann es sagen." (102)

provokes Osten, by the implied negation, into an angry attack on the idea that Bismarck created the German Empire single-handed, since this is what he believes is implied by Botho's 'Gewiß, man kann es sagen':

"Und ich weiß, worauf das alles hinaus will. Es will andeuten, daß ein gewisser Kürassieroffizier aus der Reserve, der im übrigen mit nichts in Reserve gehalten hat, am wenigsten mit revolutionären Maßnahmen, es will andeuten, sag ich, daß ein gewisser Halberstädter mit schwefelgelbem Kragen eigentlich auch St. Privat allerpersönlichst gestürmt und um Sedan herum den großen Zirkel gezogen hat. Botho, damit darfst du mir nicht kommen." (103)

Osten is angered by what he regards as the completely unjustified reputation Bismarck had acquired as founder and architect of the German Empire, a fame that has degenerated in Osten's opinion into vulgar hero-worship:

"Ich kann diesen Kultus nicht leiden." (108)

thus echoing the sentiments of Legationsrat Duquede in 'L'Adultera'.

The establishment of the German Empire is, on the contrary, an achievement primarily of the army that created the conditions for the unification of Germany by its victory over France. Osten regards Bismarck as no more than a very superior pen-pusher, admitting wryly that he was, however, very good at writing dispatches, a reference to his modifications in the text of the dispatch from Bad Ems which was generally accredited with having provoked the French government into declaring war on Prussia.

"Er (Bismarck) war ein Referendar und hat auf der Potsdamer Regierung gearbeitet, sogar unter dem alten Meding, der nie gut auf ihn zu sprechen war, ich weiß das, und hat eigentlich nichts gelernt, als Depeschen schreiben. Soviel will ich ihm lassen, das versteht er, oder mit anderen Worten: er ist ein Federfuchser." (105)

It was, Osten goes on, the army that has made Prussia great, not the bureaucrats like Bismarck:

"Aber nicht die Federfuchser haben Preußen groß gemacht. War der bei Fehrbellin ein Federfuchser? War der bei Leuthen ein Federfuchser? War Blücher ein Federfuchser oder Yorck? Hier sitzt die preußische Feder." (106)

Not only does Bismarck credit himself with achievements that belong more legitimately to the army, but, as Osten continues, Bismarck is a renegade, a one-time Prussian conservative who, having reached a position of power, now turns against his former allies and friends, against his own class:

"Er stößt die Leiter um, drauf er emporgestiegen." (107)

Bismarck even seeks to suppress the ultra-conservative 'Kreuzzeitung' of which he, Bismarck, was one of the original founders, such is the extent of his betrayal of the cause of Prussian conservatism.¹⁰⁸ Bismarck's most notable act of treachery was the introduction of universal male suffrage, a measure that could only help the enemies of the state and encourage the forces of revolution.¹⁰⁹ In short, Bismarck

"...ruiniert uns..." (110)

Osten is convinced that Bismarck has nothing but contempt for the Prussian aristocracy as evidenced by his malicious attempts to rid himself of conservative opposition from that quarter by using the courts:

"...er denkt klein von uns, er sagt uns Sottisen, und wenn

"ihm der Sinn danach steht, verklagt er uns auf Diebstahl oder Unterschlagung und schickt uns auf die Festung. Ach, was sag ich, auf die Festung, Festung ist für anständige Leute, nein, ins Landarmenhaus schickt er uns, um Wolle zu zupfen..." (111)

Thus Osten brings up the Arnim affair, one of the most notorious examples of Bismarck's use of the courts to suppress opposition from members of the Prussian aristocracy. He dismisses as an insult to one of the oldest families in Prussia Bismarck's accusations of treason brought against Harry von Arnim; in Osten's opinion von Arnim was an aristocrat whose loyalty to the throne was undisputed:

"Ist es nicht so, daß man sich als ein Märkischer von Adel aus reiner Edelmannsempörung einen Hochverratsprozeß auf den Leib reden möchte? Solchen Mann(i.e. Arnim)... aus unsrer besten Familie...vornehmer als die Bismarcks und so viele für Thron und Hohenzollern gefallen, daß man eine ganze Leibkompagnie daraus formieren könnte, Leibkompagnie mit Blechmützen und der Boitzenburger kommandiert sie. Ja, meine Herren. Und solcher Familie solchen Affront." (112)

In Osten's view the charges are ridiculous:

"Unterschlagung, Indiskretion, Bruch von Amtsgeheimnis. Ich bitte Sie, fehlt nur noch Kindsmord und Vergehen gegen die Sittlichkeit, und wahrhaftig, es bleibt verwunderlich genug, daß nicht auch das noch herausgedrückt worden ist." (113)

The figure of Baron Osten von Wietzendorf is by far the most positive and sympathetically drawn anti-Bismarck figure in any of Fontane's novels.

II : The 'Arnim' and 'Eulenburg' affairs

a. The figure of Graf Arnim in 'Cécile' and 'Irrungen, Wirrungen'

In both novels the case of Graf Arnim is cited by opponents of Bismarck as an example of Bismarck's ruthless use of his 'Omnipotenz': in 'Cécile' the liberal Hedemeyer sees the 'defeat' of Arnim as the beginning of Bismarck's tyranny:

"Übergriffe sind zu verzeichnen, Übergriffe nach allen Seiten hin, und so viele Übergriffe, so viel Fehlgriffe... Es begann als man, Arnims klüge Worte mißachtend (1) einen Hochverräter aus ihm stempeln wollte, bloß weil ein Brief und ein Rohrstuhl fehlte. Was aber fehlte, war kein Brief und kein Rohrstuhl, sondern einfach Unterwerfung. Daran gebricht es. Arnim hatte den Mut seiner Meinung, das war alles, das war sein Verbrechen, das allein." (2)

Arnim's crime was that he openly and authoritatively challenged Bismarck's policies, criticism of Bismarck was 'high treason'. In 'Irrungen, Wirrungen' the conservative Onkel Osten quotes the Arnim case as an example of Bismarck's arbitrary attacks on loyal conservative Prussian families:

"Solchen Mann...aus unsrer besten Familie...vornehmer als die Bismarcks und so viele für Thron und Hohenzollern gefallen...Ja, meine Herren. Und solcher Familie solchem Affront." (3)

Leutnant von Wedell argues, in the Bismarck discussion at Hillers, in reply to Osten that Arnim was wrong, he was wrong to oppose Bismarck because he was in an obviously weaker position and therefore unlikely to win against Bismarck:

"Gewiß, Herr Baron, es ist, wie Sie sagen. Aber, Pardon, ich habe damals, als die Sache zum Austrag kam, vielfach aussprechen hören, und die Worte sind mir im Gedächtnis geblieben, daß der Schwächere darauf verzichten müsse, dem Stärkeren die Wege kreuzen zu wollen, das verbiete sich im Leben wie in der Politik; es sei nun mal so: Macht gehe vor Recht." (4)

This was precisely the argument used by Fontane in a similar case:

"Man muß nicht mehr wollen als man kann. Wer mit einem Riesen (Bismarck) anbinden will, muß selber einer sein.

"Ohne Kampf, unter Anwendung kleiner Mittel, sind freilich zu allen Zeiten Riesen gestürzt worden; aber was ein Intrigant kann, kann ein Ehrenmann nicht, weil er der ist, der er ist. Ihr Herr Vetter glaubte sich im Bewußtsein seines Rechts und seiner Loyalität berechtigt und vielleicht sogar verpflichtet, in einen Zweikampf mit dem allmächtigen Minister einzutreten und übersah dabei die tatsächlichen Machtverhältnisse. Daraus mache ich ihm (i.e. Botho, the cousin), bis zu einem gewissen Punkt, einen Vorwurf." (5)

Fontane was writing to Philipp Eulenburg about his cousin Botho, the Prussian Minister of the Interior who had been 'dropped' by Bismarck. Fontane had felt that Bismarck had, as in the case of Arnim, acted in justifiable defence of his own position. A view that was originally expressed with regard to the actual case of Botho zu Eulenburg by Fontane now re-appears in 'Irrungen, Wirrungen' with reference to the Arnim case. The two cases of opposition merge, the issues are in both instances the same: the issue of the morality of opposition to Bismarck. What was Fontane's attitude to both the Arnim affair and the Eulenburg affair and what light does his attitude to these two cases of opposition to Bismarck throw on his own attitude to Bismarck?

b. Fontane and the 'Arnim' Affair

The Arnim affair is not of interest so much for Fontane's view of it at the time the events took place (1874 - 75) as for his subsequent re-assessment of the issues involved, namely, the morality of political action, and particularly, the morality of opposition to Bismarck.

Graff Harry von Arnim was German ambassador to France. Differences of opinion had existed between Bismarck and Arnim since the 1870's; Bismarck had not been happy at Arnim's appointment as ambassador in Paris.⁶ Arnim feared that the Third French Republic under Thiers, set up after the defeat of France in 1871, would encourage political radicalism in France with possible consequences for the internal situation in Germany. Arnim favoured the restoration of the monarchy which, he argued, as well as serving as a bulwark against radicalism would also be less inclined to a policy of 'revanche', i.e. of seeking the return of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine to France.

Bismarck, on the other hand, wished to keep France weak internally and isolated internationally; he believed that the republican form of government achieved these two aims; as a republic France would lack internal political stability and on the international scene she would not be 'bündnisfähig'. Bismarck's instructions to Arnim as ambassador were to support the Republic of Thiers, whereas Arnim believed that such a policy was dangerous and sympathised with monarchist groups in France who were seeking to overthrow the Republic. Arnim's dispatches from Paris frankly reflected his own views, so much so that Bismarck saw fit to give Arnim strict instructions not to do or say anything that ran counter to official policy, as laid down by Bismarck, the Minister responsible. In order to ensure that Arnim was not in a position to obstruct his policy towards France Bismarck persuaded the Kaiser to have Arnim transferred to Constantinople (March 1874).

While he was still in Paris, Arnim arranged for a number of internal memoranda, written by himself, to be published in various newspapers ⁷ in an attempt to influence public opinion in favour of the policies he advocated. The publication was a direct challenge to Bismarck's authority as Foreign Minister. Required by Bismarck to explain the publication of internal, allegedly confidential diplomatic documents, Arnim denied any responsibility, although he later admitted that he had arranged for the memoranda to be made available to certain journalists. This greatly weakened his credibility.

On 4th October 1874 Arnim was arrested and brought to Berlin to face charges of unlawfully removing official documents from the embassy archives in Paris and appropriating them for his own private political use.⁸ The indictment surmised the use to which Arnim might have put the documents:

"Als beweiskräftige Originale waren sie (die von Grafen Arnim zurückbehaltenen Schriftstücke) besonders wertvoll für den Angeklagten, nicht zu seiner Verteidigung, sondern zu erneuten Angriffen auf die derzeitige Politik des Deutschen Reiches." (9)

Arnim was found guilty and sentenced (20th October 1875) to nine months imprisonment. He fled abroad where he published his own version of the affair in a pamphlet 'Pro Nihilo' ¹⁰. He accused Bismarck of 'despotism'. Bismarck hit back with a bundle of criminal charges: treason, lese-majesty and libel.¹¹ Arnim was sentenced - in his absence - to five years imprisonment.

Eyck, one of Bismarck's more critical biographers, interprets Bismarck's measures as very largely inspired by the desire to rid himself of Arnim whom he saw as a potential rival for the post of Reichskanzler.¹² Bismarck was out to crush Arnim once and for all:

"...die umstrittene Frage des Eigentums (of the documents) ließ sich mit aller Sachlichkeit und Gründlichkeit in einem Zivilprozeß austragen. ... Wenn Bismarck an Stelle dieses natürlichen und zweckentsprechenden Verfahrens zur Erhebung einer Kriminalanklage griff, so gibt es dafür keine Sachlichen, sondern nur persönliche Gründe. ... Er hatte Arnim jetzt in der Gewalt, und er vernichtete ihn." (13)

A situation evoked by Hedemeyer:

"Was wir haben, heißt Onnipotenz. Nicht die des Staates ... nein wir haben die Onnipotenz eines Einzelnes. Ich nenne keinen Namen. Aber so viel bleibt: Übergriffe sind zu verzeichnen, Übergriffe nach allen Seiten hin, und so viele Übergriffe, so viel Fehlgriffe." (14)

In contrast, the version of events given by Blum¹⁵ reflects contemporary pro-Bismarck opinion. Blum emphasises the threat Arnim posed to Bismarck's position:

"(Die große Mehrheit der konservativen Partei) war auch keineswegs der Überzeugung Roons von Bismarcks Unentbehrlichkeit und Unersetzbarkeit. Sie war auch keineswegs der Meinung, daß sich 'kein Besserer' finden lasse. Im Gegenteil, die konservative Fronde hielt diesen 'Besseren' schon bereit und hoffte um so sicherer, ihn recht bald als Reichskanzler an Bismarcks Stelle zu bringen, da er in hervorragendem Maße die Gunst der Kaiserin Augusta besaß und das Ohr des Kaisers mit einer alle Ratschläge Bismarcks übertönenden Stimme beherrschte. Daß er von den Konservativen und von den Bismarck abgeneigten Hofkreisen nach Bismarcks Sturz zum Reichskanzler ausersehen war, hat der spätere Prozeß gegen Arnim klar und unwiderleglich enthüllt." (16)

Arnim, the 'Günstling des Hofes'¹⁷ was clearly scheming to remove Bismarck. In Blum's opinion Bismarck was perfectly justified in taking the measures he took:

"Dieser Haß (of Arnim against Bismarck) füllt ganze Seiten, fehlt auf keiner Seite ganz und steigert sich zuweilen bis zu Delirien. Daß Fürst Bismarck gegen Arnims höfische Ränke mit rücksichtsloser Strenge und Festigkeit seine Stellung als allein verantwortlicher Reichskanzler und damit das konstitutionelle Prinzip für die auswärtigen Angelegenheiten des Deutschen Reiches zur Geltung gebracht und gegen die auf absolutistische Behandlung derselben abzielenden Bestrebungen Arnims zum Siege geführt hat, das nennt der Verfasser der Schrift 'Ministerialdespotismus'. Die Schrift enthält auch schon die bübische Verleumdung, daß Fürst Bismarck seine amtliche Stellung zu Geldgeschäften mit Bleichröder mißbraucht habe." (18)

Blum records the reaction of those sections of the public who were anti-Bismarck, to the charges brought against Arnim:

"Alle Bismarckfeinde der Welt vereinigten sich, noch ehe das Gericht gesprochen hatte, in dem Urteil, daß Arnim das unschuldige Opfer des Neides, der Eifersucht und Bosheit des deutschen Reichskanzlers sei." (19)

A view that Onkel Osten in 'Irrungen, Wirrungen', would have agreed with.

At the time of the trial (1875) Fontane sided with Bismarck and believed that Arnim was in the wrong:

"Hätte er auf von Bülow's erste Anfrage, resp. Forderung alles 'rausgerückt, so wäre darauf zu erwidern gewesen: 'Herr Graf, Sie haben nun zwar das Fehlende wieder hergegeben; wir werden aber doch ein disziplinarisches Verfahren gegen Sie einleiten, denn es ist unerhört, mit wichtigen, dem Staate zugehörigen Papieren, in dieser Weise zu operieren.' Arnim rückte aber die Papiere nicht heraus, beharrte in seinem Trotz und zeigte sich bereit diesen Feldzug mit eben jenen Waffen zu führen, deren bloßer Besitz schon, nach allen in Preußen geltenden Traditionen, eine Ungehörigkeit, nach erfolgter Weigerung sie auszuliefern, aber ein schweres Vergehen war. Von diesem Augenblick an hatte er die milde Form eines 'disziplinarischen Verfahrens' verscherzt und die Gerichte des Landes traten an ihre Stelle." (20)

Fontane believed that Bismarck was quite justified in bringing criminal charges against Arnim. There are, however, no references in Fontane's published correspondence to later developments, so that it is not possible to say how he reacted to Bismarck's further charges - after Arnim had absented himself - of treason and libel. We do know that he - very much later (1890's) referred to Bismarck's treatment of Arnim as 'Grausamkeiten' ²¹ suggesting that he had, to some extent, revised his more negative opinion of Arnim at the time of the trial. ²² He later spoke more warmly of the Arnim family. ²³

c. Fontane and the 'Eulenburg' Affair

Fontane took a deep interest in the Eulenburg affair:

"Außer der Judenfrage hat mich seit vielen Jahren nichts so aufgeregt, wie die Eulenburgfrage." (24)

The issues raised by the affair, namely the problem of opposition to Bismarck, continued to pre-occupy Fontane throughout the 1880's, as is clear from the references to both this affair and the earlier, but similar, Arnim affair in 'Cecile'(1887) and 'Irrungen, Wirrungen'(1888).

Graf Botho zu Eulenburg, Prussian Minister of the Interior in Bismarck's cabinet, had been obliged to resign after he had been publically repudiated by Bismarck. Verbal attacks on him in the Upper Chamber of the Prussian parliament had been supported in a written statement from Bismarck. The critics had claimed that Eulenburg had made too many concessions, dangerous concessions to the liberals in his drafting of the projected reform of local and municipal government (Kreis- und Provinzialordnung). It was clear that Bismarck had engineered Graf Botho's resignation since the attacks had been made with Bismarck's prior knowledge and approval.²⁵ While the occasion for Bismarck's displeasure was Eulenburg's failure to safe-guard what Bismarck described as

"Kronrechte und Staatsinteressen" (26)

he had - in the longer term - been motivated by the fear that Eulenburg could be used by the liberals in an attempt to oust himself and replace him with a liberal government (which he refers to as the 'Ministerium Gladstone')²⁷. Both Eulenburg and Arnim were seen - and feared - as possible political rivals who might replace him as Chancellor.

Despite his keen interest - and despite the fact that he had personal ties with the Eulenburg family ²⁸ - Fontane was far from sympathising with Graf Botho's demise; on the contrary he sided essentially with Bismarck in the matter,

although he did concede that perhaps the manner in which Bismarck had brought about Graf Botho's fall from grace could be open to criticism:

"...Ich finde die Form des Vorgehens etwas stark. Das Vorgehen selbst aber begreife ich und zwar aus verschiedenen Gründen, die nicht bloß in der Sache liegen. Denn er ist ein strenger und eifersüchtiger Gott." (29)

This latter phrase refers to Bismarck.

Fontane attached very little importance to the actual differences between Eulenburg and Bismarck or the political issues at the centre of the controversy. To Fontane this aspect was of secondary importance. He saw the whole question more as a duel between two rival claims to political power. Graf Botho's failure to resign of his own accord - as Bismarck had intended - when it had become clear that Bismarck no longer supported him, Fontane took as a direct challenge to Bismarck's authority as Prussian Prime Minister:

"Ihr Herr Vetter hat vielleicht den Fehler gemacht, daß er die Gegnerschaft erst laut und offenkundig werden ließ, statt schon zu gehen, als sie noch still, aber ihm sicherlich schon erkennbar war." (30)

Graf Botho, Fontane argued, could have avoided the public spectacle if he had resigned earlier; he seems to have seen no alternative, since to defeat Bismarck, was an impossibility.

Not only did Fontane pay little attention to the political issues at stake, he reduced the affair to a personalised contest of two political forces:

"Es ist mir so gewiß, wie zwei mal zwei vier, daß es eine reine Rivalitätsfrage gewesen ist. Und weil ich es so ansehe, deshalb stehe ich gegen Ihren Herrn Vetter." (31)

By reducing what was undoubtedly a more complex issue, to a question of 'rivalry' Fontane was able to side-step the problem of the morality of Eulenburg's action, the question of the rights and wrongs of his stand and of Bismarck's response. Fontane refused to see it as a moral issue, it was simply a matter of political muscle: Graf Botho challenged Bismarck's authority and Bismarck defended that authority by taking steps to remove the challenger.

At no point in his comments did Fontane embark on a discussion of the respective points of view nor did he examine whether Graf Botho had, in fact, made too many concessions to the liberals, as had been claimed by his critics. Graf Botho did not represent a particular political point of view that Fontane either agreed with or objected to: the details of the political controversy he believed were of secondary importance. Yet, how was Fontane to determine the 'rightness' of Eulenburg's position or the 'rightness' of Bismarck's action if he did not first examine the political issues - and this he declined to do. Had he not adopted his rather simplistic 'rivalry' explanation, he might have looked at the political issues that lay behind the controversy a little closer. He might then have argued in a rather different way, he might have argued that he could not be sympathetic to Graf Botho's fate at the hands of Bismarck because he did not agree with Graf Botho's political stand-point in this matter. But this approach was excluded by his reduction of the affair to a question of political rivalry.

This illustrates Fontane's perception of the problem of political action at this stage of his intellectual evolution. Fontane's strictures of Graf Botho are neither politically nor morally motivated, neither aspect is seen as relevant. Neither politics nor morality come into it. The Eulenburg question is a trial of strength between Graf Botho and Bismarck. Graf Botho was - predictably - defeated. Indeed, Fontane comes perilously close to saying that it was Botho's failure that condemned him in Fontane's eyes, because he failed to assess the chances of success realistically before engaging in such an unequal struggle:

"Man muß nicht mehr wollen, als man kann. Wer mit einem Riesen anbinden will, muß selber einer sein. ... Ihr Herr Vetter glaubte sich im Bewußtsein seines Rechts und seiner Loyalität berechtigt und vielleicht sogar verpflichtet, in einen Zwickampf mit dem allmächtigen Minister einzutreten und übersah dabei die tatsächlichen Machtverhältnisse. Daraus mache ich ihm, bis zu einem gewissen Punkt, einen Vorwurf." (32)

Fontane's comments have a darwinistic ring about them. Indeed, Major von Gryczinski in 'L'Adultera' describes political intrigue and in-fighting as a 'Kampf ums Dasein',³³ a sentiment that is echoed by Leutnant von Wedell in 'Irrungen, Wirrungen':

"daß der Schwächere darauf verzichten müsse, dem Stärkeren die Wege kreuzen zu wollen, das verbiete sich im Leben wie in der Politik; es sei nun mal so: Macht gehe vor Recht." (34)

While it is undoubtedly true that in the sphere of politics power frequently decides - and Fontane's observation of, and own personal involvement in, the political developments in Germany since the 1830's had convinced him of this view - Fontane's 'political realism', his all-too-ready appreciation of the brutal facts of political life, persuaded him that morality, right or wrong, was irrelevant to the final outcome. The individual's moral sensibilities are not competent to pass judgement on amoral reality. To oppose Bismarck is therefore neither a moral obligation if one thinks one is in the right nor is it an act of immoral insubordination; it is just unwise if one does not wish to commit political suicide. Fontane had no sympathy for those - like Eulenburg - who apparently were prepared to take the risk.

Fontane's rather harshly worded disapproval of Botho should be seen in the context of his - as yet - predominantly positive attitude to Bismarck. Fontane accepted implicitly the political structure of the German Empire with all that meant in terms of Bismarck's almost total control and exercise of political power. Bismarck's despotism - and Fontane did not quarrel with the term³⁵ - and the greatness of Germany as an European power were inseparable:

"Der Kanzler ist ein Despot; aber er darf es sein, er muß es sein. Wäre er es nicht, wäre er ein parlamentarisches Ideal, das sich durch das Dummste, was es gibt, durch Majoritäten, bestimmen ließe, so hätten wir überhaupt noch keinen Kanzler und am wenigsten ein Deutsches Reich." (36)

Bismarck's direction of policy - albeit in an autocratic manner - was essentially beneficial for Germany. Fontane tended to accept as inevitable that Bismarck would remove

officials and ministers who were actual or potential sources of opposition and obstruction to his policies. Fontane saw no need for opposition, indeed, he felt that opposition would unnecessarily restrict and limit Bismarck and this would not be in the interest of Germany. Fontane shed, therefore, no tears when opposition was crushed; Bismarck's despotism was justified. He realised that

"...neben einem solchen Despoten nur unselbständige Naturen oder Kräfte zweiten und dritten Ranges dienen können..." (37)

but he did not regard this as a burning political issue and was not unduly worried about the consequences of such measures for the body politic in Germany in the long term. Given Bismarck's position of power, he felt that Eulenburg had no alternative but to resign in order to avoid a confrontation with Bismarck.

"Das ist andererseits freilich richtig... daß jeder freie Mann wohl tut, bei Zeiten seinen Rückzug anzutreten. Der freie Mann tut dabei, was ihm ziemt; aber der Kanzler tut auch, was ihm ziemt; wenn er sich dadurch in seinem Tun und Lassen nicht beirren läßt." (38)

In later years Fontane was to view the summary removal of officials by Bismarck in rather a different light.

Fontane's initial reaction to the Eulenburg affair is an interesting reflection of the way in which political issues - whatever the substance - were seen in terms of either pro-Bismarck or anti-Bismarck. As founder of the German Empire, Bismarck enjoyed enormous prestige, his policies were widely regarded as correct, his political judgement as infallible, the political structure he had created as the most appropriate for the German political temperament. Bismarck's personal despotism was the price that the liberal middle classes were prepared to pay for Germany's greatness, a view that Fontane shared at the time:

"So müssen wir für unsere Größe bezahlen und für die Größe des Kanzlers, der uns zu unsrer eigenen Größe recht eigentlich erst verholfen hat." (39)

Political morality was corrupted. Fontane's understanding of the Eulenburg question reflects this. Political conflict is seen primarily as a naked struggle for supremacy where what counts is the political strength or power each contestant can muster. Given the constellation of forces, a victory for Eulenburg over Bismarck was unthinkable, his defeat 'natural':

"Ein Zwergensieg gegen Riesen verwirrt mich und erscheint mir insoweit ungehörig, als er gegen den natürlichen Lauf der Dinge verstößt. ... Jeder hat ein ihm zuständiges Maß, dem gemäß er siegen oder unterliegen muß, und in diesem Sinne blicke ich auch auf sich gegenüberstehende Streitkräfte." (40)

Fontane later realised that such notions of 'naturalness' in which political conflict was seen entirely in terms of power, divorced from the principles or values that might also be at stake, were profoundly amoral, indeed, constituted a moral failing; and yet, out of a sense of what was the natural order of things (Ordnungsgefühl) he tended to side with 'might', even in cases where his sympathies were for what was 'right':

"Ich verlange von 300.000 Mann, daß sie mit 30.000 Mann schnell fertig werden, und wenn die 30.000 trotzdem siegen, so finde ich das zwar heldenmäßig und, wenn sie für Freiheit, Land und Glauben einstanden, außerdem auch noch höchst wünschenswert, kann aber doch über die Vorstellung nicht weg, daß es eigentlich nicht stimmt. Ich habe nichts dagegen, dies mich stark beherrschende Gefühl, das mich mehr als einmal von der meine Sympathie fordernden Seite auf die schlechtere Seite hinübergeschoben hat, als philiströs oder subaltern oder meinetwegen selbst als moralisches Manko gekennzeichnet zu sehen..." (41)

Fontane's own experience in the 1850's and 1860's had taught him that it was frequently necessary to accept and submit, however, reluctantly, to the realities of the situation in order to survive.

"Und das hing und hängt noch damit zusammen, daß ich immer einen ganz ausgebildeten Sinn für Tatsächlichkeiten gehabt habe. Ich habe das Leben immer genommen, wie ich's fand, und mich ihm unterworfen. Das heißt: nach außen hin, in meinem Gemüte nicht." (42)

It had developed in Fontane a keen awareness of the need to act with due regard to the over-all political situation, 'die tatsächlichen Machtverhältnisse' and with this an impatient dislike of pointless resistance against overwhelming odds - as in the case of Eulenburg.

Fontane's exchanges with Philipp zu Eulenburg were not his last word in the discussion of the issue of opposition and its justification. He had introduced the problematic of the Arnim and Eulenburg cases into the Bismarck discussion in the novel 'Irrungen, Wirrungen', in which von Wedell expresses precisely the same views that Fontane himself had held at the time of the Eulenburg affair, as expressed in letters to Philipp zu Eulenburg. Fontane's own views were being discussed in the novel.

We have seen how, at the time, Fontane judged the question of opposition purely as a matter of strength: Graf Botho had been ill-advised to challenge Bismarck because he was obviously in a weaker position, whatever his convictions as the correctness of the action may have been. Graf Botho had been - in short - a fool, who had wilfully chosen to disregard the realities of life:

"es sei nun mal so: Macht gehe vor Recht." (43)

In the novel Wedell's stand-point (which was also Fontane's) is immediately questioned by the anti-Bismarckian rebel Baron Osten who asks whether opposition is ever justified, opposition to might in the name of right, which Wedell appears to be discounting. Wedell replies, taking the discussion a step further:

"Und um nichts zu verschweigen: ich kenne solche Fälle gerechtfertigter Opposition. Was die Schwäche nicht darf, das darf die Reinheit, die Reinheit der Überzeugung, die Lauterkeit der Gesinnung. Die hat das Recht der Auflehnung, sie hat sogar die Pflicht dazu." (44)

The right to oppose is the prerogative of the 'pure in heart'; it is the moral integrity of the individual which gives him the right to oppose.

This represents a considerable shift from the rather amoral darwinistic position that Fontane had adopted in the early 1880's. Now the 'tatsächlichen Machtverhältnisse' are no longer the sole determining factor. Whatever the prospect of success or failure, there exists, quite independantly, a right, a duty to oppose. For Fontane the key to this 'right', this 'duty' lies in the individual and his character; it is the sincerity of a man's convictions, the purity of his motives that justify

his political action. Opposition is not justified by the political aims, however noble, but by the moral character of those who oppose. Opposition to Bismarckian despotism cannot be justified purely because it is inspired by notions and values such as freedom, democracy or justice; it is only justified if it is inspired by unspecified moral sentiments. Measured against this standard Arnim was not justified - so opines Wedell - in his attacks on Bismarck:

"Wer aber hat diese Lauterkeit? Hatte sie... Doch, ich schweige, weil ich weder Sie, Herr Baron, noch die Familie, von der wir sprechen, verletzen möchte. Sie wissen aber, auch ohne daß ich es sage, daß er, der das Wagnis wagte, diese Lauterkeit der Gesinnung nicht hatte. Der bloß Schwächere darf nichts, nur der Reine darf alles." (45)

Such is Wedell's contribution to the discussion. He does not actually quote examples of what he regarded as 'gerechtfertigte Opposition', but perhaps to have done so, would have pushed the question of political aims to the fore, and make the issue far too specifically political. Does Wedell speak for Fontane? If so, does this mean that Fontane shied away from the political problematic of opposition, that is to say, of justifying opposition to Bismarck in terms of concrete political aims, alternative policies and political structures, or did he really believe that opposition could be abstracted in this way from its political context and reduced to some moral core? Wedell's point of view certainly tallies with Fontane's own in the primacy of the ethical over the strictly political: Fontane's life-long ethical ideal, the individual possessed of nobility of mind and character, was a picture of a man which transcended and encompassed political and ideological differences.

"Mit der gefährlichen Anschauung muß, mein' ich, gebrochen werden, daß jeder Freiheitsschwärmer ein Ideal und jeder Kaiser-Nikolaus-Schwärmer ein Schufferle sei... Was über den Menschen entscheidet, ist seine Gesinnung, Ehrlichkeit der Überzeugungen." (46)

This echoes Wedell's sentiments almost word for word. Fontane was, by the way, speaking of Schneider, a man whose conservative political views he disagreed with strongly.⁴⁷

Fontane is concerned primarily with the motives of opposition, not with its objectives. Perhaps this emphasis is not entirely a reflection of Fontane's own priorities, perhaps he was trying to justify opposition per se. This suggests an alternative explanation for the heavily moral terms of the Wedell-Osten discussion of opposition, namely, that Fontane was concerned to get his readers to accept the idea that opposition was, under certain circumstances, justified. He was trying to activate the notion of opposition, and he emphasised the moral aspects in order to disarm possible objections! Why should Fontane have been concerned to promote the idea of opposition as a right and a duty?

Since the early 1880's Fontane had become a good deal more aware and disturbed by the ruthlessness of Bismarck's treatment of opponents; he saw now more clearly than before the dangers of Bismarck's 'Omnipotenz'. The only anti-dote was lively opposition, but Bismarck's despotism had been accompanied by an almost god-like reverence and admiration for Bismarck on the part of large sections of the public. Liberties, the freedom to speak out and oppose, had been neglected by a complacent public. Fontane began to see the tradition of aristocratic opposition, the Quitzow tradition as a precedent. It was precisely because he saw the need to revive traditions of opposition in an increasingly 'byzantine' society that Fontane dealt so sympathetically with the subject of the Quitzows.⁴⁸ Later Fontane tried to incorporate the notion of opposition into his interpretation of Prussian traditions:

"Und was ich noch mehr betonen möchte, nicht nur im Gehorsam lebt diese preußische Idee, sie lebt auch in der Auflehnung und das ist ihre schönste und größte Seite." (49)

Fontane also later realised that recall to such traditions were two-edged, especially, recall to aristocratic opposition.

Most Junker opposition had been motivated by the desire to defend Junker interests and privilege against encroachment by the centralising monarchy. Fontane realised that opposition with an eye to social change could not come from the 'Junker' class; He called passionately for the power of the Junker in Germany to be broken since they represented the main obstacle to progress. But back to the Eulenburg affair of 1881: Fontane's initial reaction, to defend Bismarck's despotism and condemn what he saw as Graf Botho's folly, was not his final position.

The Eulenburg affair coincided with - and perhaps itself served to reinforce - a considerable movement in public opinion against Bismarck in 1881. Fontane noted:

"Gegen Bismarck bräut sich allmählich im Volk ein Wetter zusammen. In der Oberschicht der Gesellschaft ist es bekanntlich lange da. ... Er täuscht sich über das Maß seiner Popularität. Sie war einmal kolossal, aber sie ist es nicht mehr. Es fallen täglich hunderte, mitunter tausende ab." (50)

Certain sections of the conservative protestant upper class in Prussia had been opposed to Bismarck and his policies since the 1860's; now opposition from the broader sections of the liberal middle classes on whom Bismarck relied for support, was also increasing.⁵¹ The elections in 1881 produced an anti-Bismarck majority in the Reichstag.⁵²

In this situation Bismarck was becoming increasingly sensitive to actual and potential sources of opposition to his policies. He developed something akin to a 'siege mentality' with political enemies apparently threatening him on all sides.⁵³ If Bismarck suspected that moves to obstruct his policies were being contemplated, he retaliated swiftly and instinctively, regardless of whether his suspicions were justified. He hit out with accusations and insinuations:

"Nicht seine Maßregeln sind es, die ihn geradezu ruinieren, sondern seine Verdächtigungen." (54)

As Fontane commented, this did Bismarck's reputation considerable harm. His single-minded pursuit of his opponents, the complete lack of generosity he demonstrated in his dealings with

Eulenburg diminished Bismarck's stature.

"Dadurch daß er seine mehr und mehr zutage tretenden kleinlichen Eigenschaften mit einer gewissen Großartigkeit in Szene setzt, werden die kleinlichen Eigenschaften noch lange nicht groß. Wenn ich einen um einen Sechser verklage und nicht eher ruhe, als bis ich ihn im Zuchthaus habe, so ist der Apparat zwar sehr groß, aber der Sechser bleibt ein Sechser." (55)

(the analogy used by Fontane to illustrate Bismarck's 'kleinliche Eigenschaften' is strongly reminiscent of the circumstances of the Arnim trial.) The ruthlessness in Bismarck's character was thus thrown into sharp relief and high-lighted more than previously. Bismarck's achievements as a statesman continued to command general respect, but his character - seen as distinct from his abilities as a statesman - left much to be desired.

"Vor seinem Genie hat jeder nach wie vor einen ungeheuren Respekt, auch seine Feinde, ja, diese mitunter am meisten. Aber die Hochachtung vor seinem Charakter ist in einem starken Niedergehen. Was ihn einst populär machte, war das in jedem lebende Gefühl 'Ach, ein großer Mann.' Aber von diesem Gefühl ist nicht mehr viel übrig und die Menschen sagen 'Er ist ein großes Genie, aber ein kleiner Mann.' (56)

Fontane's enthusiasm for Bismarck the statesman was counter-balanced by his dislike of Bismarck's ruthlessness. The mental reservations expressed in 1878 about Bismarck:

"Nehmen Sie Bismarck; so groß er ist und so viel ich ihn bewundere, das was Washington hatte und der ältere Pitt, das hat er nicht." (57)

were now cast aside as Fontane felt provoked into outright condemnation of Bismarck's behaviour. The Eulenburg affair had concentrated public attention on Bismarck's nastier side, he had displayed a lack of precisely those qualities which Fontane attached so much importance to 'Adel der Gesinnung'.

Yet Fontane's condemnation of Bismarck's action was not a spontaneous reaction; his first reaction had been to defend Bismarck, dismissing 'die Form des Vorgehens' as of minor importance. It was only on reflection that he found Bismarck's behaviour indefensible, but he was more saddened than angered at Bismarck's unfortunate display.⁵⁸ The seeds of later disaffection were sown.

III : The later novels.

a. Effi Briest (1895)

Whereas in the preceding novels, it was mainly the controversies surrounding Bismarck and his policies which figured in the novels, in 'Effi Briest' the role of Bismarck is more indirect, more all-pervasive. Bismarck's policies are not the subject of after-dinner conversation and no comments are made on his character.¹ Innstetten, Effi's husband is the link.

Effi von Briest, the young² daughter of a country squire in the Mark Brandenburg marries Geert von Innstetten, ('das alte freiherrliche Geschlecht')³ a thirty-three year old senior civil servant, 'Landrat' in the administration of the Prussian province of Pommerania. Baron von Innstetten, a member of the lower nobility, had originally embarked on a career in the army⁴ but after studying law, then entered the civil service. However, he served with distinction ('Er hat auch das Kreuz')⁵ in the 1870/71 war with France.

Innstetten rose rapidly to the position of 'Landrat', that of chief administrative officer of a district (Kreis). His career exemplifies the hold of the aristocracy on the army and the civil administration in the latter decades of the nineteenth century in Germany. Innstetten is a civil servant: conscientious ('er fing an, Juristerei zu studieren...mit einem wahren Biereifer')⁶, punctilious and exact ('es entsprach seinem Charakter und seinen Gewohnheiten genau Zeit und Stunde zu halten')⁷, a man of principles ('ein Mann von Grundsätzen')⁸, a firm believer in order and discipline ('daß es ohne Zucht und Ordnung nicht geht')⁹ and rather unbending, a 'Schulmeister'.¹⁰ In short, a dull, colourless, unimaginative man¹¹ devoid of warmth or sympathy.¹² His lack of more human traits is concealed by a meticulous command of the social graces ('ein Mann der feinsten Formen')¹³ and his 'military manner' ('so

soldatisch und schneidig').¹⁴ Thus, although he had not taken to military life ¹⁵ Innstetten, nevertheless, affected the required military manner, thus conforming outwardly to the social ideal of the officer. He remains for most of the novel a cold, remote hulk of a man, easily dominating Effi and the household; only later do we discover him in his weakness, his lack of courage, his fear of social disapproval, his complete lack of 'character'.

Innstetten is above all a careerist:

"Innstetten ist ein Karrieremacher - vom Streber will ich nicht sprechen, das ist er auch nicht, dazu ist er wirklich zu vornehm - also, Karrieremacher." (16)

He is dominated by the desire, the need to succeed.¹⁷ He realises his ambition (he is appointed Head of a Department in a government Ministry in Berlin 'Ministerialdirektor')¹⁸ at the cost of the life of his young wife, Effi, the life of his wife's lover Major von Crampas and his own happiness.¹⁹ Fontane paints a decidedly melancholy picture of Innstetten at the end of the novel, the achievement of his ambition - to which he has sacrificed all - has left him a bewildered and defeated man.²⁰

Innstetten's pre-occupation with his career, with his work, had led him to neglect Effi.²¹ She begins to feel increasingly isolated; Innstetten's visits to Varzin at the invitation of 'der Fürst' (Bismarck) mean that he is frequently away all night, leaving Effi alone in the house. One night Effi has a night-mare, convinced that a Chinese man - buried in the village - brushed past her in the darkness. Her feelings of isolation are now heightened by her fear that the house is haunted, while Innstetten's dismissal of her fears intensifies her loneliness. She implores Innstetten not to visit Varzin so often and to sell the house. He does neither, prevented by his concern for his reputation:

"...meine liebe Effi, ich lasse dich ja nicht allein aus Rücksichtslosigkeit oder Laune, sondern weil es so sein muß; ich habe keine Wahl, ich bin ein Mann im Dienst, ich kann zum Fürsten oder auch zur Fürstin nicht sagen:

"Durchlaucht, ich kann nicht kommen, meine Frau ist so allein, oder meine Frau fürchtet sich. Wenn ich das sagte, würden wir in einem ziemlich komischen Lichte dastehen, ich gewiß, und du auch. ...

Und dann Effi, kann ich hier nicht gut fort, auch wenn es möglich wäre, das Haus zu verkaufen oder einen Tausch zu machen. Es ist damit ganz wie mit einer Absage nach Varzin hin. Ich kann hier in der Stadt die Leute nicht sagen lassen, Landrat Innstetten verkauft sein Haus, weil seine Frau den aufgeklebten kleinen Chinesen als Spuk an ihrem Bette gesehen hat. Dann bin ich verloren, Effi. Von solcher Lächerlichkeit kann man sich nie wieder erholen." (22)

Innstetten does not feel able to refuse invitations to Varzin, since he does not wish to antagonise Bismarck upon whose favour his advancement depends, while in order to preserve his reputation from public ridicule he conforms to social conventions, since to lose one's social standing is to lose one's prospects of advancement.²³

The link between Effi's adultery and its tragic outcome and her husband's neglect of her is established; Innstetten's ambition is the direct cause of his neglect of her. What is the nature of the link between Innstetten and Bismarck? It is made very clear in the course of the novel, that Innstetten's promotion at every stage is due to the personal favour and patronage of Bismarck. Innstetten had first been introduced to Bismarck while he was an officer in the Franco-Prussian war, he seems to have spent some considerable time in Bismarck's company at the Prussian headquarters at Versailles:

"Der Fürst hatte noch von Versailles her eine Vorliebe für ihn..." (24)

Bismarck thought very highly of him:

"...es heißt, Bismarck halte große Stücke von ihm und auch der Kaiser, und so kam es denn, daß er Landrat wurde, Landrat im Kessiner Kreise." (25)

Innstetten's appointment as Landrat, so Fontane hints, was due in no small measure to Bismarck's influence with the Kaiser. Innstetten became a close and regular associate of Bismarck, who apparently enjoyed his company:

"Eine Woche später war Bismarck in Varzin, und nun wußte Innstetten, daß, bis Weihnachten und vielleicht noch drüber hinaus, an ruhige Tage für ihn gar nicht mehr zu

"denken sei. Der Fürst hatte noch von Versailles her eine Vorliebe für ihn und lud ihn, wenn Besuch da war, häufig zu Tisch, aber auch allein, denn der jugendliche, durch Haltung und Klugheit gleich ausgezeichnete Landrat stand ebenso in Gunst bei der Fürstin." (26)

Bismarck appreciated his abilities as an administrator while Bismarck's wife enjoyed his company. When Innstetten is appointed to the position of Ministerialrat in Berlin, this, again, is due to Bismarck's influence:

"Um Gottes willen, Geert, sie haben dich doch nicht zum Minister gemacht? Gieshübler sagte so was. Und der Fürst kann alles. Gott, der hat es am Ende durchgesetzt, und ich bin erst achtzehn." (27)

Crampas also implies as much - albeit with a touch of indiscrete humour - in conversation with Innstetten:

"... Der muß sich erst bei Bismarck einen Krieg bestellen. Weiß ich alles, Innstetten. Aber das ist doch für Sie eine Kleinigkeit. Jetzt haben wir Ende September; In zehn Wochen spätestens ist der Fürst wieder in Varzin, und da er ein liking für Sie hat - mit der volkstümlichen Wendung will ich zurückhalten, um nicht direkt vor Ihren Pistolenlauf zu kommen - , so werden Sie einem alten Kameraden von Vionville her doch wohl ein bißchen Krieg besorgen können." (28)

Innstetten's successful career as a civil servant is thanks almost entirely to Bismarck's favour and protection. He is a 'Bismarckian' administrator, a careerist, a 'Streber'. (29)

It is evident what qualities of character recommend Innstetten to Bismarck: his abilities as a conscientious, if unimaginative, but above all, amenable administrator. He would be unlikely to risk his career by acting or thinking independantly of explicit instructions from Bismarck. His ambition, and his realisation, that the realisation of that ambition, depended utterly on Bismarck's favour ensured compliance with Bismarck's political will. Innstetten is very much an historical type, a product of the Bismarck-dominated civil service. The historian Bußmann notes:

"Es war besonders der vom Kanzler gebilligten Verwaltungspraxis des Innenministers Puttkammer zuzuschreiben,

"daß für die preußische Beamtenschaft konservative Gesinnung die selbstverständliche Voraussetzung einer erfolgreichen Laufbahn wurde. Die preußischen Verwaltungsbeamten, die im allgemeinen den Korps entstammten und die sich als Reserveoffiziere dem König persönlich verpflichtet fühlten, waren die Träger des monarchischen Obrigkeitsstaates, dessen Aufrechterhaltung zu den Hauptaufgaben der Bismarckschen Innenpolitik gehörte. ... Bismarcks eingewurzelttes Mißtrauen gegen die Bürokratie vertrug sich durchaus mit dem Verlangen, sich diese Bürokratie gefügig zu machen. Die Klage, daß selbstständige Naturen in seiner Nähe nicht zur Entfaltung kämen, wurde nicht nur unter seinen Gegnern, sondern auch unter jenen Zeitgenossen, die ihm nahestanden und ihn bewunderten, immer wieder geäußert." (30)

Fontane observed in a letter to Philipp zu Eulenburg at the time of the Eulenburg affair:

"Das ist andererseits freilich richtig, daß neben einem solchen Despoten nur unselbständige Naturen oder Kräfte zweiten und dritten Ranges dienen können, und daß jeder freie Mann wohl tut, bei Zeiten seinen Rückzug anzutreten." (31)

Innstetten is such a 'Natur zweiten oder dritten Ranges', a typical Bismarck protégé.

Innstetten personifies to a degree those negative qualities which Fontane deplored and which seemed to be emerging as the dominant characteristics of social mores in the upper class in late nineteenth century German society:

"Jene 'regierenden Klassen' aber haben aus alter Zeit die Vorstellung mit herübergenommen, daß es mit ihnen etwas Besonderes sei, daß sie Hirn und Herz des Volkes verträten und sie vertreten heutzutage keins von beiden mehr, weder das eine noch das andre. Sie sind ganz und gar veräußerlicht, kleben sich unterwerfende nur auf den Gehorsam gestellte Streber und Carrieremacher..." (32)

Compliance was one of the main features of the 'Streber'; Fontane linked such compliance, such subservience (Byzantinismus') with the increasing prestige of military values, more especially the virtues of discipline and obedience:

"Besonders die militärische Welt überschlägt sich... Dabei mehren sich die Zeichen innerlichen Verfalls: Selbstsucht und rücksichtslosestes Strebertum sind an die Stelle feinen Ehrgefühls und vornehmer Milde

"getreten und während in den Herzen Rohheit und destruktive Ideen Fortschritte machen, zeigt sich nach außen hin ein toter, bei uns nie dagewesener Byzantinismus." (33)

Fontane's words to Friedländer are a pen-portrait of Innstetten.

Fontane saw the

"Beständig wachsende Fortschritte nicht im 'Männerstolz vor Königsthronen', sondern umgekehrt im Byzantinismus" (34)

as resulting from a number of associated factors: but one of the reasons - so the Bismarck discussions in his novels suggest - is to be found in Bismarck's autocratic exercise of power, his intolerance of opposition within the administration and his promotion of his own creatures. The respectful compliance that resulted, and became a permanent feature of the civil administration in Germany, was the work of Bismarck. The character of Innstetten - as moulded first by his background and then by his career and his relations with Bismarck - illustrate this development. Innstetten's career might be said to illustrate the genesis of what has been called the 'authoritarian personality', as later depicted in literature by Heinrich Mann in his novel 'Der Untertan'.

Innstetten is not - as Müller-Seidel suggests ³⁵ a figure who resembled Bismarck; Innstetten is basically a weak character, a character corrupted by the conditions that Bismarck created. The liberal historian Theodor Mommsen put it like this:

"Der Schaden der Bismarckschen Periode ist unendlich viel größer als ihr Nutzen, denn die Gewinne an Macht waren Werte, die bei dem nächsten Sturme der Weltgeschichte wieder verlorengelassen; aber die Knechtung der deutschen Persönlichkeit, des deutschen Geistes, war ein Verhängnis, das nicht mehr gut gemacht werden kann." (36)

Innstetten exemplifies - the explicit links between his career, his success and the power of Bismarck make this evident - one aspect of the upper classes in Germany. This is exactly the point made by Legationsrat Duquede in 'L'Adultera':

"Karrieremacher sind immer nur Courmacher. Nichts weiter. Es gibt heutzutage Personen - und auch das verdanken wir unsrem großen Reichsbaumeister, der die soliden Werkleute

"fallen läßt oder beiseite schiebt - , es gibt, sage ich, heutzutage Personen, denen alles bloß Mittel zum Zweck ist." (37)

Bismarck helped to re-establish - or to perpetuate - the 'Untertan' in German society, the individual who, conditioned to submit to the authority of the family, the army, the 'tyranny' of social convention, submits also - to further his own success - to the state. 'L'Adultera' from which the quote by Duquede is taken was one of Fontane's earliest social novels (1882), 'Effi Briest' one of his last (1895), but the above quotes indicate the continuity of Fontane's thinking in relation to Bismarck and his influence on German society.

b. Mathilde Möhring

The heroine of this short novel, published after Fontane's death, is a young lady Mathilde Möhring, daughter of a clerk ('Buchhalter in einem Kleider-Exportgeschäft') who is determined to better herself socially and escape from the narrowness and financial insecurity of her petit-bourgeois background. She is possessed of great single-mindedness and self-assurance. When Hugo Großmann, a student of law at the Berlin university, moves in as lodger, Mathilde seizes her unique opportunity: he is the son of a wealthy provincial family, destined on completion of his law studies to some senior post in the Prussian administration; if she could marry Hugo, she would have realised her ambition to rise to the upper reaches of society. She therefore decides to marry Hugo.

It is, however, by no means certain that Hugo will either want to marry her or that he will finish his studies: he is an indolent individual with a hearty dislike for hard work. His overriding ambition is that the life he leads shall be 'bequem'; he also has a dangerously impractical penchant for literature, especially poetry; when he should have been studying law, he was reading plays and poems. Hugo is not helped by his closest friend von Rybinski, a fellow student who has abandoned his studies and turned to acting; he is continually assuring Hugo that studying 'is not worth the candle'. Yet, if Mathilde is to achieve her goal, Hugo must be persuaded to complete his studies. Having assessed Hugo's weaknesses she decides to take him in hand: she institutes regular work sessions, acting as a tutor, investing much time and energy in order to ensure that Hugo does the work. Her tireless efforts are rewarded when Hugo passes the examinations, but only just. Mathilde then sets about finding him a suitable position - suitable in her eyes, that is: the post of mayor of a small town in West Prussia. His application is successful and Hugo Großmann is duly installed as mayor. It is Mathilde who provides her husband with the ideas he needs to become a popular and successful mayor. She even writes an article

and sends it to a Königsberg newspaper in her husband's name to further his political career. She makes him what he has become, as Hugo himself realises:

"...er sah in Thilde nichts als die rührige, kräftige Natur, die sein Leben bestimmt und das bißchen, was er war durch ihre Kraft und Umsicht aus ihm gemacht hatte." (38)

Hugo is the means whereby she realises her own ambition, he is no more than a 'Mittel zum Zweck'.³⁹ She is a 'Karrieremacher', a redoubtable female 'Streber'.

Hugo is portrayed as physically weak, indecisive, complacent, having no real positive aims in life, content to drift, as a man who willingly allows himself to be taken in hand by Mathilde, out of convenience:

"...und dabei hat mich Thilde in Händen; sie denkt, ich merke es nicht, aber ich merke es recht gut. Ich laß es gehn, weil ich es so am besten finde. Schließlich is man, wie man is... Und wenn ich nur so leidlich bequem durchkomme..." (40)

Hugo trusted her guidance implicitly:

"...eigentlich war er froh, daß jemand da war, der ihn nach links oder nach rechts dirigierte, wie's grade paßte. Daß es gut gemeint war und daß er dabei vorwärtskam, empfand er jeden Augenblick." (41)

Mathilde is the exact opposite: she knows what she wants, is confident that she will be able to achieve it, assesses the prospects of success with various strategies and then sets about achieving her aims quite systematically, using every opportunity to manipulate circumstances to further her own ends, constantly adjusting her own behaviour to those same ends.

Mathilde knows her own mind, whereas Hugo does not:

"Thilde saß neben ihm und las ihm die Zeitung vor, denn es waren die Tage, wo Bismarck ins Schwanken kam. Hugo sog jedes Wort ein und zeigte großes Interesse, ergriff aber nicht Partei, 'sie werden wohl beide recht haben.' Thilde lächelte: 'Ja, Hugo, das bist ganz du. Beide recht. Ich bin für einen.' " (42)

In conversation with the local 'Landrat' Mathilde confesses to being an ardent admirer of Bismarck:

"Je mehr ich die kleinen Verhältnisse fühlte, die mich umgaben, je mehr empfand ich eine Sehnsucht der Auffrischung, die nur, ich will nicht sagen das Ideal, aber doch das Höhere geben kann. Ich darf sagen, daß die

"Reden des Fürsten erst das aus mir gemacht haben, was ich bin. Es ist so oft von Blut und Eisen gesprochen worden. Aber von seinen Reden möchte ich für mich persönlich sagen dürfen: Eisenquelle, Stahlbad. Ich fühlte mich immer wie erfrischt." (43)

Not only does Mathilde apparently identify closely with the values Bismarck stood for - as reflected in her attitude and behaviour towards Hugo - but she even claims that he is the model for her won success and that his speeches have been a constant source of inspiration. As such, she is no doubt fairly representative of the thousands of middle class Germans who also identified with Bismarck's ideas of 'Realpolitik'. But does this particular constellation, Mathilde on the one hand and Hugo, the complacent bourgeois whose success is not his own but that of Mathilde's, on the other imply an interpretation on an allegorical level? Does Hugo represent the German middle class and Mathilde the figure of Bismarck? Is the novel a sustained allegory of Germany's fate at the hands of Bismarck? Although some passages can be read to mean this, I think it is unlikely: an allegory of this nature was foreign to Fontane's understanding of the purpose and the possibilities of the novel. However, the references to Bismarck in the novel do indicate the way in which the values of international 'Realpolitik' as practised by Bismarck with considerable success had permeated the morality of human relations.

IV : Bismarck in the novel and Fontane's view of Bismarck

One question remains: what is the relationship between the discussions of Bismarck in the novel and Fontane's own privately expressed views of Bismarck? Do the points made in the novels correspond to Fontane's own pre-occupations? Does Fontane put his own views into the mouth of any particular character or type of character? Or does no such correlation exist?

Discussion of Bismarck - mainly in 'L'Adultera', 'Cecile' and 'Irrungen, Wirrungen' - revolves round four main aspects: Bismarck, the architect of the German Empire; Bismarck, the renegade; Bismarck the autocrat and finally the question of opposition to Bismarck and the Bismarck cult. The arguments under each of these four headings can be summarised as follows:

1. Bismarck as architect of the German Empire:

Bismarck's claim - or the claim made by others on his behalf - to be the founder of the German Empire is contested by two conservatives. Duquede (L'Adultera) maintains that Bismarck plagiarised his political programme (it was, after all, the enemies of conservatism, the National Liberals who had championed the cause of German unity for decades) and that Bismarck's own contribution was more the product of favourable circumstances ('Glück'). Baron Osten (Irrungen, Wirrungen) asserts that it was the army, not Bismarck, that created the Empire.

There is no evidence that Fontane shared either of these views, though significantly, both arguments figure in contemporary criticism of Bismarck. For most of his life Fontane seems to have felt that Bismarck was quite justifiably regarded as having made the major contribution to the establishment of the German Empire.¹

2. Bismarck as renegade:

Both conservative and liberal-minded figures accuse Bismarck of treachery: Duquede and Baron Osten accuse him of betraying Prussian conservatism with his 'revolutionary' radicalism, while General von Rossow (Cécile) accuses him of destroying Friderician army traditions. Hedemeyer (Cécile), a liberal, alleges that Bismarck betrayed essential protestant liberties by ending the anti-catholic Kulturkampf. Duquede, the conservative and Hedemeyer, the liberal, join forces to level charges of 'Prinzipienlosigkeit' and 'beständiger Flaggenwechsel' against Bismarck.

There is no evidence that any of these views correspond to Fontane's own thinking.

3. Bismarck the autocrat.

Most of the characters in Fontane's novels of the 1830's are outspoken opponents of Bismarck; only van der Straaten and Reiff (L'Adultera) are expressly pro-Bismarck. Most of these opponents were victims of Bismarck's ruthless campaigns against opposition to his policies.² Such campaigns involved the unceremonious removal from office of many prominent conservatives ('Übergriffe'). The old Prussian aristocratic families who suffered thus for their opposition to Bismarck accused Bismarck of misuse of his virtually dictatorial powers ('Omnipotenz').

While Fontane may not have shared the concern the Prussian aristocracy felt at the way Bismarck seemed to be intent on attacking and ousting members of his own class (Fontane shows no great sympathy for Arnim (1874 - 1876) and Eulenburg (1881)); he was perturbed at the ruthless and vindictive way in which Bismarck sought to destroy his political opponents.

4. Opposition to Bismarck.

Admiration of Bismarck - both as a statesman and as a latterday Germanic hero - had reached the proportions of hero-worship

(Heroenkult), so it is alleged in 'L'Adultera' and 'Cecile'; it is even described as idolatry (Kultus, Götterdienst) while Bismarck himself is compared in status to the religious leader, the Dalai-Lama. The consequence of this is the - ritual - sacrifice of freedom of thought ('freie Meinung').

There is little in Fontane's correspondence to suggest that he was deeply concerned at the effects of the Bismarck cult, although it is a phenomenon that he would have been familiar with. It is unlikely therefore that he would have agreed with the views of Duquede and Hedemeyer in quite the way expressed in the novels. Fontane had observed that admiration for Bismarck frequently went hand in hand with the unthinking assumption that Bismarck was always right, a tendency to regard Bismarck as infallible, and this was something that did worry Fontane. He ridicules this attitude in 'Die preußische Idee':

"Glauben Sie mir, Bismarck hat immer recht. Wenn Bismarck morgen den Morgenkaffee abschaffen und die Brotsuppe der Altvordern wieder einführen wollte, so würde ich gehorchen, trotzdem mir nichts über Mokka geht." (3)

In later life Fontane became increasingly concerned at the spread of 'byzantine' attitudes, a timid, conformist lack of independence in thought and action,⁴ but he seems to have regarded this as more a legacy of established Prussian governmental traditions rather than as a consequence of the Bismarck cult or of Bismarck's influence.⁵

The views expressed in discussion of Bismarck - for the most part trenchant criticism by bitter opponents of Bismarck - have only in one or two minor instances any direct relation to Fontane's own views. He did not use the novel as a vehicle for the propagation of his own views of Bismarck. The prominence of opponents of Bismarck in the novels of the 1880's is not a reflection of Fontane's own attitude to Bismarck. Most of the views expressed by characters relate more directly to the social milieu and the type of character that Fontane was describing: predominantly the upper and middle classes in Berlin.

A prominent feature of aristocratic and conservative thinking circles in Prussia in the 1870's and 1880's was their opposition to Bismarck. It was, therefore, only natural that Fontane, as a novelist who had always striven to paint as full and as realistic a canvas of intellectual discussion as possible should attempt to reflect the Bismarck opposition of the upper classes in his novels. Most of the arguments about Bismarck put forward in the novels are culled from contemporary discussion as observed by Fontane. The views expressed by Hedemeyer, von Rossow and Osten are, in historical terms, substantially correct.

Even where the political views expressed are highly eccentric both in content and formulation - as in the case of Duquede whose contention that Bismarck achieved no more than any normally endowed mortal with the same good fortune, is patently one-sided - Fontane does not stray far in his fictional reality from the 'real' situation. Duquede's outburst against Bismarck is an expression of his resentment of Bismarck's betrayal of Prussian conservatism, a resentment that many conservatives felt and might well have expressed in this way.

The Bismarck discussions reflect fairly accurately the tenor and substance - carefully observed and finely distilled by Fontane - of contemporary conservative opinion. The discussion on the practicability of opposition to Bismarck in 'Irrungen, Wirungen' is something of an exception in this regard: while the issue was real enough, based as it was on Fontane's first-hand experience of the Eulenburg debacle, one cannot help feeling that the conclusion reached in the novel:

"Der bloß Schwächere darf nichts, nur der Reine darf alles." (6)
 represents Fontane's own thinking on the matter; it is his own contribution to the discussion, his moral solution to the dilemma rather than a reflection of significant contemporary comment.
