

NACHDENKEN ÜBER OSTDEUTSCHLAND: UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF
EAST GERMANY THROUGH THE LITERATURE OF CHRISTA WOLF

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ABSTRACT

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The Purpose of this thesis is to contextualize Christa Wolf's works *Der geteilte Himmel*, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Medea*, and *Stadt der Engel* oder *The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* in their historical setting, and to discuss their contemporary impact on society. Wolf's writings follow a pattern of her own influence within East German society and history, as she first acts on history, with *Der geteilte Himmel*, then becomes acted upon in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, and finally, she reflects on her personal history through *Medea* and *Stadt der Engel*. Contrasting these specific works with other novels and diaries of hers provides background information essential to those four novels. Then, placing these works in their greater historical context shows Wolf's impact on the society around her.

Wolf consistently provides a dual analysis of events through use of flashback and memory in her texts, giving the reader a unique frame of reference in reflecting on the works. Expanding on one of Wolf's own terms, I call this literary use of multiple time frames and memories *dual subjective authenticity*. This literary device is significant in Wolf's writings because through these dual perspectives, Wolf is able to address problems in East German society, while still showing support for the GDR government.

Using primarily historical sources that reflect on the German Democratic Republic since the fall of the Berlin Wall, this thesis discusses contemporary approaches to Wolf's literature and its complicated reception in both East Germany and the West.

For Bert and Gert, without whose support none of this would ever be possible.

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CHAPTER 1: CENSORED FREEDOMS: A LOOK AT THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

*Literary texts are public events and as such are more susceptible
to moral and political judgment than other kinds of discourse.*¹

-Marc Silberman

During the Cold War, East German prose writing served to help the public become aware of what was happening in their present time, and since reunification, literature has helped in processing the events of the past. From literature studies to political analysis of previously classified information, scholars have sought to uncover the truth about what happened behind the Wall in order to contextualize the existing, and often contradictory, information. In Marc Silberman's words, "We need to investigate the historical GDR culture and be prepared to recognize an ongoing or post-GDR culture."² One integral part of that historical culture is literature and the role it played in East German media. Because of the unique media restrictions in the GDR, popular literature took on the role of influencing the public sphere, granting authors greater political and cultural influence than was awarded to their Western counterparts.³

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the momentous event of German reunification sparked studies across multiple disciplines that examined life in East Germany in every arena from politics to literature. Although a thorough review of major works in all aspects

¹ Marc Silberman, "German Studies and the GDR: Too Near, Too Far," *Monatshefte* 85, vol. 3 (1993): 267.

² Silberman, 269. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the cultural history of East Germany that focuses on *Alltagsgeschichte*, rather than adopting a more political approach.

³ David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 30 & 35. See also Dolores Augustine, "The Power Question in the GDR" *German Studies Review* 34 no. 3 (2011): 634-35. In the latter, Augustine notes the progress of GDR scholarship since its introduction to German Studies in the 1960s.

of GDR studies is beyond the scope of this study, I will include a review of specific works that are important to this thesis.

With the opening of state archives, new research thrived, confirming assumptions and breaking new ground. In 1992, Thomas Fox's *Border Crossings*⁴ looked into East German authorship behind the wall with studies of reform, dissident, and feminist literature. His study discussed the works of major East German authors across multiple generations, such as Anna Seghers, Stefan Heym, Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, and Monika Maron. He dedicated entire chapters to Heym and Wolf as the two authors who best represented the GDR and wrote novels that had a major international impact.

Shortly after Fox's work was printed, historian Mary Fulbrook's monograph, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989*⁵, was published. Fulbrook has published numerous texts on the political and cultural history of the 40-year regime both before and after the fall of the Wall. Since German reunification, Fulbrook's detailed studies have made accessible the information from the archives that had until then remained a mystery to many. In this study, I will focus primarily on her works, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* and *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*.⁶ Combined with her works, those of prominent Germanist David Bathrick provide an excellent background for any student of the GDR. In 1995, he published, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*⁷, a monograph that set out to explain East German

⁴ Thomas Fox, *Border Crossings: An Introduction to East German Prose* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

⁵ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁷ Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*.

culture and politics both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. His account of the unique role of authors in the cultural sphere has become a foundational text for studies of the GDR, especially for scholars interested in a literary history of the Eastern State.

Perhaps the most essential text on East German literary history is Wolfgang Emmerich's 1996 revised edition of his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*.⁸ Emmerich's thorough investigation of key GDR fiction covers political and cultural implications of major works. He outlines biographical information of major authors, works that were subject to strong censorship, the demographics of readership, and short descriptions of major publications in East Germany.

Going further in depth on a few authors, Dennis Tate's *Shifting Perspectives*⁹ looks at autobiographically influenced writings of Brigitte Reimann, Franz Fühmann, Stefan Heym, Günter de Bruyn, and Christa Wolf. He characterizes the tendencies of each of the authors, citing especially Christa Wolf's introduction and use of subjective authenticity in her post-1968 works. A slightly less intimidating undertaking than Emmerich's project, Tate's work gives a good overview of a handful of significant East German authors.

At the turn of the century, a general tendency toward anthologies and articles emerged, bringing scholars together to collaborate on their research efforts and findings. Konrad Jarausch edited a successful text that was published in 1999, titled *Dictatorship as Experience*.¹⁰ In this collection, which originated as a conference held in Potsdam in 1997, 27 scholars contributed on topics ranging from theory to feminism in the GDR and during

⁸ Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR(KLDDR)* (Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1996).

⁹ Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives before and After the End of the GDR* (Rochester, New York: Camden House Publishers, 1996).

¹⁰ Konrad Jarausch, ed. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999).

the transitional time of the early 1990s. The work aimed to create a wider discussion on the East German dictatorship, focusing on experience rather than theory.¹¹

Since Jarausch's anthology, numerous others have also been published on similar topics. In 2008, Katherine Pence and Paul Betts co-edited *Socialist Modern*, which focuses on everyday culture from the grassroots perspective, including topics such as fashion, the sexual evolution that took place in the GDR, and education inside the welfare dictatorship.¹² In 2011, Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce co-edited *The GDR Remembered*,¹³ an anthology that reflects on the management of the memory of East Germany. In the same year, Renate Rechtien and Dennis Tate co-edited another anthology, titled *Twenty Years On*,¹⁴ which has a similar approach to that of *The GDR Remembered*.

Clearly, not all major publications since the turn of the millennium have been anthologies. Fulbrook's *The People's State*, as mentioned above, was published in 2005. In her text, she contrasted the positive memories that many former GDR citizens have of their youth with the claims of absolute dictatorship and its negative implications that are so often discussed in western analysis. In 2011, historian Patrick Major published a monograph, titled *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power*,¹⁵ which focuses on the political and economic implications of the Berlin Wall. Major divided the work into three parts: "Before the Wall, 1945-61", "Behind the Wall, 1961-89", and "Beyond

¹¹ See Jarausch, *Dictatorship*, ix-x.

¹² Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds. *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

¹³ Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce, eds, *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State Since 1989* (Rochester: Camden House Publishers, 2011).

¹⁴ Renate Rechtien and Dennis Tate, eds, *Twenty Years On: Competing Memories of the GDR in Postunification Culture* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011).

¹⁵ Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

the Wall,” discussing in turn political and social issues in the GDR at different stages of its existence.

While each of these studies has contributed greatly in some way to the broader study of East Germany, until now, no scholar has focused specifically on contrasting the progression of historical events surrounding the building and later destruction of the Berlin Wall as they relate to Christa Wolf and her works.¹⁶ Throughout this thesis, I will refer to specific authors, each one focusing on a certain text or texts by Wolf, and I will tie the works and analyses together with the historical events in order to create a comparison between her earlier and later works. Additionally, I will point out that throughout her works, Wolf uses subjective authenticity, not only in her post-1968 novels, as some would believe, but also in *Der geteilte Himmel*, which she published in 1963. I will also argue that Wolf’s style consistently uses a *dual* subjective authenticity, always providing two points of reference for the reader to associate with, and through which she guides the reader to come to a certain conclusion, usually from a single character in the novel.

Christa Wolf, East German Citizen and Author

Born in 1929 and raised during the Third Reich in Landsberg an der Warthe (which now belongs to Poland), Christa Wolf embraced the ideals of Marxism and socialism as the most plausible alternative to fascism when she began her career in writing after the war. As an author whose coming of age coincided with the transition of Germany into East and West entities, she is an ideal representative of GDR thought and the attitudes of many of its citizens throughout the duration of its forty-year existence. Wolf’s novels resonated with

¹⁶ For a review of the biographical research done on the life of Christa Wolf, see chapter two of this thesis. Additionally, literature reviews corresponding to individual works are found in each chapter of this thesis.

readers on both sides of the Berlin Wall, however, because of her ability to problematize contemporary attitudes and issues without shying away from difficult topics, which was a tricky feat for any author who tried to publish in a country that censored the media so strongly. She wrote about topics from the Russian “liberation” of Germany in 1945 to the erection of the Berlin Wall to the loneliness of trying to fit into a narrowly prescribed social system. In a society that consumed literature in ways that other cultures consumed televised media, Wolf’s books offered more than mere entertainment. Through her books, she was able to reach out to the public and become a moral and idealistic influence. Although she, like other authors and citizens, became disenchanted with the East German government, she never gave up her belief in the possibility of a socialist utopian society, even though her perspective changed significantly after the demise of the GDR.

In the decade after the German-German divide, authors, including Christa Wolf, focused on writing prescriptive texts that would help form their national identity and ideology. Their works focused heavily on the emancipation of the working class and the development of socialist idealism.¹⁷ By publishing her 1963 novel, *Der geteilte Himmel*, Wolf was in essence an instigator of history in that she influenced public opinion through the novel by providing a protagonist with whom the people could identify and after whom they could model their opinions. Her novel was especially popular for the way in which she portrayed the dilemmas faced by the GDR population as they were confronted with the physical divide that separated families and imposed uncomfortable restrictions on its own people. The novel is especially indicative of Wolf’s attitude toward the socialist experiment from its inception until 1965.

¹⁷ See Bathrick, 30-31 and Emmerich, KLDDR, 29-40.

Literary historian Wolfgang Emmerich notes that in the GDR, political leaders claimed that literature should always present a kind of story that fits perfectly together with the political views and guidelines established by the government, a sentiment that was not long shared by many of the artists and authors. He mentions that especially in the 1960s, GDR literature contained a greater focus on subjectivity than in the previous decade.¹⁸ At the XI. Plenum of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (German Socialist Unity Party, SED) in 1965, General Secretary Walter Ulbricht declared that authors were to adhere strictly to GDR policies in their themes. Christa Wolf countered that it would be unwise to restrict the flow of ideas so definitively. She pointed out that the young minds of the new generation needed to be taught to think more deeply, and analyze right vs. wrong for themselves in order to come to the realization that socialism was, in fact, the higher moral ground for society.¹⁹ She argued, but to no avail. The government leaders' paranoia prevented basic freedom of thought, and their hand of censorship extended into even marginally subversive texts.

In response to the XI. Plenum, Wolf wrote a novel that expressed the difficulties that one woman faced while attempting to adjust to socialist society. At this point, Wolf, though still very influential, began to write as a reaction to politics and society. Instead of writing to influence her audience to think differently, her next novel was an attempt to come to grips with the events of the previous years. In writing, she chose to discuss her memories of a recently deceased friend, Christa Tabbert, and titled it appropriately, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (*The Quest for Christa T.*).

¹⁸ Emmerich, 174.

¹⁹ For information on the heavily diluted education received in the GDR, see John Rodden's *Textbook Reds: Schoolbooks, Ideology, and East German Identity* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

This transition from prescriptive to descriptive writing, and Christa Wolf's changing perspective on the East German government did not significantly disrupt her overall belief in socialism or her sense of belonging within GDR society.²⁰ She maintained her belief in and hope for a utopian socialist society long after the demise of East Germany. It was through this sustained belief in socialism, and her disappointment in GDR government that Wolf later gained the title of 'loyal dissident.'²¹ Although disenchanted with the way the government handled censorship and artistic freedom, Wolf hoped for progress in the GDR that would eventually sustain more freedoms for its people.²²

The months and years that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall represented a time of massive adjustment for East and West mixed with excitement and disappointment as new facts about the former, very censored society were revealed. As West German leaders sought to delegitimize the former GDR, they used multiple avenues to accomplish their goal. One way they achieved this was to find ways to discredit prominent GDR figures, such as Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym. To many people from the former GDR, Christa Wolf represented the greatest aspect of their culture. Her personal opinion in many ways often influenced public opinion.²³ Wolf experienced defamation personally when, in 1990, she published, *Was bleibt*, a novella that she had written much earlier about an author who was being followed by the Stasi. When she published *Was bleibt*, she received heavy criticism in

²⁰ Magenau, 198.

²¹ According to Julia Hell ("Loyal Dissidents and Stasi Poets: Sascha Anderson, Christa Wolf, and the Incomplete Project of GDR Research," *German Politics and Society* 20 no. 4: 2002) Jörg Magenau was the first to apply this term to Christa Wolf in his biography of her in 2002.

²² Magenau, 190.

²³ See Magenau, 195. The resulting conflict around Christa Wolf and the other GDR authors became known as the *Literaturstreit* (Literature conflict): for more information, see Richards-Wilson, 64.

both the East and the West. Critics called her an opportunist and an East German author of the state (*Staatsdichterin*).²⁴

Additionally, when Wolf published the novella, political leaders took the opportunity to accuse Wolf of being an opportunist who enjoyed the very best aspects of the GDR and then sought to claim a position as a victim of that government once it was sure to fail. In her published diary entry from 1990, Wolf explains that by ensuring her total character assassination, leaders of the newly unified Republic of Germany hoped to be able to discredit the author's previous works and many more aspects of East Germany and its culture.²⁵ Thus, they could begin to incorporate their plans for expanding Western assumptions of a completely evil, oppressive GDR society and create a culture where former moral leaders would not be welcome. The effects of this character assassination led the author to seek exile in Southern California, where she could reflect on her past and reconcile those events with her current circumstances.

During her stay in California, Wolf was able to continue work on a novel that she had been considering for part of her feminist canon. The ancient myth, *Medea*, needed a great deal of clarification in and of itself due its many adaptations throughout the centuries. The central character of the myth and Wolf's novel, the sorceress Medea, in many ways formed parallels for Wolf as she attempted to retell her own past. This story represents a central text in this thesis because of the similarities between the predicament of retelling the Medea story and the dilemma that Wolf herself faced beginning in 1990. While choosing an explicitly autobiographical text such as *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* may have merit in explaining Wolf's precise experiences, a retelling of the story of Medea exonerates the

²⁴ See Magenau, 406.

²⁵ See Wolf, *Ein Tag im Jahr* (München: Luchterhand, 2003), 498.

characters in the story and provides a creative outlet for Wolf to explore the same for herself. Over the course of the five years that Wolf wrote *Medea*, she was able to begin to come to terms with the past that she did not deserve, but that she was forced to face through criticism and character assassination.

While Wolf's texts, *Der geteilte Himmel*, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Was bleibt*, *Medea*, and *Ein Tag im Jahr* provide unique perspective for the time in which they were produced, they fail to provide sufficient perspective of the entirety of Christa Wolf's life. She lived through two German dictatorships, each with its own unique challenges, and maintained a positive attitude and outlook toward the here-and-now with which others could identify and follow. By writing her final major work, *Stadt der Engel, oder the Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (2010), Wolf provides readers with a deeper understanding of her past than would otherwise be possible. In this final text, she analyzes the experiences that she found important and pertinent to her life, especially those that formed her opinions and caused her to question the social and political environment that surrounded her. These works represent snapshots of her experiences from the time of the building of the Berlin Wall to her final reflection on the existence of the GDR and its demise. In this thesis I will use them as my focus, taking a bird's-eye view of the texts and contrasting them with events in the GDR throughout its forty-year existence, an approach that has not been taken to date. By contrasting these works side by side, the reader gains insight into the role of literature in East Germany.

Politics and Culture in the East

In order to understand the full impact that Christa Wolf had on East German society, and why she and other authors were so influential, it is important to understand the unique

culture of East Germany. The difference in readership between East and West was so significant that GDR leaders termed the state “*Leseland DDR*” (Readers’ land: GDR), an idea that was introduced by the GDR’s first Minister of Culture, Johannes R Becher.²⁶ This power put writers in a unique position to comment in various ways and on various topics, and so long as their opinions agreed with those of the SED, their comments were sanctioned by the state. Konrad Jarausch explains that the result of such political responsibility and power caused the mantle of cultural leadership to fall on the shoulders of writers within the GDR, requiring them to gain an acute awareness of the inner workings of GDR politics.²⁷

The Front Line in Their Front Yard

Cold War tensions were major causes of concern among leaders of the GDR. Within the sphere of Cold War politics, the pressures between East and West were felt especially strongly in Germany. The wall that divided the country quite literally divided the two warring ideologies, capitalism and communism. The tensions that arose from such a division caused paranoia among East German leaders that seemed to intensify their need for a strong governing body. British GDR scholar Mary Fulbrook said of the resulting paranoia,

In the Cold War context, the two Germanies were on the front line of potential international conflagration. The remilitarization of the two Germanies and their incorporation into opposing Western and Eastern military alliances symbolized the division of the world between the superpowers in the Cold War era; the clash of world systems and world-views was experienced most acutely on German soil. The West Germans were not only the “brothers” of the East Germans: they also had to be presented as their bitterest potential enemies. And written into the West German constitution...was the goal of German reunification—at the expense

²⁶ See Bathrick, 35; and Katharina Belwe and Hans-Georg Golz, eds. “*Leseland DDR*” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 11 (March 9, 2009): 3-14.

²⁷ Konrad Jarausch, ed. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999) Translated by Eve Duffy, 2004: 230.

of the total disappearance of the East German state. The GDR was hence imbued from the start by a sense of massive existential insecurity.²⁸

Because of the concentrated nature of Cold War politics in Berlin, the events surrounding people's lives often became synonymous with the entire conflict, which is evidenced by multiple United States Presidents visiting the Berlin Wall to make speeches in regard to peace or Cold War progress. President John F. Kennedy's 1962 visit to the Wall signified international support of the plight of East Germans who were trapped behind the Wall, and more importantly to American economic interests, the support of democratic freedoms throughout the world.²⁹ Twenty-five years later, in President Ronald Reagan's 1987 speech just west of the Brandenburg Gate, he did not address the German people at all. Rather, he called on Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to improve political relations between Soviets and Americans by tearing down the Wall that separated East Germany from its Western counterpart, as if the sole responsibility for the Wall resided in Soviet power. The implication, then, was that the Germans remained "pawns" to be controlled by either Americans or Soviets.³⁰

The Western threat to the East was also compounded by the American Cold War strategy of containment, as set forth by President Harry S. Truman and his advisors, particularly George Kennan. Under containment, any country that had a free, democratic government (and capitalist economy) was supported in its resistance against communism. Because West Germany did not acknowledge the existence of the German Democratic

²⁸ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Paperback edition 1997, 26. Hereafter in the paper to be cited as AD.

²⁹ See Bathrick, 6 and Major, 89-116.

³⁰ Ronald Reagan, "Tear Down That Wall Speech," June 12, 1987, given at the Brandenburg Gate. To view the speech, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjWDrTXMgF8>. Ironically, the Wall was not imposed on East Germans by the Soviets. It was planned and constructed by Erich Honecker to perpetuate his career in the GDR, and it was supported by the Soviet Union.

Republic, the stipulations of containing communism and eliminating it from German soil could feasibly have been applied to East Germany. And since conflict with East Germany under such circumstances would clearly have led to World War III, beginning with America and the USSR, the doctrine of containment in relation to East Germany simply added to the tension.³¹ An irrational, and in many ways, infeasible way of avoiding conflict was to create a physical division between the two countries that would separate the ideologies between them. Although building a wall seems an archaic choice, it was one way in which the communists “contained” themselves, but importantly it kept their citizens from defecting to West Germany and created a physical shield from the ideals of the enemy.

The significance of the Wall between East and West is further evidence of the tensions felt between the two countries. Calling it the “anti-fascist protective wall,” East German authorities claimed that the wall was to keep the enemy out. However, given that approximately one in six GDR citizens fled the Republic between 1945 and 1961, the goal was actually to stem the flight of intellectuals and able-bodied workers across the border to the West.³² The division between the two, in either case, provided a tangible barrier that fenced ideologies, economies, and people on either side of the Wall. In his book, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, Patrick Major expounds on Fulbrook’s claim that the division between the two Germanies was cause for uneasiness. He notes that such an archaic form of defense could only have been justified in the twentieth century by a “nuclear deterrence that provided a balance of power which froze fronts and stabilized conflicts.”³³ Major thus explains that the

³¹ For information on American policies of containment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). first ed. 1982.

³² Major, 12 & 25.

³³ Major, 1. Note that the East German claim of necessity for building the Wall as a form of defense against the West is one of many justifications that Major discusses in his book.

tensions of the front were stabilized by the erection of the Wall, but that the Wall could only be warranted by the greater threat of nuclear arms on either side of the dispute. By building the Wall, East Germans were able to stem the near-constant emigration of its population from East to West. However, it also physically reinforced the possibility of Soviet exploitation of East German resources.

The Government and the Governed

The pressure of paranoia regarding invasion from the West spread from GDR leadership onto the general population. Fulbrook mentions that government leaders attributed a sense of false consciousness to the citizens, through which they were able to adopt a greater, more imposing role in the lives of the people, meaning that “the ruling ideas of the age were the ideas of the ruling class.”³⁴ Leaders were thus required to “adopt a vanguard role, which often entailed acting in the supposed ‘real’ interests of, but against the currently expressed will of, the majority of the people.”³⁵ This paternalistic role of caring for the socialist experiment in its infancy led to invasion of the private lives of the people, as leaders sought to enforce unity within a single-party society and ensure peace within its borders. The methods of surveillance ranged from video cameras and wire-tapping of phones to a system of secret informants throughout the country with a central headquarters in Berlin. This headquarters, introduced in 1953, was known as the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry for State Security), or more commonly as the Stasi. The result of such intense surveillance led to the interweaving of public and private

³⁴ Fulbrook, AD, 22.

³⁵ Fulbrook, AD, 22-23.

lives, leaving the general citizenry in a constant state of paranoia, wondering who worked as a secret informer and who was a true friend who could be trusted.³⁶

For most East German citizens, the reality of the Stasi was more of a nightmare than an issue of personal experience. People neither knew who the secret agents were nor were they aware of what the agents were recording. Citizens functioned under the assumption that people could be spying on them at any time, in some ways making casual, everyday relationships seemingly impossible. Mary Fulbrook writes about such assumptions:

Many East Germans... did not know the extent of surveillance and interference in their lives, but for the vast and apolitical masses of the East German population, such considerations were for the most part, consciously or unconsciously, consigned to irrelevance. From an early age, it was instilled into East German citizens that they must conform, obey the written and unwritten rules of behavior, and never stand out in any way that might attract attention.³⁷

As Fulbrook notes, the problems that surrounded Stasi surveillance of the day-to-day had a minimizing effect on the privacy of East Germans. They did not know the extent to which the secret police were spying, and whose lives were being observed, and so the consensus was avoid undue attention through conformity. In response to Fulbrook's reasoning, Dolores Augustine points out a critical flaw that arises in almost any aspect of GDR research, but particularly in Fulbrook's claims about the effect that the Stasi had on East German citizens:

She[Fulbrook] argues throughout the book that the two [private and public realms] became closely interwoven, that there was no truly private realm. Yet in other passages she asserts "the relative normality of everyday life and leisure in East Germany for most people most of the time," meaning that they were "relatively untouched by the heavy hand of the state."³⁸

³⁶ Fulbrook, AD, 23.

³⁷ Fulbrook, AD, 55.

³⁸ Augustine, 637.

Because the state was often self-contradictory and intentionally deceptive, evidence of those contradictions arises in monographs and articles that probe its past. Normality and everyday life for East Germans operated on a completely different paradigm than that of life in the West. The condition of contradiction in society became commonplace.

In a 1982 interview, Christa Wolf talked about living with contradictions. She said that while contradictions may feel uncomfortable at times, their presence as a force to move things forward is a positive one. Then she mentions, "It now seems to me that there are fewer and fewer productive contradictions and that the number of unlivable alternatives is increasing. That's precisely the source of so many people's tension, that they feel they've gotten into a corner."³⁹ Wolf understood the controversies that people in the GDR faced, and was able to articulate what were, for a lot of citizens, the main concerns of the time. Her desire for a better form of communism and her feminist writings played well to the emancipation of the woman in a society that boasted gender equality in the workforce.⁴⁰

Gender equality proved to be a deceptive statistic, however. Although women represented 49% of the workforce and received equal pay for equal work, they were given the jobs that were less lucrative.⁴¹ Moreover, women were still expected to be caretakers of the home. They were to clean the house, take care of the kids, prepare the meals, do the

³⁹ Christa Wolf and Jeanette Clausen. "Culture is what you Experience: An Interview with Christa Wolf" *New German Critique*, 27 no. 3 (1982): 93.

⁴⁰ Wolf's feminist writings extended to the point of rewriting historical literature to favor women as intellectuals, e.g. *Cassandra* and Euripides' *Medea*.

⁴¹ Fox, 189-91. This phenomenon in feminist attempts for equality in the workplace is well described by the American sociological term, "second shift." It is descriptive of women's plight wherein they not only are expected to perform in paid work, but also maintain the domestic realm of life. For more information about second shift, see Arlie Hochschild, *Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at home* 2nd edition (New York: Viking Press, 2003). first ed. pub. 1989.

laundry, and commit to a full-time work-week, receiving as “compensation” for that labor, one paid day per month off from the workplace.⁴² Leonore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen refer to the discrepancy between “ideological self-representations of the GDR state and the actual social realities of East German women” as a “new myth of emancipation,” noting that such disappointing incongruities existed throughout the East German state.⁴³ The imbalance of work was frequently reflected in writings by women, which contributed to a sense of comradeship among working women for those seeking understanding in the public sphere.⁴⁴

Focus on Lit: GDR Literature and its Different Roles

“Writers are engineers of the soul.”⁴⁵ –Joseph Stalin

Because of the unique role authors had in the GDR, many novels, articles, and novellas from 1949 to 1989 can be read for their underlying political themes. Although many authors sought to write literature for the sake of writing, specific attention to what was published and when it was published also has connotations of political importance, if not for the authors’ intentional political role, then for the observation of what literature was censored and what was not.⁴⁶ In some instances, government leaders dictated specific ideals to be written into the literature of the time. In one example, Dolores Augustine notes,

⁴² Fox, 190. See also Jarausch, 163-176.

⁴³ Leonore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen, “The Myth of Female Emancipation: Contradictions in Women’s Lives” in Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999). Translated by Eve Duffy, 2004. 167.

⁴⁴ For evidence of “second shift” occurrences in the GDR, see Christa Wolf, “Dienstag, der 27. September, 1960” in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, 2003.

⁴⁵ This is a phrase often attributed to Joseph Stalin, which he quoted often in impromptu speeches and discussions with authors.

⁴⁶ Bathrick, 30.

“Political dictation of the social often took place in complex ways.”⁴⁷ She expounds on this thought by citing Thomas Kramer’s work, a scholar who contributed to knowledge of the GDR comic series *Mosaik*:

Although its roots lay in large part in pre-socialist bourgeois culture (from the imperial to the Nazi eras), political mandates of the communist era nonetheless played an important role in the development of the story line. *Mosaik* turned its attention to technology in the late 1950s and early 1960s when its staff was informed that it had to propagate “scientific-technical revolution.”⁴⁸

Then, even with the somewhat radical transition from a historical series to a futuristic view, the overwhelming public opinion of *Mosaik* was that it was apolitical.⁴⁹ The significance of these political spins in literature revolves around the idea of subtle indoctrination of political motives into society. Evidence of the infusion of politics into literature can be seen in the following aspects of the literary sector of the GDR.

Key Terms, Phrases, and Events that Affected Literary Culture in East Germany

In this section, key movements and terms that affected GDR literary culture will be defined and discussed.

Der Deutsche Schriftstellerverband (1952): Particularly in East Germany, where most enterprises were state-run, the line between the private sector and the public was hard to distinguish. For authors, the existence of the Deutscher Schriftstellerverband (DSV, German Writers’ Society), was just such an example. Although it was formed in 1952 to protect their interests and to provide an arena where they could discuss the major political issues in the GDR, the government had a hand in the background of the society. Bathrick’s explanation in *The Powers of Speech* portrays the society’s conflicted roles in the GDR. He

⁴⁷ Augustine, 638.

⁴⁸ Augustine, 638.

⁴⁹ Augustine, 638.

notes that its initial mission was threefold. First, it was to encourage the masses to become part of the literary process. Second, it was to eliminate the gap between the elitist and the mass literature, and third, to “further the appropriation of the literary heritage by the working class.”⁵⁰ These goals, largely reflected in the Bitterfeld Movement (see below), developed further as the DSV took on a more central role. It served, then, as a bridge between the SED and the writers, in order to inspire “literary creation at every level of society.”⁵¹ The DSV, although not directly run by the government, was supported by it and thus heavily influenced by its decisions and ideology. It helped many authors find a foundation to build on and created a connection among writers who were interested in publishing inside the GDR.

*Censorship in the GDR:*⁵² In East Germany, there were two primary forces of censorship that controlled writing and publication.⁵³ The first, less visible form was the unspoken pressure of *Kulturpolitik*, or cultural policy, where, according to Bathrick, “restrictive aesthetic codes, communicated normatively through the discourses of ‘socialist realism’ and official ‘cultural policy,’ functioned to legislate value and social identity as a total discursive system.”⁵⁴ This unofficial policy impressed upon authors the importance of following a prescriptive pattern of writing that was approved by the government.

A second method of censorship was set in place in the form of publication procedures. Known as *Druckgenehmigung*, or permission to print, writers followed a strict

⁵⁰ Bathrick, 34-36.

⁵¹ Bathrick, 35.

⁵² Censorship in Germany was not unique to the GDR. In 1827, Heinrich Heine published a poem titled “Zensur,” that depicted his frustration with German censorship at the time.

⁵³ Bathrick quotes Wolf: Self-censorship is worse than official censorship because “it internalizes constraints which can hinder the birth of literature.” Bathrick, 236.

⁵⁴ Bathrick, 16, as quoted by Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, „Rezensur: A Case Study of Censorship and Programmatic Reception in the GDR,” *Monatshefte*, 92:1, 2000, 54.

process in order to be able to publish. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming writes, “These procedures made it possible for the State to coordinate, control, and license all aspects of literary production.”⁵⁵ Such abilities of the state, together with the censoring of everyday citizens through the Stasi, seemed to guarantee the ideal society to GDR leaders.⁵⁶ At the beginning of the social experiment that was the GDR, many authors shared the opinions of the government. Thus, although it was tedious, the work of following procedures to publish was not a major concern. However, with time, the attitudes of authors and government leaders tended to diverge, particularly after the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976, giving rise to a need to find indirect ways of critiquing politics.

Because literature had a unique role in the world of media, and although many authors understood the importance of writing according to those restrictions, there were a number of ways to indirectly circumvent the censorship system. By writing about other societies and/or other time-periods, authors could often conceal criticisms of government or society within their works.⁵⁷

The Bitterfeld Movement: Shortly after the birth of the GDR, authors were issued the challenge to write prescriptively about positive heroes of the working class who conformed to their (the government’s) own perceptions of an ideal society. The Bitterfeld Movement was so named as a result of the first writers’ congress held in April 1959 at Bitterfeld.⁵⁸ The term that was chosen to describe this literary movement was “Prescriptive Socialist

⁵⁵ Costabile-Heming, 54.

⁵⁶ Belwe and Golz, 2.

⁵⁷ See Bridge, 21 and 173.

⁵⁸ See the Oxford Companion to German Literature, “Bitterfelder Weg” for more information on the origins of the term.

Realism," a phrase with roots in the Russian Revolution.⁵⁹ This form of literature represents well the influence of the government upon writers, and the influence of writers on the populace.⁶⁰ The Leninist-Stalinist ideas published in common literature were intended to influence the actions of GDR citizens. Through the Bitterfeld Movement, the working class and the intelligentsia were supposed to find common ground where authors would come to understand and appreciate the plight of the worker, and then write about it. The workers, in the meantime, were expected to "greif zur Feder, Kumpel!" and learn to write, thus elevating their abilities and helping them gain an appreciation for art.⁶¹ Concomitantly, those same blue-collar workers were encouraged to try their hand at writing, because "the national culture needs you!"⁶² With this invitation, the expectation was that the enormous gap between the intelligentsia and workers would shrink as the workers became more and more educated, and the intellectual labor force would understand the rigors of the working class. Unfortunately, while many authors successfully took on the task of writing, no worker became a successful writer as a result of this challenge.⁶³

Ankunftsliteratur: By 1961, many authors in the GDR had written and published novels for the movement. The genre that arose from the Bitterfeld Movement came to be known as *Ankunftsliteratur*, or arrival literature, because of its portrayal of everyday citizens "arriving" at the realization that socialism is the moral and logical high-ground that travels above capitalism. The name originated from a novel by Brigitte Reimann, titled

⁵⁹ See Emmerich, *KLDDR*: 119.

⁶⁰ Bridge, 9.

⁶¹ Bathrick, 120.

⁶² Theodore Huebener, "The Literary Scene in East Germany," in *The Modern Language Review* 50 no. 4 (1966): 209.

⁶³ Huebener, 209.

Ankunft im Alltag (*Arrival in the Quotidian*, 1961), which portrayed the ideals of a responsible GDR citizenry by contrasting three coming of age stories. Reimann presents three different students who meet and end up working together in the same factory. Each comes from a different background, but in the end, all three arrive at the same conclusion of supporting the fatherland. They acknowledge their duties as responsible GDR citizens to participate fully in society and contribute their best work, rather than choosing the easy road of relying on others to do their work for them.⁶⁴

XI. Party Plenum: The Eleventh Party Plenum took place in December 1965. This was the first time that Erich Honecker, future General Secretary and leader of the GDR, would make his voice heard on a larger scale. He announced new plans for East Germany, outlining adjustments in the economic plan and the new approach to media, among other things.⁶⁵ This new approach--specifically to literature--is important in this study, especially because of the effect that it had on GDR intellectuals. Authors, in particular, had been hoping that the government would ease the tight restrictions on censorship after the building of the Berlin Wall. While that may have been true between 1962 and 1964, a renewed resolve for tighter censorship was a key aspect on the agenda. Several authors and intellectuals objected and petitioned for the ability to publish more freely, but to no avail. Many of the younger generation found this to be an attack directed toward them because of the stringent cultural restrictions that were introduced.⁶⁶

Subjective Authenticity: Subjective authenticity is a term coined by GDR author Christa Wolf in 1968 in an essay titled "Lesen und Schreiben." Through the concept of

⁶⁴ See Brigitte Reimann, *Ankunft im Alltag* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1961).

⁶⁵ See Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), 39.

⁶⁶ See Jörg Magenau, *Christa Wolf: eine Biographie* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2002), 180-191.

subjective authenticity, Wolf introduced a truer-than-real-life means of writing prose.⁶⁷ Barbara Dröscher defined it as “ein auf die Überhöhung der Wirkungskraft der Literatur und der Rolle der Schriftsteller in der DDR gegründeter Versuch, durch den exemplarischen Prozess der Emanzipation beim Schreiben die Gesellschaft zu verändern.”⁶⁸ Authors in East Germany were in a unique position to influence the public through literature because of their role as intellectual leaders. Within this role, the decision to write according to one’s conscience factored into how and what was written. Authors like Christa Wolf wrote about protagonists with whom readers could identify, but they also created powerful characters that influenced public thought.

Expatriation of Wolf Biermann: In 1976, GDR leaders made the decision to expatriate musician and poet Wolf Biermann from East Germany because of his controversial lyrics. He had been under “*Berufsverbot*” (forbidden to publish/perform) in the GDR since 1965, and during his controversial televised performance in Cologne, West Germany that year, GDR politicians thought that they had finally found a reason to expel him.⁶⁹ The expulsion, a major event, as recorded by nearly every scholar of the GDR, marks a turn in authors’ general faith and acceptance of the socialist experiment.⁷⁰ Wolf Biermann was a musician known for his witty and sometimes critical commentaries, but he was a faithful communist. When the government decided to expatriate him, a group of writers from the DSV, including Christa Wolf, wrote and signed a letter of protest, requesting that the government reconsider its decision. This set in motion a number of government reactions, ranging from pressure for the signatories to retract their letter, to expatriations and censoring within the

⁶⁷ See Christa Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung* (West Berlin: Luchterhand Verlag, 1980).

⁶⁸ Barbara Dröscher, *Subjektive Authentizität* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993), 180.

⁶⁹ Major, 186.

⁷⁰ Costabile-Heming, 57.

GDR. The consequences of this event led to the decision of several major GDR authors to flee East Germany in the short period following the expatriation.

November 4, '89 Rallies: East Germany was a society where the citizens were becoming increasingly impatient and exhausted from the disappointments of government leadership and Stasi abuses. Just after Hungary opened its borders to the West in August of 1989, East Germany experienced a rush of anti-socialist protests and rallies. The most famous rally took place on Berlin Alexanderplatz on November 4th, 1989 just five days before the Berlin Wall fell and the German border reopened. Christa Wolf and several other prominent authors took the stage at the front of the rallies to persuade the East Germans to give socialism another chance with a reformed government and a more truly Marxist society.⁷¹

Historikerstreit (Historians' Dispute): The *Historikerstreit* was a highly politicized debate among German historians, discussing structuralist and intentionalist approaches to 20th Century German history, particularly in relation to the Nazi past and—at the time—the East German present.⁷² It took place primarily in the late 1980s, and in many ways influenced the *Literaturstreit* that followed shortly afterward.⁷³

Literaturstreit (Literature Conflict): in 1990, after Christa Wolf published a novella about an author's experiences with the Stasi, she was accused of being an opportunist who wanted to prove that she was a victim in the GDR. The accusation developed into criticism of all prominent GDR authors, and disputed the legitimacy of their works after the fall of the Wall, and whether they had any true literary merit after socialism failed. The discussion

⁷¹ Belwe and Golz, 21.

⁷² Mary Nolan, "The Historikerstreit and Social History" *New German Critique* 44, Special Issue on the Historikerstreit (1988).

⁷³ See *New German Critique* 44, Special Issue on the Historikerstreit, 1988.

of literary merit and legitimacy was compounded when, in 1992, a record of a number of famous GDR authors as secret informants for the Stasi was published.⁷⁴

Conclusion

One concern that authors had in the wake of the conflict that surrounded Christa Wolf and others is that authorship will be re-evaluated based on past discrepancies and interactions with the Stasi, rather than appraised for its merit within GDR literature. Silberman acknowledges the need to maintain an objective point of view when analyzing literature and authors based on facts that were unveiled after the Wall came down. While such analysis has merit, it should not come at the cost of understanding GDR literature in its historical context. He writes, "The revision of the GDR canon in literary studies threatens to proceed, for example, on the basis of judging individual political behavior: who was a dissident, a party member, an accomplice? Yet a 'good' person is neither a necessary or sufficient condition for a 'good' text."⁷⁵ The importance of maintaining an objective view in looking at the authors separately from their literature is an analytical tool that arose from the Literature Conflict. It is critical that GDR literature be observed within its contemporary historical context, rather than through a biased post-unification lens that ultimately points to the demise of the Republic, and thus a skewed interpretation of the authorship of the time. While new and expanded information can be helpful, the issue of the downfall of the East German State and subsequent character analysis of what authors or cultural leaders did within the republic may present a jaded view of the literature and its immediate impact on the population.

⁷⁴ Wolfgang Emmerich, *KLDDR*, 462-477.

⁷⁵ Silberman, 267.

In the GDR, authors wielded an invisible cultural power over the public, and in many cases, the writers were representative of the successes of East Germany until the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Thus, the major events and movements in GDR politics, such as the paranoia felt by both the government *and* the citizens, are reflected in the literature of the time. As time progressed, and censorship increased, so too did the authors' creativity as they sought ways to convey their messages in spite of increased restriction. Proof of the extent of authors' influence and their political involvement (or accusations of their political involvement) first surfaced in their entirety after the Wall came down. Christa Wolf's unique position as female author in East Germany, together with her positive but realistic works, afforded her the perceived position of matron in GDR society. Her personal experiences during the Cold War and after reunification called international attention to her and to the literature of the German Democratic Republic while observing the importance of the complex aspects of divided Germany. Because of her life experiences within the GDR and her ability to write in such a way that people on both sides of the Wall could relate to her texts, Christa Wolf and her works stand at the heart of understanding East German cultural and literary history. In the coming chapters, a selection of her major works based on the major turning points in GDR history will be discussed. First will be a discussion of Wolf's work toward writing an *East* German novel that contributed to the cultural division of the two Germanies, titled *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963: *Divided Heaven*, 1965).

CHAPTER 2: CHRISTA WOLF'S TRANSITIONING ROLE: FROM WRITING DER GETEILTE HIMMEL TO NACHDENKEN ÜBER CHRISTA T.

This chapter discusses the development of Wolf's novel of German Division, Der geteilte Himmel, and its immediate impact within the GDR, as well as the GDR'S impact on the writer, who developed from a loyal critic to a more disillusioned position, producing Nachdenken über Christa T., a work that portrays her disenchantment with the GDR government.

Christa Wolf's Path to the Berlin Wall

In the years leading up to and following the division of East and West Germany, there was more than just a physical separation between the two states. Both East and West worked to define their respective political philosophies and to claim the moral high ground over the other. In the West, the government did not need to engage in direct propaganda; entertainment and advertising, fueled by the successes of the Marshall Plan, were only too eager to accomplish the task of spreading the message of economic freedom and democracy to the people. The government in the German Democratic Republic, on the other hand, relied a great deal on authors and literature to portray the private and public responsibilities of the people living under a socialist government, choosing to nickname the country *Leseland DDR*.¹ Based on the number of East Germans defecting to the West, there was still an apparent need for citizens to make a complete conversion to socialism, which provided authors with a task from the very beginning. A decade into the GDR socialist experiment, authors like Brigitte Reimann, Herman Kant, Stefan Heym, and Christa Wolf

¹ The GDR claimed a status as a literature society, which gave authors a particularly privileged position as ideological leaders of the state. For more information, see the previous chapter, titled "Censored Freedoms." See also David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 35.

wrote prescriptive novels in the style of Socialist Realism, providing positive heroes as examples for the public to emulate. Wolf was especially popular for her ability to identify with the concerns of the time, and for her eventual role as the unofficial literary matron of East Germany.² Her first widely-read novel, *Der geteilte Himmel*,³ gained her international attention for its evaluation of socialism and its acknowledgments of the strengths and weaknesses of the East German state. An engaged member of the new socialist experiment, Wolf saw herself as contributing to the process of history, influencing the attitudes and impressions of the public through her literature.

As possibly the best-known author to come from the GDR, Christa Wolf published novels and novellas from 1960 until the time of her death in 2011. Because her fame has lasted so long and her story has been so unique, several authors have written biographies of her life. The biographies range from short narratives written by her friends, as with Therese Hörnigk in 1989⁴ to those of distant scholars, such as Myra Love's. Love focused her 1991 study on Wolf's writings and her moral influence.⁵ Jörg Magenau, upon whose work I have relied most heavily for this thesis, based his 2002 record on extensive research and personal interviews with the author.⁶ Wolf is known especially for her works *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969), *Kindheitsmuster* (1976),

² In the years following unification, Wolf's role as a matronly figure in the GDR was not soon forgotten. Thomas Brussig refers to her public role in his 1995 post-unification satire, *Helden wie Wir*.

³ English, *Divided Heaven*, translated and published in 1965 in the GDR by Seven Seas Publishers, a company founded for English translations of GDR literature.

⁴ Therese Hörnigk, *Christa Wolf* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 1989).

⁵ Myra N Love, *Christa Wolf: Literature and the Conscience of History* (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1991).

⁶ Jörg Magenau, *Christa Wolf: eine Biographie* (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2002). Other biographies include: Alexander Stephan, *Christa Wolf* (München: CH Beck Verlag, 1991); Sonja Hilzinger, *Christa Wolf* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007); and Christine Christ-von-Wedel, *Christa Wolf. Eine Biographie in Bildern und Texten* (München: Luchterhand Verlag, 2004).

Kassandra (1983), and *Was bleibt* (1990). Born in 1929 in Landsberg an der Warthe, Brandenburg—now part of Poland—she was a child during the National Socialist era and lived near the border of Germany and Poland, where Hitler’s influence and demands for German *Lebensraum* were felt particularly strongly. Her family was part of the Nazi party and showed the typical loyalty of the time to the Führer. As a young girl, she recalled learning how to read and write, and how to do the Nazi salute. The tendency to say “Heil Hitler!” was so ingrained into her mind and others’ that after the war, it was hard to greet people with “Guten Tag” and to say “Auf Wiedersehen” to say goodbye.⁷ She remembered the excitement and anticipation of Hitler’s first visit to her town when she was 6 years old, noting that the entire city gathered in the streets in hopes of catching a glimpse of their beloved leader. Wolf’s identity as a child of the Nazi party was something that she would work hard to overcome during the years following the war.⁸

From the beginning of the German Democratic Republic, Christa Wolf was an emphatic supporter of the socialist utopian experiment as the only logical alternative to Nazi fascism and used the new society to overcome her own fascist past.⁹ As part of the generation that benefited greatly from the variety of available careers in the early 1950s, Wolf’s faith in the future of socialism solidified.¹⁰ Her university education from Leipzig and Jena prepared her for a future in literature. As outlined in the introduction, authors were expected by the government to portray the ideal Marxist workers and create

⁷ See Magenau, 22. Magenau reflects on Wolf’s own fascist past, and her resolve to overcome that past through dedicating herself to the new political movement in the first pages of the biography.

⁸ Magenau, 23.

⁹ Magenau, 20-24. Her zeal for socialism went so far as to lead her to become an informant for the secret police from 1959-1962, which would later lead to harsh criticism after German reunification.

¹⁰ See Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 36, 217-218.

acceptable heroes and protagonists for the nation to look up to and follow. David Bathrick described the situation for GDR authors in this way: “As officially commissioned purveyors of governmental policy, artists in the GDR were from the beginning accorded an institutional status unknown to their counterparts in the West.”¹¹

Christa Wolf was no exception to this rule. From the time of her publication of *Der geteilte Himmel* in 1963, Wolf enjoyed, and sometimes endured, a life in the public eye. As an author, her supportive yet critical view of GDR society brought her not only a loyal following in the East, but also an international stature that protected her from the worst censures of her own government.¹² This freedom afforded her the opportunity to write more openly about the regime. Because of this, many readers in and outside of the GDR saw Wolf as one who exemplified the positive aspects of East Germany without downplaying its negative facets.

While she wrote about fictitious places and events, there was always mention somewhere of the political tensions of the time, which helped the citizens confront their concerns and often gain new perspectives. The author’s prominent role in the East was due to her ability to write well and to the number of discourses in which she could engage. Helen Bridge cites specifically the topics of utopian socialism, feminism, environmentalism, and the peace movement as a few of Wolf’s common themes.¹³ As a result of her ability to write well and connect with her readership, Wolf took on the role of the searched-for, trusted friend. To those who had relied on the hope of a successful socialist experiment,

¹¹ Bathrick, 30-31.

¹² See Bathrick, 42-43.

¹³ Helen Bridge, *Women’s Writing and Historiography in the GDR* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 9.

Christa Wolf's books and public image represented a matronly figure that fit mostly comfortably within the GDR culture.¹⁴

Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* was influenced by a movement that took shape in 1959 to bridge the gap between workers and intellectuals among GDR citizens, one of the challenges of communism that was often discussed by Karl Marx. Through the Bitterfeld Movement, authors were exhorted to help make this goal a reality by visiting blue-collar jobs and then writing about the day-to-day experiences of the average worker under the banner of "socialist working, learning, and living."¹⁵ Socialist realism describes literature as "an instrument of pedagogy for the transformation of consciousness in the struggle to build a new socialist order."¹⁶ The Leninist-Stalinist ideas published in common literature were intended to influence the actions of GDR citizens. David Bathrick explains that the Bitterfeld Movement, "called for writers to go into the factories to learn about industrial production experience firsthand in order to overcome the alienation of art and life."¹⁷ By understanding and writing about the day-to-day experiences of the German worker, authors had the ability to turn the seemingly mundane into art.

As the official workers' state, the GDR glorified the position of the blue-collar worker. Mary Fulbrook points out that the worker was so lionized that "even top Party functionaries claimed working class status if they had so much as spent two weeks on a training course for some manual occupation," which was a common occurrence in the

¹⁴ See Magenau, 32-44.

¹⁵ Ingeborg Gerlach, *Christa Wolf: Der geteilte Himmel. Grundlage und Gedanken zum Verständnis*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Moritz Diesterweg) 9.

¹⁶ Bathrick, 34.

¹⁷ Bathrick, 120. See also Fulbrook, *People's*, 215.

GDR.¹⁸ High school graduates would often do a practicum in a factory or on a farm.¹⁹ With that popularity and emphasis, the focus of GDR literature needed to present heroes from the working class in order to reach their intended audiences. Wolfgang Emmerich states that such descriptions of literary heroes became a requirement in the Soviet Union in 1932 and were soon adopted by other Eastern Bloc countries. The call was for authors to portray an „objektive Wirklichkeit in ihrer revolutionären Entwicklung.“²⁰ In other words, authors were to write prescriptively about the reality that the government would like to see, in hopes that the readership would follow suit and progress toward a socialist utopia. The goal for authors, then, was to write a unique story about a working-class hero who overcomes all physical and ideological obstacles in order to conclude that socialism was the only option for continued progress, and that every citizen has the responsibility to contribute to said progress.²¹

The idea behind writing about proletarian heroes would benefit GDR society in a number of ways. First, the working class would be able to identify with the literature of the time by seeing their own experiences and challenges reflected in the lives of the characters. Second, the government had an avenue through which it could show its citizens the correct ways of acting and interacting in their utopian society. GDR leaders hoped with the introduction of prescriptive socialist literature that they could influence the peoples' motivation to participate fully in GDR society.²²

¹⁸ Many of the early GDR functionaries were, in fact, average workers who returned from exile and were appointed to positions of government leadership.

¹⁹ Fulbrook, *People's*, 214.

²⁰ Emmerich, 120.

²¹ See Emmerich, 199.

²² See Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 58, 78-80.

Accepting the challenge to write for the working class as part of the Bitterfeld Movement, Wolf spent more than a year visiting a railcar factory, observing the blue-collar workers and their environment.²³ She seemed to take the challenge seriously to write and publish a novel with which her socialist comrades could identify, meaning that she could not shy away from hard topics that people were thinking about at the time. She would have to write descriptively, thereby confronting and indirectly analyzing the negative aspects of the regime, such as the government sanctions against fleeing the GDR, the lack of a work ethic in some areas, the challenges of dealing with a people with a national socialist past, and especially the erection of the Berlin Wall. On the other hand, she would also have the opportunity to write prescriptively, portraying her main character as a simple hero who overcomes extensive odds to become an ideal comrade and accepts her responsibilities within the GDR.

Her novel, *Der geteilte Himmel*, though pro-socialism, identified the weaknesses of the regime and socialism at large, such as the consistent lack of supplies in production factories and the inconsistent motivation of workers.²⁴ This acknowledgment provided an avenue for frustrated citizens to identify with the protagonist and, thus, work through their concerns about the problems of the developing society. Mary Fulbrook acknowledges the challenges faced by the GDR government when leaders instituted the “building of socialism” in 1952. The SED (German Socialist Unity Party) had no extra funds or real incentives, but required citizens, particularly the working class, to increase industrialization and productivity. The result was a disgruntled workforce.²⁵ Wolf’s own

²³ See Wolf, *Tag*, 39.

²⁴ Emmerich, *KLDDR*, 207.

²⁵ Fulbrook, *People’s*, 34.

experience with the frustration of the pressure to produce is reflected in the characters in *Der geteilte Himmel* who work at the railcar factory.²⁶

Although the novel was considered a part of the Bitterfeld Movement, the aspect that sets the book apart from other texts of the time is the way in which Wolf addresses the overnight appearance of the Berlin Wall without giving mention to the structure itself.²⁷ Wolf uses other major events around the time, combines those events with the psychological concerns of the main character, Rita, and then puts a positive twist on the restrictive Wall because it coincides with the protagonist's resolve to remain true to her own communist ideals. It is because of the positive presentation of the timing of the Wall that Wolf was able to present to the public a way to cope with the barrier and the new restrictions that it brought. She added to the argument for the building of the Wall by emphasizing its protection against the morally empty capitalist world outside the GDR, giving hope to many in a bleak situation of feeling trapped behind a barrier that separated many people from their families and friends in the West. With *Der geteilte Himmel* Wolf succeeded in writing a story that was truer-than-fact. The novel described openly the problems and frustrations of the Wall yet also how Rita overcame those trials, a feat that Wolf noted was a goal for so many authors. In her book, *Lesen und Schreiben*, she writes:

Nur eine Beobachtung kann festgehalten werden, eine Teilantwort auf die Frage, was einen Menschen zwingen kann, literarisch produktiv zu sein: anscheinend erwartet der Schreibende, daß seiner Hand, schreibend, eine Kurve gelingt, die

²⁶ See Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel*, 42 edition (München: dtv Verlag, 2010), 85-86. First edition 1963.

²⁷ Dennis Tate argues that with Wolf's close attention to the novel, and its later publication than other authors, that Wolf took the call to write more seriously than did her contemporaries, for example, Brigitte Reimann and Stefan Heym. See Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives before and after the End of the GDR* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 194-196.

intensiver, leuchtender, dem wahren, wirklichen Leben näher ist als die mancherlei Abweichungen ausgesetzte Lebenskurve.²⁸

In writing about the issues with which the working class dealt on a daily basis, Wolf indicates that authors have the motivation to be productive because of their ability to create a world for the readers that is closer to an ideal way of living than that of their own lives.²⁹ The literature written for the Bitterfeld Movement, and especially *Ankunftsliteratur*, had exactly that effect on many readers: the characters portrayed the problems of the developing state, often explaining and clarifying the issues at hand and presenting ways for readers to adjust and/or to cope.

In the period immediately preceding Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*, there were three major adjustments in the GDR with which the people were confronted. Many of them looked to literature to find ways to cope with the social transitions. First, in 1960, the transition to collectivization of agriculture was completed, and farmers were forced to turn over their land to the state. The discontent among farmers caused a number of them to go west or to move to the cities.³⁰ Next, the open wound of people hemorrhaging out of the GDR was closed when the Berlin Wall was built. Before the construction of the wall, as many as 2,000 people fled to the west in a single day, trying to escape the heavy restrictions associated with Soviet rule and communism.³¹ And third, the new economic system was introduced and put in place, which was supposed to provide incentives to

²⁸ Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben*, 13.

²⁹ See Huebener, 209 and Emmerich, 129

³⁰ Fulbrook, *People's*, 221-24.

³¹ Welles Hangen, „New Perspectives behind the Wall“ in *Foreign Affairs* 45, no. 1, (1966): 137.

encourage workers to be more productive.³² With the concerns of the Bitterfeld Movement in mind, Wolf navigated a narrow tightrope between truthfulness and patriotism.

The Novel

Two years after Brigitte Reimann's publication of *Ankunft im Alltag* and the introduction of *Ankunftsliteratur* in East Germany, Wolf published *Der geteilte Himmel*. The novel represents a reflection of the protagonist's experiences in an enlightening relationship where she learns of her faith in socialism. The hero, Rita Seidel, is required to choose between love for her boyfriend with his ambitious Western goals and her allegiance to socialism. After a long internal battle and a suicide attempt, she emerges with a deeper understanding of the costs of her socialist values and with a renewed loyalty to East German society. As she wakes up and realizes the events of the recent past, from the vantage point of a safe hospital room, she realizes that:

Heute schreckt sie nicht mehr davon zurück, sich einzugestehen, daß es kein Zufall war, wann sie endlich zusammenbrach, und wo. Sie sieht die zwei schweren, grünen Wagen noch heranrollen, unaufhaltsam, ruhig, sicher. Die zielen genau auf mich, fühlte sie, und wußte doch auch: Sie selbst verübte einen Anschlag auf sich..... Deshalb weinte sie, als sie aus der Ohnmacht erwachte. Sie wußte, daß sie gerettet war, und weinte. Heute empfindet sie fast Abneigung, sich in jenen krankhaften Gemütszustand zurückzusetzen.³³

The suicide attempt, which Rita first acknowledges as such at the end of the novel, represents the chronological center of the book, where she is finally strong enough to stand on her own, and decide for herself to move forward to become a contributor to the utopian vision of socialist society.³⁴

³² Emmerich, 174.

³³ Wolf, *geteilte*, 227.

³⁴ Wolf never explicitly mentions the word suicide in the novel, which leaves the reader to infer through the author's ambiguity, that it was either suicide or a nervous breakdown that led to Rita's fall in the factory.

The novel is told primarily as a flashback as Rita, from her hospital bed, remembers the long chain of events that led her to attempt suicide while working at a railcar factory.³⁵ In the flashback, the 19-year-old naïve Rita Seidel meets Manfred Herrfurth, a twenty-something engineering graduate with an attitude of being jaded by life, at a party in her rural village. Rita is offered the chance to study at a university in the city where Manfred lives. She accepts gratefully and moves to Halle an der Saale, where the two become lovers and Manfred happily takes on the task of teaching Rita about life.³⁶

She works in a railcar factory before attending the university, and although she meets with prejudice at first, Rita doesn't let her gender get in the way of her efforts to contribute to the factory and to do her part. In the factory, Rita meets Rolf Meternagel, a hard-working and honest man, who is hardened by his experiences during World War II and the post-war era. Rita identifies with Meternagel's work ethic and adopts him as a role model for what she would like to be as she contributes to society.³⁷ He represents for Wolf the worker who has achieved the Marxist idea of every individual contributing what is necessary for the good of the whole. His morale, especially in relation to consistent, hard work is known throughout the brigade, and because of that he is often met with resentment and fear from the other workers.³⁸ Rita's naïveté represents the new generation of Germans who have no real memories of life under Nazi Germany, as they collectively carve their path toward a utopian socialist society. Wolf's inclusion of the less-than-perfect working conditions and the uncertainty of those who enter the workforce are two

³⁵ In *Der geteilte Himmel*, the two representations of a single character portray the understanding that comes with experience, while at the same time affording the reader a chance to come to similar conclusions about the virtues of socialism.

³⁶ Wolf, *Himmel*, 20, 24-25.

³⁷ Wolf, *Himmel*, 34.

³⁸ See Gerlach, 44.

examples of her honesty with her readership, where she acknowledges the hardships associated with the life of a blue-collar worker.

While living in the city, Rita lives as a renter in the home of Manfred's parents, who, we learn, were active in the Nazi regime during the war. His father served in the military and is now shamed by the family for it. He cannot overcome his ties to the past, and consequently has become cynical and effectively emotionally cut off from his wife and child. Manfred's parents represent the old bourgeoisie of the city, who cannot find a place in the new workers' society. The issue of Manfred's father serving in the military is compounded in the East by the fact that many East German communists viewed themselves as the first victims of the Holocaust, meaning that Herr Herrfurth represented one of the perpetrators of World War II.³⁹

Through the housing arrangement, Wolf shows the sharp contrast between young, rural Rita and Manfred, the older, disenchanted cynic. Manfred, who is ten years older than Rita, is a disgruntled scientist who feels the increasingly strong pull to defect to the West. His age puts him in a position to remember parts of the Nazi past and especially the horrific effects of the war on Europe.⁴⁰ This bitterness and cynicism, felt by many after the war, prevent him from realizing the Soviet goal to create a society where every person works for the greater good of the whole, a concept that Rita slowly begins to understand. Manfred is dismayed by Rita's growing independence from his ideas and knowledge. She begins to question his judgment and cynicism at times when she had earlier accepted his thoughts

³⁹ See Fulbrook, *AD*, 32-33.

⁴⁰ In Tony Judt's *Postwar*, chapter one presents the condition of all of Europe at the end of the war, and the struggles that would follow in the postwar years, such as illness, broken societies, hunger, homelessness, displacement, etc. Also, Manfred is approximately the same age as Christa Wolf, who writes in his memories to match many that are similar to her own experiences from the war, and post-war times.

wholesale as fact. The reader begins to see the distance between Manfred's cynicism and Rita's optimism when Rita returns late one night after a factory meeting. He criticizes her naïveté, leaving her frustrated about his inability to see the potential in the situation.

“Und du denkst wirklich,” fragte Manfred, “nach der Versammlung geht alles besser als vor der Versammlung? Auf einmal habt ihr genug Material? Auf einmal sind unfähige Funktionäre fähig? Auf einmal denken die Arbeiter an die großen Zusammenhänge anstatt an ihren eigenen Geldbeutel?”
 “Mag sein, daß alles beim alten bleibt,” sagte Rita nachdenklich...
 “In jedem Betrieb,” sagte Manfred, “hat es Dutzende solcher Versammlungen gegeben. Du hast eine einzige mitgemacht.”
 Wennschon, dachte Rita störrisch. Die eine ist mir wichtig. Wie kann er angst haben, etwas, was mir wichtig ist, könnte mich von ihm wegtreiben?
 “Hor mal,” sagte sie nach einer Weile, “wollen wir uns doch vornehmen, nicht auf Versammlungen eifersüchtig zu sein, ja?”⁴¹

Rita's attitude toward Manfred's childish skepticism shows her waning dependence on his opinions and attitudes. Her youthful faith in the socialist system starts to become a determined faith in the triumph of the socialist experiment.

The couple's relationship begins to crack further when Rita associates with a man from the brigade named Ernst Wendland, going to dinner with him after work, and defending his ideas against Manfred's, who seems to be ever more disenchanted with all things Eastern.⁴² Wendland's attitude of total loyalty to the party and his enthusiasm about working to achieve the socialist utopia brings the ideological disagreement between Rita and Manfred to a conscious acknowledgment of the problem. His intense support of the GDR through all challenges and trials creates in him the poster boy of the socialist working class.⁴³

⁴¹ Wolf, *Geteilte*, 70.

⁴² Wolf, *Geteilte*, 118-124.

⁴³ See Fulbrook, *AD*, chapter 3.

Manfred's frustrations culminate in disgust when his work as a scientist goes unrecognized in the GDR, and he defects to the West. There, he claims to have a better reception and more opportunities for his research. The timing of his departure coincides with the erection of the Berlin Wall in August of 1961. Once in the West, however, he does not exhibit any greater amount of joy or freedom. He asks Rita to come with him and live in the West, where they can both live out their dreams. When Rita goes to visit him, however, he is in much the same position as he would have been in the GDR. She sees him, "mit dem Rücken zur Tür an einem Tisch, der dicht vor das Fenster gerückt war. Er las mit aufgestützten Ellenbogen in einem Buch... Sein kalter, abweisender Blick sagte Rita mehr über sein Leben in diesem Zimmer, als er je hätte erzählen können."⁴⁴ Through this depiction, Wolf is able to portray the banality of life in the West and its loneliness. After one day, Rita's discomfort causes her to leave the West and return to her home in Halle. Her short presence in West Berlin reminds the reader that a life in the GDR, where people work together and everyone has enough, stands in stark contrast to Manfred's situation at the end of the book. He was unhappy in the GDR, and, though financially successful, he remains unhappy in the West.

The high point of the novel occurs before Manfred defects, while Rita, Manfred, and Meternagel ride along on a test-drive of one of the trains that was built in their (Meternagel's and Rita's) factory.⁴⁵ As they ride along, the train comes to a premature stop, causing them to approach the door of the train to look for the problem. As the train stops, a man standing in the field near the train tracks gives them "the news," information that causes everyone on the train to pause. "Wißt ihr's schon?" sagte er, gar nicht besonders

⁴⁴ Wolf, *Geteilte*, 203.

⁴⁵ Wolf, *Geteilte*, 169-171.

laut. 'Seit einer Stunde haben die Russen einen Mann im Kosmos.'⁴⁶ For Rita, it was a moment of shock and silence, while others whistled and cheered for joy. Yuri Gagarin became the first man to go to space and return alive. This moment in the book represents a monumental moment in the race between East and West to show their technical superiority.⁴⁷

The significance of the characters hearing the news while riding in a train made in the East serves as a moment of triumph for communism. Wolf's portrayal of railcars as an export is substantiated in the fact that by 1966, East Germany exported railcars and other machines to over one hundred countries.⁴⁸ Rita's experience confirms to her that she is coming to the right conclusions that the Soviet route is the better option. This experience gives meaning to her endeavors and solidifies her growing political savvy.⁴⁹ As the hallmark moment of the book, Wolf emphasizes the positive aspects of the GDR and its allies while later only indirectly mentioning the Berlin Wall or what some critics have called the regime's "worst humiliation."⁵⁰

Thomas Fox elaborates that the subject of the book "is the wall, although that structure is never explicitly mentioned."⁵¹ While Wolf's novel revolves around the political division, it demonstrates that the Wall that physically divides East from West does not go far enough to explain the ideological divide that arises between Rita and Manfred. The book's focus is on the process of the ideological separation of East and West that has come to be represented by the Berlin Wall. A physical edifice can be overcome, but the

⁴⁶ Wolf, *Geteilte*, 170.

⁴⁷ See Judt, 248.

⁴⁸ Hangen, 136.

⁴⁹ See Fox, 116.

⁵⁰ Hangen, 137.

⁵¹ Fox, 132.

differences between Rita and Manfred extend into moral and psychological differences. By making the argument more important than the Wall, Wolf is able to downplay the significance of the physical divide, and even to defend its purpose in separating the morally different states. Patrick Major, referring to the novel as the most famous of its type, writes:

Significantly, the Wall itself hardly features; instead, as the story's title hints, the divisions are between value systems. The cynical Manfred comes from a depoliticized bourgeois background; Rita, the village innocent, matures to accept socialist responsibility.⁵²

Major argues that more importantly than a physical wall, Manfred and Rita represent the divergence of national values; the attempt to cope with that gap is key in understanding Wolf's novel. Wolf's ability to defend the building of the Berlin Wall and to portray it positively to GDR readership marks not only great accomplishment on the part of the author, but also the intensified role of writers in the GDR. Readers on both sides of the Wall became keenly aware of Wolf's writings and began to look to her as one who had the answers.⁵³ As an author in East Germany, she contributed to the reputation of writers as cultural beacons to the public, especially in the readers' society.

Der geteilte Himmel is an *Entwicklungsroman*—a coming-of-age novel—because of Rita's transition into womanhood and because she learns to embrace the socialist experiment as the greater of the two Germanys. The majority of GDR citizens had to fight against the idea of "Germanness" that existed before the separation of the occupied zones in the immediate post-war period.⁵⁴ During the Weimar period, and throughout the war, there was a heavy emphasis on the *Blut-und-Boden* concept of Germans who belonged in Germany. Now that the country had been divided down the middle, a new definition of

⁵² Major, 179.

⁵³ Magenau, 195.

⁵⁴ See Huebener, 208.

belonging needed to be developed. In the decade leading to the Berlin Wall, attempts to defend the division of Germany involved the claim that the Western Germans were the true Nazis, and the communist East Germans were the first victims of the Holocaust.⁵⁵ Another attempt at defending a divided Germany was based on the caring East vs. the careless, cold-hearted West.

At a time when many were fleeing over the border to the West, it was important for Wolf and other authors to re-define for the Eastern readership the superior ideology of socialism over wholesale capitalism because of the strong association of “Germanness” that existed before, and especially during, the war. The division of ideals had to be presented to the public in order to gain renewed support for the new Eastern European state.⁵⁶

Der geteilte Himmel, though famous for its inclusion of identifiable hardships and problems associated with socialism, also contributes to the utopian goal by what it does not portray. Although the novel shares significant experiences in the GDR through its main characters, the fact remains that those same figures do not reflect on major protests like that of June 17, 1953. They also do not look out their windows one morning to find a Wall that divides Berlin, a monumental event in the then-recent history of the GDR. The Wall went up while Wolf was in the process of writing the novel, which made her reconsider aspects of the plot before publication.

In her 1961 entry of *Ein Tag im Jahr*,⁵⁷ a collection of Wolf’s diary entries on the 27th of September every year between 1960 and 2000, she wrote:

⁵⁵ Fulbrook, *People’s State*, 24.

⁵⁶ See Major, 125-26 and 162-64.

⁵⁷ It is interesting to note that the prompt for this project came from a Soviet Newspaper’s call to authors throughout the world to put into writing exactly what they had experienced on 27. September 1960. While many authors answered the call, in the Soviet Union and East Germany

Diese Konzeption [dass Manfred die Republik verläßt] hatte ich angefangen zu verwirklichen vor dem 13. August. Ich mußte sie nicht verändern. Daß Manfred jetzt gar nicht mehr weggehen *könnte*, ist kein Argument: Ihre Liebe ist vorher zerbrochen, nicht dadurch, daß er weggeht. Allerdings hat die Trennung jetzt etwas Endgültiges und schneidet noch tiefer ein.⁵⁸

The effects of the physical division between East and West were felt immediately across the two Germanys, but they were especially noticeable in Berlin. Patrick Major reports the personal reflections of a number of East Berliners, who were unsure of what to think about the Wall. Some chose to react violently, while others believed that border restrictions would be a passing phase, as in the previous years, 1953, with the June 17th people's uprising against the government that lasted five days, and 1956, when the National People's Army was formed.⁵⁹ The intensity of the issue made the novel more effective as Wolf made the events leading up to the Wall the subject of the book without removing the importance of supporting the GDR efforts to create a new society.

While discussing the goals of her novel with her husband, Wolf was able to pinpoint exactly that goal of having a protagonist who does not exhibit superhuman virtues. The author reflected on the objective of the Soviet Union to create a society of sameness, where everyone represented the potential for greatness. There was "kein Pathos, kein Zugeständnis an das Bedürfnis nach dem 'Heldischen', statt dessen Suche nach dem Verhalten der Personen im Alltag."⁶⁰ For the GDR citizenry, the naïve Rita was a character without a particular sense of greatness. Nonetheless, what set her apart from Manfred, and

especially, Christa Wolf took the invitation much further by recording her thoughts and experiences on the 27th of September each year over the course of four decades.

⁵⁸ Christa Wolf, *Ein Tag im Jahr*, München: Luchterhand Verlag, 2003. 40.

⁵⁹ Major, 120.

⁶⁰ Christa Wolf, *Jahr*, 38.

from the non-productive members of society, was her desire to be a contributing part of the whole.

Ingeborg Gerlach notes that Wolf uses *Der geteilte Himmel* to respond to, and even rewrite, stories and plotlines from other works in order to paint socialism in a better light.⁶¹ Her ability to write according to the truth of her emotions is one reason why she was so successful as an author. In her books, the imperfections of everyday life lend believability to situations that are sometimes more realistic than fact in the mind of the reader. Of this form of fiction, she wrote:

Es gibt eine Wahrheit jenseits der wichtigen Welt der Fakten. Hier endet die Affinität zu den Naturwissenschaften: der Erzähler kann ihre Ergebnisse kennen und nutzen, aber was er selbst auf der Suche nach der Natur des gesellschaftlich lebenden Menschen entdeckt, darf wohl als 'wahr' gelten, ohne daß der Nachweis der 'Richtigkeit' erforderlich wäre, den jeder naturwissenschaftliche Schluß verlangt.⁶²

By writing openly about the GDR, and creating complex characters, Wolf was able to portray the strengths and weaknesses of East Germany more clearly than a newspaper article or essay.

After the overnight construction of the Berlin Wall on August 13, 1961, authors believed that they would gain greater artistic freedoms because the discussion of socialist behaviors would remain inside the GDR. There is evidence that Wolf shared this hope in certain aspects of *Der geteilte Himmel*, especially in the case of some of the workers in the factory, who seemed less intent on reaching production quotas than simply going through

⁶¹ Gerlach, 11. She references in particular Uwe Johnson's *Mutmaßungen über Jakob*, in which Johnson allows his protagonist to commit suicide by falling onto the train tracks as a train approaches. Gerlach notes that Wolf knowingly created Rita's accident on the train tracks to provide an alternative ending that provides hope for those who stayed in the GDR.

⁶² Christa Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung* (München: Luchterhand, 1980). First edition 1968. 37.

the motions.⁶³ In addition to commenting on the work ethic for some employees in the GDR, Wolf also courageously includes Sigrid's story—a young woman whose family defects to the West—and the state's reaction and consequences for the person who stays behind. Sigrid was not home when her family fled to the West, but when she arrives home, she knows where they have gone. For two weeks, she hides the secret from those around her by claiming that her family suddenly left on vacation, for a while. Then, she claims that her father was ill.⁶⁴ The consequences of her family's actions weigh on her because of the repercussions she would face as a result.

Wolf's inclusion of a family that defects to the West exhibits the problem that existed in East Germany that massive numbers of people would flee to the West, rather than stay and do their part to support socialism. The problem of *Republikflucht* was apparent as early as 1947 when the Volkspolizei attempted to monitor movement west, but failed to find any conclusive information. By 1953, the Stasi had begun monitoring the outflow of citizens from East to West.⁶⁵ Welles Hangen described the dilemma in the following words:

Before the Wall, East German officials reckoned that at least one out of every five professional school graduates would defect to the West before taking his first job. Hospitals, schools, theatres and research institutes were denuded of staff. Factory managers arrived on Monday mornings to find dozens of workbenches deserted. Entire apartment houses would be emptied of their occupants in a single weekend.⁶⁶

The problem of citizens fleeing, especially the intelligentsia, informally became known as the "Brain Drain" because of its impact on working conditions and employment in the East.

⁶³ Christa Wolf, *Geteilte*, 83-86.

⁶⁴ Wolf, *Geteilte*, 144.

⁶⁵ Major, 92-93.

⁶⁶ Hangen, 137.

It became such a large problem that the government created a law prohibiting emigration to the West, and followed up with a commission to support propaganda that discouraged young people and families from defecting. One example was the claim that in the West, young women were kidnapped and forced into prostitution.⁶⁷ Other avenues were also employed, such as publishing anti-capitalist literature and sending Stasi agents to the West to entice people to emigrate East, or to return home. The issue of the Brain Drain had a very real effect on GDR citizens and government alike, and was only stopped when the Berlin Wall was built to create a physical barrier between East and West.⁶⁸

By choosing to include some of the challenges of society in her work, Wolf is able to show the benefits of overcoming those challenges. In spite of the laziness of other factory workers, Rita seems always to put forth her best effort. In the case of the Stasi involvement, however, the matter becomes more significant and complicated. When Wolf writes about the young girl who faces the consequences of her family's departure, it can be argued that the author shows negative consequences in order to discourage her readership from defecting for the good of their loved ones. In so doing, Wolf does not deny the existence of government abuses of the family members who choose not to defect.

The Case for Subjective Authenticity

One major feature typical of Wolf's writing is her incorporation of *subjective authenticity* (*subjektive Authentizität*) in her novels. Wolf coined the term in 1968, discussing the significance of writing objectively about events and ideas while staying true to the self. For example, in *Der geteilte Himmel*, in addition to her fictional character portrayal, Wolf incorporates her own perspectives as a woman who was once a child under

⁶⁷ Major, 97.

⁶⁸ Major, 98.

the Nazi regime, and then as a grown woman in a patriarchal society, into the novel. Both Wolf and her protagonist share the role of women who want to have a positive impact on the world: Rita as a future schoolteacher, and Wolf as an important author. Both benefit from the SED party practices to support young people and gain the loyalty of the rising generation. For both women, the realization of the good fortune of living in the East leads to each woman's support of the East German government.⁶⁹ By incorporating this reality into the novel, Wolf's subjectively authentic perspective could be shared with the reader in a way that creates a sense of common identity within GDR culture.

The idea met with wide acceptance and gained her greater popularity amongst her readers and her critics. Wolfgang Emmerich explains Wolf's success as an author, and her inclusion of subjective authenticity in the following way:

Kein anderer DDR-Schriftsteller hat so stark wie sie aus der individuellen Erfahrung 'subjektiv authentisch' zu schreiben versucht und einbekannt, daß ihm die Realität nicht mehr etwas Selbstverständliches, Fertiges, ohne Umschweife Darstellbares ist. Dennoch erreichen ihre Prosatexte ein hohes Maß an Prägnanz in ihren Aussagen über die DDR-Gesellschaft. Sie entziehen sich auch von vornherein bisher verwendeten vergrößernden Etiketten wie Agroroman, Produktionsroman oder ABF-Roman, weil sie vom eigenen Anspruch her wie in der Umsetzung entschieden komplexer sind.⁷⁰

Der geteilte Himmel is told from two perspectives of a single character, that of the young, naïve Rita, and of her slightly older, enlightened self, as she goes through the process of remembering events and people who brought her to her current place. Her youth and inexperience make her character personable, and yet her slightly older self provides the perspective of someone who has experience. The new generation of the GDR reading public could then use this form of a *dual* subjective authenticity to compare their

⁶⁹ Most scholars attribute subjective authenticity only to works that Wolf wrote after she coined the term, but there is evidence of it in all of her published works, especially *Der geteilte Himmel*.

⁷⁰ Emmerich, 204.

own experiences to Rita's and use the protagonist as an example on their own paths toward accepting and embracing the society in which they lived.⁷¹ By using the double-perspective of a single character, Wolf portrayed a person with whom those in the GDR could identify, and by whom they could be convinced to understand the ideological divide between East and West.

The literary device of her dual subjective authentic perspective was a necessary one in order to persuade Wolf's readers of the impact of her objective. She needed to show the older, enlightened Rita in order to present a character to the reader who has come to terms with the Wall and could still function well in society. The purpose of young Rita was to portray the coming of age in a society where the question of ideological support for the state rests on the shoulders of more than just the youth. As Rita's attitude progressed within the story, the reader followed the process of her true conversion to socialism. Wolf influenced the masses by showing them her transition from naïve child to inquisitive and prepared mind to an enlightened socialist who was ready to take part in society. In a sense, she painted a path for the reader to follow. Then, Rita's suicide attempt after returning from her visit to the West marks a baptism into socialism where she left behind her old life and completed her conversion to a new way of life. The new, older Rita was the converted woman who understood that she represented but a single part of a greater whole and who understood her role in contributing to it.

Although Christa Wolf did not introduce the term *subjective authenticity* until 1968, and did not consciously incorporate it into her novels until after that point, evidence of the development of the idea exists very clearly in *Der geteilte Himmel*.

⁷¹ Book sales of *Der geteilte Himmel*, and Wolf's experiences at readings of the book strengthen the argument that Rita, and thus Wolf, became a moral leader during an unsteady time in GDR history.

Reception and Fame

The reception of Wolf's 1963 publication not only won her international attention, but it also afforded her the position as a moral leader in the state for decades to come. As noted in the thesis introduction, the power associated with authors in a country where they had an unprecedented ability to influence the views of the reading public put writers in a unique position to comment on socialist society. So long as their opinions agreed with those of the SED (German Socialist Unity Party), the authors' comments were sanctioned by the state. Konrad Jarausch explains that the result of such political responsibility and power caused the mantle of cultural leadership to fall on the shoulders of writers within the GDR, requiring them to gain an acute understanding of the inner workings of GDR politics.⁷² Many of these authors were keenly aware of that fact, including Wolf, and were actively involved in the political process.

In the East, Wolf received both harsh criticism and accolades from reviewers. Readers who were positively affected by the book claimed that *Der geteilte Himmel* revolutionized literature and culture in the GDR.⁷³ On the other hand, one of the harsher critics claimed that Wolf lacked a sense of nationalism. Many could not understand why Rita hesitated before making the decision to stay true to socialism.⁷⁴ The mixed reviews stemmed from her open and critical observance of the GDR at the time. Her fame, however, was sealed in the East. She had written unapologetically about life in East Germany and changed the way that authors considered Socialist Realism.

⁷² Konrad Jarausch, ed. *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999). Translated by Eve Duffy, 2004. 230.

⁷³ See Gerlach, 47-48.

⁷⁴ See Gerlach, 48.

Her work was also widely followed in the West, although, perhaps ironically, the Western reviews focused primarily on Manfred rather than Rita as the main character. For example, Welles Hangen wrote in 1966, that *Der geteilte Himmel* was “the first East German novel to deal honestly with the reason that prompted more than five million East Germans to flee to the West before the Wall was built.”⁷⁵ According to Hangen, the progression of the novel led to Manfred’s realization that socialism cannot support the needs of his research, and that his separation from Rita and the world of Eastern ideals is inevitable. He asserts that Manfred is the main subject of the novel and that the book deals more with the reasons behind *Republikflucht* than with Rita’s ideological coming of age. Rita’s greatest significance contributes to the story when she follows him from the East in order to convince him to return, but is overwhelmed by Western culture, and returns home empty-handed and broken-hearted, leaving Manfred to begin a life of opportunity in the West.⁷⁶

Theodore Huebener also describes Manfred, the engineer, as the main character who is in love with Rita, the student teacher. He writes that Manfred “sees only the inadequacies, the shortcomings, the failures” of the GDR, and even Rita’s love couldn’t convince him to stay in the East.⁷⁷ These interpretations, which disregard the simplest axioms of narrative literature, clearly demonstrate the ideological role that was being assigned to East German writers on both sides of the Wall.

Perhaps one of the most effective analyses of the reception of the book is Wolf’s own. In *Ein Tag im Jahr* in 1963, Wolf notes some of the negative feedback she received, especially from party leaders. They mentioned that she had gone too far in criticizing the

⁷⁵ Hangen, 142.

⁷⁶ Hangen, 142.

⁷⁷ Huebener, 213. Wolf’s description of Manfred and Rita’s separation in spite of their love for each other in the book ironically parallels the intellectual differences between East and West Germany.

socialist experiment and that she gave too much credit to Manfred, the man who fled the republic and left his family behind. The burden of criticism was both frustrating and discouraging for the author. Not all Eastern reviews of *Der geteilte Himmel* were negative, however. In her 1964 entry, Wolf notes the apparently overnight transition to fame. She received seven hundred requests to do readings of the book in addition to fan mail from individuals and groups who praised her talent in writing a novel with whose characters they could so perfectly identify. Wolf even went so far as to note that her husband needed to remind her that she still was only human.⁷⁸

After the Wall: Extending the Restrictions

Wolf's contribution to GDR culture first began with her 1963 publication of *Der geteilte Himmel*, and throughout the decade her influence grew wider and deeper. Her fame spread almost instantly with the international reception of *Der geteilte Himmel*. Then, as the dust of her newfound fame began to settle, in 1965, Wolf attempted to use her position of influence to gain greater freedoms for artists in East Germany. As part of the German Writers' Union, and a candidate for the Central Committee, the author took part in numerous councils and meetings to discuss the future of literature in the GDR. She attended the 11th plenary session of the Central Committee⁷⁹ in hopes of convincing GDR leaders that because of the protective barrier of the Berlin Wall, GDR culture had greater ability for unique—and liberal—development.⁸⁰

Her attempts proved unsuccessful, however. At that plenary session, Eric Honecker, the Central Committee Secretary for Security Matters, also intended to expand his influence

⁷⁸ Wolf, *Jahr*, 69.

⁷⁹ The XI. Plenary Session was also remembered for the banning of controversial films in East Germany.

⁸⁰ See Magenau, 174.

upon the government and the people. While authors and artists saw an opportunity for greater freedoms, Honecker saw a drain on the already strained economy that supported them.⁸¹ Along with Walter Ulbricht, he presented to GDR authors the need to align all literature with the ideals and goals of socialism because the State was not going to pay authors for work that did not support the Republic.⁸² His tightened grip on censorship and culture proved especially disheartening for Christa Wolf.⁸³

In what can be viewed as a reaction to the plenary session, Wolf authored a new novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, wherein she presented the story of a young woman who seemingly did not fit into the prescribed mold of the ideal socialist and depicted her subsequent attempts to deal with that society⁸⁴. Christa Wolf's own inhibitions about adjusting to the new prescriptions of authorship after the XI. Plenum were reflected in this novel.⁸⁵ In addition to this, Wolf's repertoire of narrative techniques became more sophisticated, as she wrote for the two separate and opposing audiences of East and West Germany. A sense of dual subjective authenticity again made an appearance here. However, instead of telling the story from the perspective of one woman at different times in her life, the story is presented by the narrator, a friend of Christa T., who attempts to remember the

⁸¹ See Emmerich, 208-209.

⁸² Ulbricht's argument solidifies the claims of West German critics that East German literature lacks creativity. Theodore Huebener writes, "How can there be any artistic creativity if art and literature serve the state? Ordinary human problems and individual development must be ignored in favor of a glorification of communism, since everything is pervaded by socialist ideology. Intellectual activity is controlled, confined, stifled." In Theodore Huebener, "The Literary Scene in East Germany" *The Modern Language Journal* 50, no. 4, (April 1966): 208.

⁸³ See Magenau, 172.

⁸⁴ Magenau, 192. Wolf claims that the novel is exactly what helped her out of the existential crisis that she fell into after the 11. Plenum. The book is what saved her.

⁸⁵ See Magenau, 190. Wolf's development of the premise of the novel reflects her collaboration with Brigitte Reimann in considering the alternatives to complete assimilation by authors as demanded by Honecker and Ulbricht in 1965. For more information, see Brigitte Reimann and Christa Wolf *Sei gegrüsst und lebe: eine Freundschaft aus Briefen*, published by Angela Drescher: Berlin: Aufbau, 1999.

second primary figure of the novel, a woman who played a significant role in shaping the opinions of the narrator. The interplay between the memory of Christa T. and the development of the novel reflects the internal conflict felt by the narrator as she decides what is most important to include in the biography of her misfit friend.

Christa T. makes her first appearance in the novel as a young woman who refuses to be influenced by society's accepted standards. As the new student in school, Christa T.'s apparent disinterest in prescribed social customs causes the narrator—quite obviously a native of the area, and oblivious to the prescriptions with which she is so familiar—to reflect deeply on her accepted role within society. The two form a lasting friendship, upon which the narrator reflects after Christa T.'s later untimely death from leukemia.⁸⁶ The narrator's reflection on major events and people that affected Christa T. bring her to the realization that the woman with whom she had so often met and discussed the intricate aspects of life had suffered at the hands of a society that so exactly prescribed its expectations of its citizenry. Marcel Reich Ranicki, famed West German literary critic, explained Christa T.'s dilemma in the following way: "Christa T. stirbt an Leukämie, aber sie leidet an der DDR."⁸⁷ The fact that Christa T. feels she has no place in GDR society is a careful statement against the socialist idea that everyone belongs and contributes to the greater whole. It is dangerous because one of the most positive attributes boasted by the GDR was that everyone contributed and had a place where they felt at home.⁸⁸

Wolf's publisher, the Mitteldeutscher Verlag(MDV), and the Central Committee were upset by Wolf's negative portrayal of the current social structure in the GDR. In response to

⁸⁶ Wolf, *CT*, 7,179.

⁸⁷ Marcel Reich Ranicki, "Christa Wolfs unruhige Elegie," *Die Zeit*, May 23, 1969.

⁸⁸ Julia Schoch, Personal Interview, February 19, 2013.

Christa Wolf's critical stance recorded in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, the SED leadership and the MDV chose not only to restrict publishing of the novel, but also all of Wolf's other essays and works that had been previously approved to be published in the following years. The danger associated with any single hero rising out of the ranks of the people was compounded when that person stood in any sort of opposition to state leaders. The plan for *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was not to halt the novel, but to publish a very small run of 4,000 copies, essentially publishing it into obscurity.⁸⁹ Heinz Sachs, director of the MDV publishing company, wrote the following letter addressed to Comrade Vollrath in the East German Ministry of Culture to explain his decision for retracting the agreement to publish Wolf's works at the time:

6.5.69

Liebe Genossin Dr. Vollrath,
 da wir es für politisch falsch halten, wenn sich um den Namen Christa Wolf eine ideologisch-künstlerische Plattform bildete, die sich gegen unsere Kulturpolitik richtet, halten wir das Erscheinen des für dieses Jahr geplanten Essaybandes von Christa Wolf "Lesen und Schreiben" für nicht richtig.
 Wir ziehen deshalb das Manuskript hiermit zurück.
 Mit sozialistischem Gruß
 (Sachs)
 Verlagsleiter⁹⁰

Reacting to the censorship of the GDR, Wolf's husband refused to let the matter of restricted publishing of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* end there, and pursued opportunities for publication in the West. He also convinced Christa to add another chapter to the end of her book to serve the purpose of downplaying the severity of the social criticisms in the

⁸⁹ Magenau, 218. See also Rolf Michaelis' letter published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for one example of the unfulfilled demand for Wolf's latest book. Rolf Michaelis, "Selbstkritik eines Verlegers in der 'DDR'" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 15, 1969.

⁹⁰ Federal Archive, Potsdam Department, „Drukgenehmigungsakte zu „Lesen und Schreiben“ 1968/69, as quoted in: Angela Drescher, *Dokumentation zu Christa Wolf, Nachdenken über Christa T.* (Hamburg: Luchterhand Verlag, 1991), 98.

book, to appease the Central Committee leaders. With this new addition, a second publishing commenced with the preprinting of the book as articles in the *Der Sonntag* newspaper.⁹¹ No longer able to overlook Wolf's book, the public attention forced GDR leaders to acknowledge the novel and take action in regard to its publication.

By publishing a book that so harshly scrutinized the standard culture of the GDR, Christa Wolf established a new grey area between the black/white extremes of loyalist and protester. This unique grey area eventually became known as loyal dissident, referring to someone who is true to the ideals of socialism, yet is disenchanted with the current government situation.⁹² After Wolf became identified as a dissident in GDR society, her fame domestically and internationally spread exponentially. While the GDR's purpose in refusing to publish her book was to limit her influence on popular opinion, the actual result had the opposite effect. Furthermore, the writings that Wolf initially intended as suggestions for reform, were instead used in the West as means to delegitimize the GDR system and culture.⁹³

Conclusion

As an author whose coming of age coincided with the division of Germany in 1949, Christa Wolf possessed a unique perspective about the intricate details of life in the GDR. In both of her first major works, she used literature to portray and analyze aspects of the GDR as realistically as possible, and to make suggestions regarding ways in which society could

⁹¹ Magenau, 201.

⁹² Emmerich, 56.

⁹³ See Heinz Sachs, "Verleger sein heißt ideologisch kämpfen" *Neues Deutschland*, May 14, 1969 as quoted in *Dokumentation zu Christa Wolf: "Nachdenken über Christa T."* (Hamburg: Luchterhand, 1991), 100. Here, Sachs points out that in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Wolf addresses the question, "How should we live?" See also Thomas C Fox, *Border Crossings: An Introduction to East German Prose* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 91-92.

be improved. Always inherent in the texts were the subtle assessments that western critics often interpreted as harsh critiques of the failures of East Germany, while those in the East found texts with which they could identify because of their authentic portrayals of imperfect life in East Germany.

In *Der geteilte Himmel*, Wolf tells the story of Rita Seidel's emotional journey of loyalty and self-discovery as she grows to embrace socialism. At first, Rita fails to acknowledge the benefits of living in East Germany, not understanding that she was afforded chances in the East that were non-existent elsewhere. Through her maturation process, as portrayed in the novel, Rita develops a sense of camaraderie with the factory workers, and consequently acknowledges "Jedermanns" contribution to the socialist experiment. Her evolution from young, naïve German to enlightened, socialist East German citizen represents the transition that is possible for her entire GDR readership. Rita's suicide attempt then represented the culmination of her conversion to socialism, and a baptism into the ideology, leaving her old life behind. Through her efforts, Wolf portrayed the challenges of living in East Germany and the coming-of-age process that was reflected in the attitudes of many GDR citizens. The ideological separation between Manfred and Rita solidified for many the difference between the East German dedication to being a supporting part of the greater whole and the portrayed West German idea of just searching for the good of the individual.

While many authors wrote for the Bitterfeld Movement, *Der geteilte Himmel* played a unique role in conveying the goals of Socialist Realism, as Christa Wolf clearly portrayed both the strengths *and* the weaknesses of East Germany, and left the interpretations to her

readers. For those who were looking, the triumph of Rita Seidel offered hope for a positive socialist future.

Then, in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, the reader is introduced to the problems that relate to assimilation in a narrowly defined society. By writing about her former friend, the narrator depicts the pressures to comply with the prescriptions of the GDR that Christa T. faced. The decision not to assimilate reflects Wolf's own decision to resist the demand for authors and artists to conform to an exact literary agenda that was presented at the XI. plenary session of the Central Committee in 1965. This refusal led to extreme censorship and other losses for Wolf within the GDR culture, but also earned for her a permanent place as an important international literary figure for decades to come.

As an author, the decade of the 1960s served to define Wolf's future career as a cultural leader. Her contributions to popular opinion and her ability to influence GDR readership were cemented with her novels, *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Each of the works seemed to come forth at a time of transition and frustration for the public, and provided a useful perspective for ways in which the people could handle major political and cultural turning points that existed within the GDR. Given this conflict of interests with the state during the 1960s and her published perception of the problems, it is ironic that just over twenty years after the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Wolf would be vilified as the "Staatsdichterin." It is to this interpretation of Wolf's work that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION: WOLF IN IDEOLOGICAL EXILE

This chapter discusses the reaction to analyses of Wolf as a proponent of the State and how she herself seemed to process the accusations.

Myth, Censorship, and History in GDR Literature

Scholars from Sigmund Freud to Robert Graves have supported the belief that myths may offer insight into events in human prehistory, and contribute to the story of the development of the human species. Since the Renaissance, authors have frequently turned to myths for the subjects of their works in order to comment, perhaps in disguise, on contemporary events. This tactic was especially common in censored societies in general, and the GDR in particular, where examples included Heiner Müller's *Philoktet* (1964) and *Medeaspiel* (1974), Stefan Heym's *Ahasverus* (1981), and Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* (1983), to name a few. Such reinterpretations provided the opportunity for these and other authors to circumvent the stringent regulations of literary censors during the years of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).¹

Within the cultural and political structure of the GDR, it is easy to identify more than one type of censorship that was imposed upon authors. In one instance, the carefully crafted cultural norms accounted for a certain degree of control, encouraging authors to write books that embraced a prescriptive approach to socialist realism. A more direct form of restriction is evident in the official licensing process that applied to all writers who wanted to publish their works. Authors were required to gain *Druckgenehmigung*, or permission to print, before publishing. Additionally, nearly sixty of the seventy-eight

¹ From this point on, German Democratic Republic will be abbreviated with GDR.

publishers in East Germany were owned by the state.² Under such restrictions, GDR authors came to find more indirect ways of portraying meaning (and often criticism) in the socialist regime that so often controlled the way they worked and lived.³

Such instances of censorship inspired authors to become creative and cautious in their texts. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming refers to the purposes of government control: "In addition to promoting an incapacitated reading public, guided 'public' reviews of texts or programmed reception instructed readers on the appropriate interpretation of a given text."⁴ To ensure complete control of the people, the SED censored everything from the writing process to public readings. This "guaranteed" power over the writing and reception process. It is precisely this form of government control over literature that Wolf critiques in her 1990 novella, *What Remains* (discussed in detail below). In the novella, Wolf keeps a fictional record of a day in a female author's life. The day climaxes at a public reading, which the unnamed author is unsure about attending because of the number of SED and Stasi (*Staatssicherheitsdienst*—GDR Secret Police) members who will be there. In the end, she decides to go for the good of her public. The reading progresses into a political discussion when one character refers to the word "future," at which point the party members and Stasi in attendance close the meeting prematurely.⁵ Because the public openly converses about the future, the Stasi can classify the discussion as a potential conspiracy plan.

² See Christoph Links, „Was blieb vom Leseland DDR?“ *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, (March 2009): 32.

³ See Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, "'Rezensor': A Case Study of Censorship and Programmatic Reception in the GDR" *Monatshefte* 92, no. 1 (2000): 53-67.

⁴ Costabile-Heming, 54.

⁵ See Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt (What Remains)*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990).

The fact that Wolf's protagonist is a woman is more than just representative of an autobiographical aspect of the work. Christa Wolf was a key player in the GDR feminist movement. The protagonists in her works were usually women, and she worked hard to assert that feminism was more than just a matter of economic equality. She also noted that women might offer a different sort of memory to historical scholarship. Thomas Fox writes of Wolf's role in feminism, "She asked whether women, for centuries outsiders, might bring a different memory, a different epistemology, a different set of values into history... She furthermore asserted that for women, emancipation should not entail becoming 'like men'."⁶ In 1983, she took a character from Greek mythology to illustrate her point to reclaim women from male-directed history. Writing about Cassandra, she changed the traditional attributes of the character from a woman with supernatural powers to a woman who had the ability to think clearly and thus anticipate what the future would bring. In an interview that she gave after publishing *Medea*, she explained, "Aber, seit ich über Kassandra gearbeitet habe, ist mir ganz klar, dass die Geschichte des Patriarchats die Geschichte der Frauen aus der Mythologie umgeformt hat."⁷ Wolf saw her work, then, as returning the mythological women to their original roles in their respective histories, and thus correcting the long-accepted patriarchal narrative that dismissed and downgraded women's capacities in society.

Even after the Wall fell, Wolf maintained her pattern of emancipating women in (historical) literature. While writing the story of *Medea*, her attempts to free the woman from the oppression of patriarchal interpretation of mythology gained an additional dimension as Wolf sought to free herself from the events of post-reunification Germany.

⁶ Fox, 192. See also „Christa Wolf im Gespräch“ in Hochgeschurz, 59.

⁷ „Christa Wolf im Gespräch“ in Hochgeschurz, 60.

True to her style, Wolf combined her experiences with those of her characters, and was thus able to confront her past in the process of researching and writing the book. Though the novel clearly addresses feminist ideals, the goal of this chapter is not to focus on those important aspects. Rather, the chapter will pay particular attention to the book's immediate historical relevance.⁸

Background to the Myth

For centuries, authors have told and retold the story of the irrational wild woman, Medea, who kills her own children in a climactic act of revenge against her ex-husband. First written by Euripides, the story is told from a patriarchal perspective, where Jason, Medea's (ex-) husband is portrayed as a sensible man who meets the mystical princess while on a quest for the Golden Fleece. He is able to see through Medea's mysticism, while still being captivated by her. His ability to maintain a sense of reality throughout the narrative contrasts sharply with the personality of the emotional healer-princess from a distant land. When, years later, Jason moves beyond this relationship, it is the disenchanted Medea who, in a rage of passion, gifts Jason's new lover a poisoned dress, and then kills Jason and Medea's own two children to ensure an end to Jason's rational happiness and his posterity.⁹ Georgina Paul mentions a number of authors who have taken part in developing the Medea myth. From Euripides to Franz Grillparzer to Heiner Müller, each author

⁸ For discussion of *Medea* as a feminist text, see Julia Przybilla's *Christa Wolfs Medea: Stimmen, eine feministische Interpretation* (Munich: Grin Verlag, 2008), and Helen Bridge, "Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* and *Medea*: Continuity and Change," *German Life & Letters*, 57, no. 1 (Jan 2004): 33-43.

⁹ According to Wolf's research and records in Basel, Switzerland, Euripides was the first to introduce the idea of maternal filicide. Before Euripides' version, the children were killed in the temple of Hera by the Corinthians. See Wolf, "Brief an Margot Schmidt," in *Christa Wolfs Medea, Voraussetzungen zu einem Text*, edited by Marianne Hochgeschurz (Berlin: Gerhard Wolf Janus Press, 1998), 20-21.

exemplifies his (rarely *her*) own perception of the woman gone mad in a patriarchal society.¹⁰

In contrast to all of these interpretations, however, in 1996, Christa Wolf entered the scene with her own interpretation of *Medea. Stimmen* (*Medea: Voices*). Her new interpretation, based on eleven monologues from the different primary characters, represents an entirely different woman, one who is consistently framed for murder and made a scapegoat in the eyes of those whom she seeks to serve. Wolf's Medea takes the role of the rational character, who sees beyond others' shortsightedness. In so doing, Wolf is able to turn the traditional enlightenment ideas on their head by portraying Jason as a vain, self-serving egotist, for whom she would not mourn, much less harm or murder her own children. While other authors have cried murder, Wolf's Medea becomes the victim in a series of plots to bring about her downfall, which were planned first by a former student of hers, and then embraced by political leaders in the new land she must call home.

By rewriting the narrative of Medea and, as many of Wolf's critics claimed¹¹, superimposing herself on the protagonist, Wolf accomplishes three objectives. First, she makes the point that no woman would ever become so irrational from love as to slaughter her own children in order to spite her lover. Moreover, pointing out that Medea would not murder her own children supports the retelling as a feminist narrative. Second, by relieving Medea of the burden of killing her own children, she points out that Medea becomes a

¹⁰ Georgina Paul, "Schwierigkeiten mit der Dialektik: zu Christa Wolfs *Medea. Stimmen*," *German Life and Letters* 50 no. 2 (1997): 227. Also, the idea of a woman-gone-mad because of love is not uncommon in German literature, even in post-enlightenment texts. In Goethe's masterpiece, *Faust*, the protagonist's female lover, Gretchen, murders her child in an irrational sorrow when she believes that Faust has abandoned her.

¹¹ See, for example, Anna Chiarlioni, "Medea und ihre Interpreten: zum letzten Roman von Christa Wolf" in *Hochgeschurz*, 112 and 115. See also Volker Hage, "Kein Mord, nirgends" *Der Spiegel*, February 26, 1996, 202-206.

scapegoat for the unenlightened characters who perpetuate the patriarchal society in which she lives. This is representative of Wolf's own experience, having become the scapegoat for West Germans to claim the need to enlighten East Germans. Finally, by retelling the Medea story, Wolf is able to process her own past and situate her experiences within the greater social realm.

The Need to Process the Past

In 1990, Wolf published an eighty-nine-page novella, titled *Was bleibt* (English translation: *What Remains*), that she had written in 1979. The story is about one day in the life of an author who was being followed by the Stasi. In addition to writing about the individual author, Wolf writes about the paranoia that results from being constantly followed, causing the Stasi's victim to pay an unhealthy amount of attention to detail and to act out of character.¹² The constant attention to detail was an aspect of the GDR with which most citizens of the former dictatorship could identify and that they could understand. The progression of the storyline represents the tight control that was exercised over every part of life in the GDR.

Publication of *Was bleibt* triggered major accusations from Wolf's critics both inside and outside the former GDR. She was accused of publishing the book as an opportunist who sought to present herself as a victim of the East German regime, even though critics pointed out that she had enjoyed a great deal of privilege as an honored author, in effect having lived as the lap dog of the East German government.¹³ Many examples of her freedoms

¹² See Wolf, *Was bleibt*.

¹³ Christine Schoefer, "The Attack on Christa Wolf" *The Nation*, October 22, 1990. Reprinted in *When the Wall Came Down: reactions to German unification*, edited by Harold James and Marla Stone, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 205-208.

included travel rights throughout the world,¹⁴ salaries, pensions, and prizes, and a private home outside of Berlin.¹⁵ The accusations escalated to a character assassination of Wolf¹⁶ and expanded to accusations against other prominent GDR authors, including Heiner Müller and Stefan Heym.¹⁷

In 1993, Wolf's predicament was compounded when research revealed that she had been a secret informer to the Stasi between 1959 and 1962 under the name *Margarete*, something she claimed to have long since forgotten. As an informant, she joined the side of the oppressors, who were associated with the embodiment of evil. David Bathrick notes that Wolf's and other authors' involvement with the Stasi, "seemed to confirm once and for all the moral and political bankruptcy of the literary avant-garde in the GDR. It was one thing for [them] to have naively worked within a dictatorial system in the hope of reforming it; quite another to have crossed the line into a realm of unadulterated evil."¹⁸ In that light, it is evident that Christa Wolf had quite a lot of accusations to deal with, and although some of them may have been justified, many critics concur that she did in fact serve a "scapegoat" function for triumphalist West Germans who were eager to proclaim their victory in the Cold War. Several scholars also made note of the convenience of

¹⁴ In 1974, Wolf was the Max-Kade-writer-in-residence at Oberlin College in Ohio. Then again in 1983, Wolf spent a year in the United States as a guest professor at Ohio State University. An uncommon allowance among East Germans was the ability to leave the GDR. More than that, the United States was seen as an ideologically polluted nation, where capitalism and excessiveness abounded. See Volker Krischel, *Erläuterungen zu Christa Wolf: Medea* (Hollfeld, Germany: Bange Verlag, 2003), 10-13.

¹⁵ See Fox, 14-15.

¹⁶ See Ulrich Greiner, "Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik" in *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, edited by Thomas Anz (Munich: Spannenberg, 1991), 210.

¹⁷ Stephani Richards-Wilson, "Cry Wolf? Encounter Controversy: Christa Wolf's Legacy in Light of the Literature Debate" *New German Review: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 24, no.1 (2011): 64.

¹⁸ Bathrick, 219-220.

discrediting Wolf as an author. In her analysis of the attack against Wolf, Christine Schoefer wrote:

Wolf is a sacrificial lamb in a larger project: the ideological shaping of unified Germany. Why Christa Wolf? The fact that she is a woman may be coincidental. But it goes without saying that if one of East Germany's most respected writers is discredited, all East German writers who shared her vision will be silenced.¹⁹

By taking the most famous writers and making their opinions taboo in the new society, it becomes easier to disregard any positive aspects of the former Eastern society that were discussed by authors like Wolf.²⁰

Thus, it wasn't simply for the fact that people did not love her book, *What Remains*, that Wolf needed time to process the past. Nor was she simply overwhelmed by the extreme transitions of adjusting from living under a socialist dictatorship to living in a capitalist state. The author felt that Western politicians had specifically targeted her as the representative scapegoat for the evil Socialist Republic. In a journal entry in 1990, Wolf recorded an encounter in the Cecilienhof in Potsdam that seems to come directly from a drama/murder mystery. She was approached in a darkly lit hallway by a man who "stood behind the curtains and pulled the [political] strings" to ensure that the political reunification would represent Western ideas. After the encounter, she recorded the experience in the following way:

Der Mann ist jemand, der anscheinend hinter den Kulissen Fäden zieht, ...Was also wollte mir Abends dieser Mann in der dunkeln Nische des Ganges erzählen?.... 'Natürlich handelt es sich um eine Kampagne gegen Sie. Natürlich geht es gar nicht um Ihre Vergangenheit, sondern um Ihre Aktivitäten in der Gegenwart. Das stört. Und natürlich soll bei Ihnen alles, was einen Anhauch von

¹⁹ Schoefer, 205.

²⁰ Thomas Anz's compilation, *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf: der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland*, provides an extensive discussion about the events surrounding the Literaturstreit, incorporating responses from some of the most influential authors and scholars in Germany at the time of its publication.

links hat, zerschlagen werden. Die DDR muß unbedingt delegitimiert werden.' Einige linke Gäste aus der DDR, die er noch habe einladen wollen, seien ihm abgelehnt worden. Und eben habe der Lahnstein zu ihm gesagt—als die Rede darauf kam, mich zu einer bestimmten Vortragsreihe nach München einzuladen—'Das lassen wir jetzt. Es hat sich wohl erledigt.'—Sie kriegen bei uns in den Medien keinen Fuß mehr auf den Boden...aber Sie haben ja Ihre Fans, und Sie können sich einfach rar machen und schreiben.²¹

Wolf's encounter in the building where Churchill, Truman, and Stalin negotiated the Potsdam Accord, a powerful symbol of the Allied victory over Hitler, represented a perfect irony: East Germany's narrative of the end of WWII posited a sort of "salvation" by the Russians and their socialist ideas, and Wolf was one of the few ardent supporters of maintaining a socialist government.²² For her, the building was still significant, and yet that was the very place where she learned that she would be the victim of character assassination in order to secure the accepted ideologies of the newly reunited German State.²³

The Purpose of Rewriting the Myth

When comparing contemporary history to the myth, the reader sees that Wolf has written herself into the story, incorporating the experience of her character assassination in the early 1990s with experiences of the main protagonist, thus drawing attention to Medea's own downfall as a result of victimization. Anna Chiarloni explains,

Der Roman ist nach einem längerem [*sic*] Schweigen der Autorin als Erzählerin erschienen. Der Grund ist bekannt: vor der Wende hat man Christa Wolf als Nobelpreiskandidatin gepriesen, dann—als die DDR als ein Irrtum der Geschichte bezeichnet wurde—hat man sie im Westen als Staatsdichterin

²¹ Christa Wolf, *Ein Tag im Jahr: 1960-2000* (München: btb Verlag, 2005), 465-66.

²²The man remains nameless and the timing of the encounter is so convenient to the conflict that this experience merits a look into further evidence of the occasion. While it can be proven that Wolf was at the Cecilienhof, it may have been an altered memory of Wolf's, or another way for her to process her dramatic past.

²³ See Wolf, *Jahr*, 466.

verhöhnt. Dass die Schriftstellerin in ihren jungen Jahren auch eine Kulturfunktion gewesen war, wollte jetzt niemand wahrnehmen.²⁴

Chiarloni's comments reflect on an analysis of time during which Wolf must have struggled with her own reality of one who was once well respected and revered within society, to one who was sentenced to life in its cultural margins. Thus, from 1991 when she began writing, to 1996 when the book was published, Wolf seems to have been able to use the book as a vehicle for processing the past (*die Vergangenheit verarbeiten*), progressing from a state of disenchantment with West Germany and the general public to acceptance of her position within the newly reunified country.

In comparing Wolf's experiences to those of the protagonist, the most easily drawn, though imperfect, parallel arises when the innocent goals of the two women are misinterpreted by the societies in which they live. For example, the major conspiracy in *Medea* begins with the protagonist's discovery of Corinth's concealed past. After finding the dark secret of the Corinthian culture, Wolf's Medea remarks that she has no motive to expose the society, but—perhaps naively—wants to understand the Corinthians and their history. As a result of her uncovering the secret, however, she unknowingly sets a trap for herself. When the situation escalates, she claims that she only wanted to understand the place in which she lived, but she had no intention to act on the knowledge:²⁵ "ich wollte mir nur klarmachen, wo ich lebe."²⁶ Such an argument can easily be compared to Wolf's composition and delayed publication of *What Remains*. Written in 1979, but not published until 1990, many accused her of being an opportunist, seeking now to be identified as a

²⁴ Anna Chiarloni, "Medea und ihre Interpreten: zum letzten Roman von Christa Wolf" in *Christa Wolfs Medea, Voraussetzungen zu einem Text*, edited by Marianne Hochgeschurz (Berlin: Gerhard Wolf Janus Press, 1998), 115.

²⁵Paul, 239.

²⁶ Wolf, *Medea*, 96.

victim, although for so long she was arguably the Grande Dame of East German letters. In order to defend herself, she gave Medea the words that echoed Wolf's own sentiment just prior to writing the book. By pointing out that she "only wanted to understand" East German society, she adds to the argument that her role as an author was not that of a savior of the people. Explaining that understanding a society does not mean that one has to act on that knowledge neutralizes the argument against her that she should have become an activist against the Stasi.

In pointing out this and other parallels between Medea and Christa Wolf, I do not wish to suggest that the novel must be a *roman á clef*, a strict evaluation of the past where each character and event has a parallel voice in either the GDR or the FRG (West Germany).²⁷ Wolf has responded in interviews²⁸ that the book is primarily concerned with rescuing Medea from the patriarchal interpretations of history as part of a life-long feminist project. Thus, although certain aspects of the book may reflect correlations to people and events, it is not strictly a *roman á clef* and it would be restrictive to the story to read it solely in that way. In a 1997 interview about the novel, she said that a good many critics expected that she would write a book about East-West relations. She did not deny that there are aspects of the East-West conflict in the book, but that the conflict appears in a very different way than predicted. She asserted that there is much more to *Medea* than just a re-evaluation of the immediate past.²⁹ Writing a strict *roman á clef* would have restricted

²⁷ See Cheryl Dueck, *Rifts in Time and in the Self: the female subject in two generations of East German women* (New York: Rodopi publishers, 2004).

²⁸ See Hochgeschurz, 58-64.

²⁹ "Christa Wolf im Gespräch: nach der *Medea*-Lesung im Frauenmuseum in Bonn," in Hochgeschurz, 58.

Wolf to analyzing the past according to the time span of the GDR and the short years thereafter.

By integrating her story with Medea's, Wolf could react to experiences that she noted were previously too difficult for her to discuss. In *Ein Tag im Jahr*, Wolf discusses her inability to confront the controversy that arose in 1990. After a particularly exhausting public appearance, Wolf mentions in 1990, that she is "versucht, dieses Projekt abubrechen (the 40 year diary), aus einer tiefer sitzenden Hemmung heraus als der gewöhnlichen Unlust.... Ein Widerstand gegen einsichten, die zu nahe an mich herangehen würden, lässt sich nicht auflösen."³⁰ Her mention of "insights that are too close" shows her inability to immediately face the challenge of evaluating the experience. Three years later, though, she still has a hard time discussing the events surrounding her deeper past. In her 1993 entry, she writes about a public interview she had in West Berlin:

Ich versuche, so offen wie möglich über die verschiedenen Stadien zu sprechen, über den ersten Schock, den Schrecken über mich selbst, die Verzweiflung über die Unmöglichkeit, in der allgemeinen Stasi-Hysterie auf eine Differenzierung in der Öffentlichkeit rechnen zu können, auf die Gefahr, mich mit der Charakterisierung, die ich dann in der Öffentlichkeit erfuhr, zu identifizieren, *auf die Therapie durch Schreiben* und das allmähliche Wieder-herausfinden aus der Depression bis zu dem jetzigen Zustand, da ich glaube, ich könne diese Episode, die immer ein wunder, auch ein dunkler Punkt bleiben werde, aus meiner Entwicklung heraus erklären. Während ich rede, merke ich, dass ich mir doch zu viel zugetraut habe, dass ich doch noch zu dünnhäutig bin für derartige Foren, aber jetzt gibt es kein Ausweichen mehr.³¹

Through these statements, it is clear that Wolf was not in an emotional position to confront her past through directly, "in the real world", but that she needed a different avenue to understand the past without confronting it head-on. It is through this lens that the reader comprehends the importance of an emancipated Medea for Wolf.

³⁰Wolf, *Jahr*, 486.

³¹ Wolf, *Jahr*, 555.

The Pre-Stages of Writing *Medea*

Wolf has stated that one major aspect of deciding to use myth to write about contemporary culture was asking the right questions. Producing a question that gives just the right perspective can be like drawing “iron filings to a magnet.”³² In prehistoric myth, there is a lot of information to gather and interpret, and researching to find the “true myth” was something in which Wolf reveled. From oral traditions to Euripides, she spent countless hours reading and divining information from sources that she could find. Especially during her time in Los Angeles, Wolf used computer access and copy machines to collect as much material on the Medea myth as she could. Notes that she kept from that time mention that she was researching the true origins and story of the myth.³³ Then, combining the information with the right questions, she was able to find representations of what she thought had happened and, to an extent, combine it with her own experiences to re-tell the story of *Medea*.³⁴ Over the five years that Wolf researched and wrote the novel, she visited multiple sites and consulted innumerable scripts and works in order to come as close as possible to the truest version of the Medea story.³⁵

By approaching reality through writing, a tactic often attributed to Wolf and what she called subjective authenticity, the progression of the book represents her process of evaluating and working through the events, granting *Medea*, in particular, a kind of historical accuracy. Helen Bridge notes one aspect of the evolution of Wolf’s writing by discussing the changes in the role of myth in history. She writes, “The more psychological

³² Christa Wolf, “Von Kassandra zu Medea: Impulse und Motive für die Arbeit an zwei mythologischen Gestalten,” in Hochgeschurz, 15-17.

³³ See Christa Wolf’s diary entries in Hochgeschurz, 38-39.

³⁴ Wolf, in Hochgeschurz, 38-49.

³⁵ Christa Wolf, “Von Kassandra zu Medea,” in Hochgeschurz, 15-17.

exploration of myth in *Medea* reveals interesting shifts in Wolf's understanding of the individual's role in history.... In *Medea*, Wolf seems more doubtful about the ability of individuals to control events, even those they have caused."³⁶ Wolf's perception of an individual's control of society changed radically after 1990, as was certainly evident in her later works. In *Medea*, she gains the ability to express those doubts through her characters.

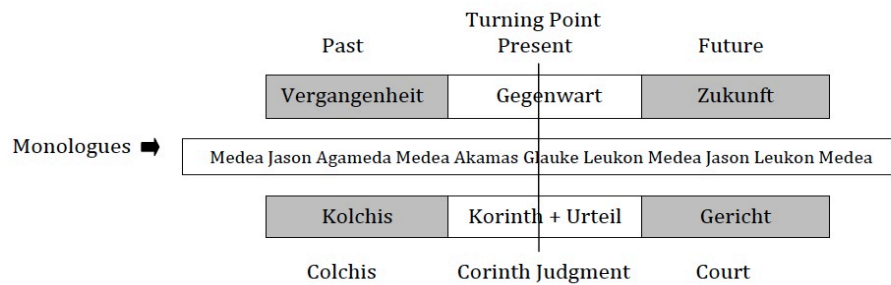
The Storyline

The narrative of the book begins halfway through the plot, in *medias res*, where Medea explains her experiences and thoughts about the current state of affairs. This halfway-through-the-storm entrance to the story could represent the author's position in the crossfire of the *What Remains* conflict. Perhaps to her advantage, this format of storytelling is particularly characteristic of Wolf's writing, as is evidenced especially in the book that won her national and international acclaim, *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), which was told as a flashback.³⁷ Wolf's ability to write from the end to the beginning represents the decision to reflect on events and the evolution of ideas. Georgina Paul points out that this trait is typical of Wolf's writing, which shows that "...Selbsterkenntnis ist das zentrale Ideal der Wolfschen Poetik."³⁸

³⁶ Helen Bridge, "Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* and *Medea*: Continuity and Change" *German Life and Letters* 57, no. 1, (Jan 2004): 39-40.

³⁷ Fox, 112-121.

³⁸ Paul, 235.



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As the chart above illustrates, the reader learns about what has occurred through the perspectives of four of the six characters whose opinions are shared via monologue. This variety of viewpoints is reminiscent of the process of discovery that occurs in periods of transitional justice, as the truth is pieced together from different angles. In East Germany, the Stasi files represented just such a transition. The revelation of Christa Wolf's participation played a key role in understanding the function of the files, as she was not only a secret informant, but was also the victim of 42 volumes of spy notes. Her role in the processing of the importance of the Stasi files resulted in the publication of an entire book of files and headlines that brought to light many of the aspects of the East German government's avenues of human control.⁴⁰

Once Medea's past and present are generally understood, the plot moves forward. In this process, the reader is not likely to overlook the comparison between Wolf's decision to retell the story and the progression of her evaluation of her personal history as she decides to write it.

As is reflected in the chronology of the text, Wolf starts with a strong sense of the East/West dichotomy and the death of socialism, but over the five years that she spends

³⁹ Illustration taken from Marie-Luise Ehrhardt, *Christa Wolfs Medea: eine Gestalt auf der Zeitengrenze* (Würzburg, Germany, Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2000), 50.

⁴⁰ Hermann Vinke and Christa Wolf, *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf: Zerrspiegel und Dialog* (Hamburg: Luchterhand Verlag, 1993).

writing the book, moves away from that association. While at one stage in the development of the novel, it could have been received as a *roman á clef*, such an interpretation became more questionable with each successive draft because the author's perspective changed with time, and thus, so did the telling of the Medea story. However, the traces of Wolf's initial attitude and intentions are still visible as a palimpsest within the text.

The book is written in first person narrative form, told from the perspective of six separate and significant characters from within the myth. Damon Rarick's comparison between drama and narrative explains several authors' decisions to use a narrative retelling of myth in GDR society to comment on its weaknesses and failures. He says, "Despite obvious genre distinctions, the transition from dramatic to narrative mythopoeism amplified rather than muted the iconographic potential of the texts and retained the themes of marginalization and spectacle invoked in the earlier dramatic interpretations."⁴¹ Because there is no central omniscient voice within the text, each narrative section could be interpreted as overtly subjective. However, a combination of those perspectives provides an objective view of the myth, which is important in Wolf's retelling because of her goal of emancipation of the traditional Medea figure. Each character tells one portion of the story, as if adding a new piece to a complicated puzzle.

In adding to the story, the characters exhibit different degrees of honesty and manipulation. For example, Jason thinks he's telling the truth, but doesn't understand his own tendencies toward self-perpetuation and aggrandizement. Agamedea is fully aware that she's altering the facts, but is consumed by envy and hatred for Medea. Glauke, the feeble

⁴¹ Damon Rarick, "Mythic Identities: Greco-Roman Mythology and the Creation of National Identity in the German Democratic Republic," *Glossen 30*, accessed online: <http://www2.dickinson.edu/glossen/heft30/Rarick-Construction.html>.

princess, takes on the role of the easily deceived virgin in the story, sadly believing that she is responsible for Medea's downfall. Her innocence and naïveté play a significant role that leads to her final emancipation from her life of intellectual bondage. From each of these characters, the subjective monologues allow the reader to become co-creator of a story that might be considered the objective truth.⁴² Christian Grawe elaborates on the ways in which the characters define themselves and others through their monologues. He writes, "Though reflective in mood and monotonous in tone, these monologues by, among others, Jason and his new bride Glauke capture Medea's person, feelings, and fate from both sympathetic and hostile perspectives and draw the reader into the events which they narrate in jigsaw puzzle fashion."⁴³

Wolf's ability to articulate the personalities and traits of her characters reflects the importance of each individual and chapter in the book. While reducing the text to a direct reading of specific characters from Wolf's own life would create an incomplete reading of *Medea*, certain traits of the novel clearly echo the author's personal experiences through various characters and events within the text. The provision of specific examples of character analysis portrays the extent to which they can be associated with different people and events from her own history; we will now examine them in turn.

Six Voices: One Affair

As an enlightened woman who is forced to take on a dual role in a society that is in the process of transformation, Medea becomes the diplomat who communicates between two cultures. Sabine Wilke writes of the Medea character, "Medeas Aufgabe als hybrides

⁴² Anke Brunn, "...Daß die Menschen ohne Angst verschieden sein können!" in *Hochgeschurz*, 104-105.

⁴³ Christian Grawe, "Medea: Stimmen by Christa Wolf" *World Literature Today* 71, no. 1, (1997): 142.

barbarisches Subjekt in Korinth ist also die Verbreitung von mehr Selbsterfahrung und Selbsterleben unter den Korinthern, was letztendlich dazu führen soll, Angst abzubauen und friedliche Subjekte herzustellen.”⁴⁴ Along those same lines, at the time of the *Wende* (reunification), Wolf found herself in the position of a cultural leader to whom the people could look as an example during the transition between German division and unity. Because in the West she represented the typical East German „barbaric“ identity and to the East a powerful moral and cultural leader, she maintained her standing in the popular spotlight. The development away from the old and toward the new represents her transition between methods of thought, but also the dual subjective authenticity that is apparent among Wolf’s main characters.⁴⁵ This experience lends itself easily to a comparison with the main character’s experience as the exemplary leader of the Colchians as they made the transition into life in Corinth. In the same sense that Medea was called upon to calm the fears of the Corinthians and Colchians alike about integration of one society into another, Wolf experienced the pressure of trying to appease both East and West in a seemingly impossible task of integrating cultural differences between two worlds separated quite literally by the Iron Curtain.

Medea’s former student, Agamedea, had studied to be a healer in order to be liked and needed by society. When she does not become Medea’s favorite student, she develops an attitude of vengeance, and seeks affirmation outside of Medea’s influence in the new society. Agamedea is fueled by hatred and resentment of her heritage. She assimilates into

⁴⁴ Sabine Wilke, "Die Konstruktion der wilden Frau: Christa Wolfs Roman 'Medea. Stimmen' als postkolonialer Text, *The German Quarterly* 76, no. 1, (2003): 22.

⁴⁵ See Christian Grawe, Review of "Medea: Stimmen" by Christa Wolf, *World Literature Today*, 71, no. 1, (1997): 142.

Corinthian society by discussing the unbearable aspects of Colchis.⁴⁶ This attitude can be paralleled in East German society in several ways; one example from the literary world is in the person of Monika Maron, who turned her back on East Germany in the 1980s. While the character of Agamedea is not necessarily based on Maron, one commonality exists: that of dissatisfaction with former East German writers, and their role in society. In a 1990 article in *Der Spiegel*, Maron lambastes authors who published in the GDR for their deceptive role during the Cold War, at one point, even criticizing Stefan Heym by name. She writes,

Diesmal ist nicht die Regierung vom Volk enttäuscht, diesmal sind es die Dichter. Kaum ist der heroische Akt der Revolution vorbei, müssen sie feststellen, daß das Volk für die falschen, weil nicht ihre, der Dichter Ziele, auf die Straße gegangen ist... Die Schriftsteller der DDR waren eine besonders verwöhnte Gruppe ihres Berufsstandes.⁴⁷

Maron's critical stance toward the authors of the GDR—she was also an author, but due to censorship she was not allowed to publish in the East, and thus defected to the West—draws comparisons to the Agamedea of Medea's tale because of her ability to forsake East Germany and openly criticize it so shortly after the peaceful revolution that reunited East and West.

As part of her role in Corinth, Agamedea thrives on convincing others of Medea's sorcery. When she convinces the king's chief astronomer that Medea is a threat to Corinthian society, she revels in her genius: "And no pleasure exceeds the satisfaction that wells up in me when I've so thoroughly imbued another with my ideas and my intentions that he considers them his own." In this aspect of her character, the reader sees reflections of the former regime, where the government sought to guide the actions of its people.

⁴⁶ Wolf, *Medea*, 59.

⁴⁷ Monika Maron, "Die Schriftsteller und das Volk" as quoted in *Vaterland, Muttersprache: Deutsche Schriftsteller und ihr Staat seit 1945*, (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, 1995), 441.

Along similar lines, Akamas, the first astronomer to the king, is willing to read anything in the stars that will add glory and power to the kingdom. As a servant, he is willing to tell the king what he wants to hear, continually reinforcing Akamas' position of power in the kingdom. His intelligence and cunning are unquestionable. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of the kingdom and is willing to eliminate anyone who is a threat to those strengths. He sees a worthy opponent in the character of Medea; he acknowledges her intelligence and her ability to see and think clearly in a plethora of situations. Thus, when Agamedea approaches him with the great secret of Medea's guilt, he is disappointed and delighted at the same time. His excitement compounds when he knows he has found a scapegoat whom he could blame for the unforeseen misfortunes of the kingdom. By explaining to the public that Medea had magical powers that extended beyond healing, he tells the people that the earthquake and the plague that recently struck Corinth are curses set by the wild woman Medea on the people.⁴⁸ His dishonesty and exaggerations are marks that he thrives on his own lack of conscience. One such example occurs when he explains the story of concealing Iphinoe's death from the public. He says, "I learned that no lie is too obvious for the people to believe if it accommodates their secret wish to believe it."⁴⁹ His willingness to construct lies and perpetuate them within Corinthian culture further sustains his position of power in Corinth.

As the man who gains power and influence through flattery, Akamas could represent many different individuals or groups. For example, he could represent East German intellectuals who perpetuated the myth of the utopian socialist society in the GDR, while the reality was that that society was based on restrictions and surveillance of the

⁴⁸ Wolf, *Medea*, 87-102.

⁴⁹ Wolf, *Medea*, 98-99.

public in order to inflict absolute obedience on its subjects.⁵⁰ Equally, he could represent the apologists of capitalism, like those who attacked Wolf, who perpetuate the perhaps equally baseless myth of the “justice” of the invisible hand of the marketplace.

In Wolf’s portrayal of the myth, Glauke is an innocent soul, who is easily influenced by those around her. At first, the healer Medea helps the frail princess to gain control over her body and mind, but as time progresses and Medea’s reputation begins to falter, King Creon and other leaders convince Glauke that Medea is to be avoided. Agamedea takes Medea’s place as healer to Glauke, and Glauke’s progress slows. Her frailty is compounded by her poor self-image. Her tendencies for self-deprecation and self-doubt reflect the image that her family has of her. As a weak character, she is no threat to the throne, nor does she make any great contribution to society. She lives in the backgrounds and shadows of the palace, with a servant to escort her wherever she chooses to go, which decreases the burden on her parents. Similar to the innocent masses of GDR society as they read Wolf’s novels throughout the 40-year existence of the GDR, Glauke gains strength through communicating with Medea, the insightful healer. The therapy prescribed by Medea causes Glauke to “grasp the rope of memory”⁵¹ as she reflects on her childhood and remembers its more traumatizing elements, in particular the murder of her sister at the hand of her father. The paradox of the therapy is that through working with Glauke, Medea is also able to process the harrowing images of what she saw, both in Corinth with Iphinoe, and in Colchis with her brother, Apsyrtos.

As the victims of their societies, Iphinoe and Apsyrtos share a common fate. Iphinoe, daughter of King Creon of Corinth, was to be his successor to the throne, while Apsyrtos

⁵⁰ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

⁵¹ Chiarloni, 115.

was to become king of Colchis in the stead of his father Aietes. In both cases, the children were murdered for the purposes of the state, extending the reigns of their fathers, though understandably in marginally different circumstances, based on tradition in their respective homelands. The representation of the GDR “gerontocracy” is clearly represented here, as both Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker both held onto their political power until they were no longer physically capable of leading the country.

Each of the two characters was significant to Medea. Apsyrtos, Medea’s brother, was a friend and confidant. For her, his death marked a tragedy that warranted her leaving her homeland, and traveling with Jason and the Argonauts, eventually landing in Corinth, which would lead to her eventual demise.

In Corinth, Medea’s discovery of Iphinoe’s death marks the turning point of the plot. Medea was trying to learn more about her surroundings, and was sickened when she encountered the secret. Discovering Iphinoe’s story drew so many parallels for her between the two countries, frustrating the Corinthian claim that it was an enlightened country in comparison to the other lands. Marie-Louise Ehrhardt discusses the intensity of the experience by noting that the shock of discovering that Creon had arranged for the murder of his daughter was harder for Medea to cope with than the fact that Jason, her husband, had decided to leave her and marry Glauke, Iphinoe’s younger sister, princess of Corinth.⁵²

By incorporating the discovery that both countries had reason to hide aspects of their past, Wolf shows that both East and West had weaknesses or undesirable aspects of their government as represented by the deaths of Iphinoe and Apsyrtus. The similarity of

⁵² Marie-Louise Ehrhardt, *Christa Wolfs Medea: eine Gestalt auf Zeitengrenze*, (Wurzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2000), 14.

the deaths and secrets of their countries also represents the common history shared by East and West Germany from the time before 1945, when the country was still united.⁵³ Thus, the claim that Corinth, and in this case West Germany, was a more enlightened, better society, was reduced to a myth in Wolf's telling of the story.

Scholarly Interpretation and Reception

Some critics, such as David Slavitt and Volker Hage, suggest that Colchis symbolizes specifically East Germany, while Corinth is representative of West Germany.⁵⁴ Although there are arguments for this view at certain points in the novel, the correspondence is imperfect. For example, both societies are built on a foundation of misdeeds and lies, an assertion that Wolf may or may not intend to make of German society.⁵⁵ Anke Brunn elaborated on the assertion that each city represents a specific divide between East and West by responding,

Richtig ist, daß Kolchis ja offensichtlich im Osten von Korinth liegt. Aber das ist meiner Meinung nach auch schon alles. Dieses Kolchis ist Medeas Geburtsland, ihr Heimatland, der Ort ihrer Kindheit—aber es ist nicht so morsch wie die DDR. Und deshalb erkenne ich nur wenige Züge der DDR in Kolchis. Ich erkenne wohl eine Kritik des Westens in der Darstellung Korinths, zum Beispiel in bezug auf die Anmaßungen, mit denen Wessis oft Ossis begegnen oder überhaupt in bezug auf den Umgang mit den Fremden im Land, mit all denen, die dazugekommen sind.⁵⁶

Brunn points out that there are specific ties between the myth and the East-West relationship, but that reading the book as a *roman á clef* is beyond the scope of the tale. *Medea* has a deeper, and yet broader meaning than what would be possible by assigning

⁵³ For a basic history of Germany, see Hagen Schulze, *Germany: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider.

⁵⁴ See David R. Slavitt, "Revenge Fantasy" *New York Times*, June 14, 1998, BR17; Volker Hage, "Kein Mord, nirgends" *Der Spiegel*, February 26, 1996, 202-206.

⁵⁵ Paul, 238.

⁵⁶ Anke Brunn, "...daß die Menschen ohne Angst verschieden sein können!" in *Hochgeschurz*, 106.

characters and events on a one-to-one basis from myth to GDR. Additionally, there are aspects of the myth that are inherent to its Greek history and are thus necessary in any telling of the narrative. However, those sections may not be directly applicable to Christa Wolf's personal experience in the GDR or during reunification. In reading *Medea*, confining the book to GDR history also confines Wolf's ability to process her past holistically, pulling from aspects of her past that do not relate directly to the public history of East Germany. In one instance, the character of Glauke could be an attempt at reconsidering the *Mitläufer* of the Nazi era, which is associated with Wolf's childhood. Even so, in the case of Christa Wolf's *Medea*, scholars pose the question, "Ist eine Medea, die keine Greuelthaten begeht, eine ganz und gar schuldlose Medea noch Medea?"⁵⁷ In other words, is this re-telling of the myth with an innocent protagonist still representative of the myth?

Since Wolf published *Medea*, scholars have critiqued both Wolf's past and her interpretation of the myth in both positive and negative ways. Various scholars have acknowledged the defamation of character that Wolf suffered in the years following reunification. Many of her numerous advocates and critics have written about her experience since the *Wende*. One sympathetic example is that of Adolf Muschg, President of the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin, where the Christa Wolf Archive is held. In the foreword to the book about the archive, published in 2004, Muschg wrote:

Als der Krieg, der kalte, hätte zu Ende sein können, wurde er gerade gegen diejenigen, die ihn nicht hatten mitmachen wollen, nochmals angeheizt. Und da Christa Wolfs Bücher über Menschen mehr verraten, als Sieger gerne wahrhaben, baute man daraus den Sachverhalt „Verrat“ zurecht und gab die Hexe Helena zur Verbrennung frei. Sie gehörte über Nacht zu den moralischen Mitschuldigen am Trojanischen Krieg.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Paul, 234.

⁵⁸ *Das Archiv von Christa Wolf*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2004.

However, a number of literary critics and scholars criticized Wolf for her attempt to exonerate herself through rewriting the past. For example, Christian Grawe points out that Wolf left Germany, and even Europe, to escape the controversy that surrounded the publication of her 1990 novella, *Was bleibt*. The controversy proved to be so completely overwhelming that she lost credibility, friends and her sense of *Heimat*,⁵⁹ or home, in her native Germany, making Medea an ideal myth for the comparison. He notes that:

Medea thus is a book without hope, a book about the loss of friends, home, and magic powers, and a book about alienation from two worlds. The title question of Wolf's earlier story, *Was bleibt* has turned into Medea's desperate, personal question "*was bleibt mir*" on the final page of her latest work. The answer: nothing but curses for her enemies and an overwhelming sense of loneliness in a world in which she does not belong.⁶⁰

Grawe's analysis of the work alludes to Wolf's attempts to cope with the loss of her credibility and her homeland, a socialism that she had supported for so long, and the ideal society in which she wanted to take part. According to Grawe, writing *Medea* did not bring Wolf any closer to her purpose of approaching reality through writing, and thus overcoming otherwise insurmountable obstacles. Grawe's critique of Wolf leaves her without closure regarding her past.

Moving On and Overcoming

Perhaps adding evidence to prove Grawe's point, more than twenty years after the Wall fell, Wolf was still reflecting on the gravity of her personal history in the GDR and the effects of the immediate post-unification charges against her character. In her 2010 novel, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*, Wolf accounts for her time in Los Angeles

⁵⁹ The German term *Heimat* is translated into English as "home". While it represents a feeling of home and belonging, the German sense of *Heimat* is much stronger than the English perception of home.

⁶⁰ Christian Grawe, "Medea: Stimmen by Christa Wolf" *World Literature Today* 71, no. 1, (1997):142.

with the Getty Center as she worked through the beginning stages of *Medea*. Her attempts to distance herself from her immediate past by physically leaving the country were key in creating a space for her to think and evaluate. The text is structured simply like a diary, but the author has brilliantly constructed a multi-level work that serves many functions. Although a full discussion of this rich text is beyond the scope of the present thesis, it deserves mention both as a documentation of Wolf's work on *Medea*, and as a continuation of the "therapy through writing" that Wolf had begun with *Medea*.

Critics of the work, and the educated reader, have noted the unmistakable evidence that Wolf's own personality and experience are reflected in the narrator. Richard Kämmerlings remarks that through this work, "Christa Wolf erinnert sich...an eine tiefe Krise ihres Lebens, aber entdeckt am Rande der westlichen Welt überraschend eine Hoffnung auf Erlösung."⁶¹ Through authoring this text, Wolf had the opportunity to process a past that had haunted her for decades. Another reviewer, Joshua Hammer, discusses the contrast that she uses between Los Angeles and the Eastern Bloc countries, and then outlining Wolf's—not just the narrator's—love-hate relationship with her East German past.⁶² The general reception seems to be positive, approaching the novel as a "part 2" addition to *Kindheitsmuster*, to complete her biography. Reviewers focus not only on the content of the text, but also on its context within the greater Wolf saga, noting the direct connection of the author to her narrator.⁶³

⁶¹ Richard Kämmerlings, "Mein Schutzengel nimmt es mit jedem Raumschiff auf," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 18, 2010.

⁶² Joshua Hammer, "The Lives of Others," *The New York Times*, February 22, 2013.

⁶³ See Wilfried Mommert, "Christa Wolfs "Stadt der Engel": Ein erstaunliches Lebenszeichen aus dem "Meer des Vergessens" in *Die Berliner Literaturkritik*, August 5, 2010; „Christa Wolfs Triumph“ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 17, 2010; and Arno Widmann, „Christa Wolf's letzter Roman "Stadt der Engel: Wahrheit und Wahn“, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, June 14, 2010.

Regarding her choice to go to the United States, one of the characters in her novel relates the following anecdote:

*Du kannst über die Geschichte von good old Europe nirgendwo besser arbeiten als hier in der Neuen Welt. Bessessen sammeln sie alles, was den alten Kontinent betrifft, so als wollten sie, wenn Europa durch Atombomben oder durch andere Katastrophen unterginge, jedenfalls eine Kopie davon hier bereithalten.*⁶⁴

Through writing *Stadt der Engel*, Wolf was finally able to explain her time in the United States as she worked through the many aspects of the *Literaturstreit*.⁶⁵

One of the key attributes of the novel is the narrator's way of addressing her past through referring to her younger self as "du" as she had done in *Kindheitsmuster* (1976).⁶⁶ Additionally, just as Rita's story in *Der geteilte Himmel* was told from two perspectives, and as Medea's character continuously remembers her own past, Wolf engages the narrator in conversation with a younger self. She discusses her growth through both fond memories and memories that she painfully remembered. This form of writing, addressing her memory as a venue for progression in the story, creates in the "du" another character as concrete as the others in her story. As she continues to use this literary device of dual subjective authenticity between the narrator's perspectives and those of her memory, Wolf enriches the novel by adding a third dimension. From reunified Germany, Wolf reflects 20 years after reunification on her LA experience, a time when she was reflecting on her previous experience in the GDR. The overall analysis represents three figures, then, with each one working through the memory of what came before.

⁶⁴ Christa Wolf, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*, (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 16. Italics added.

⁶⁵ Although the novel is worthy of analysis in and of itself, the purpose of its inclusion in this thesis involves its reflection of the GDR.

⁶⁶ A phenomenon that is unfortunately lost in the English translation is the linguistic difference between formal, "Sie" and informal "du" addresses.

The reaction to the past from reunified Germany is of particular importance because inherent in the aspect of reunification is the implication that Wolf's former *Heimat* no longer exists. This loss created the need for the maintenance of her memories, as Grawe pointed out. Julia Schoch has presented a reminder that once something ceases to exist physically, the importance of preserving the memory increases.⁶⁷ For Wolf, the long-term need to work through her memory of the GDR carried a deeper meaning than just the initial question of 'what just happened?' It was the necessity to preserve the existence of East Germany through East German eyes, rather than the standard reaction of a Western perspective of the East. In the novel, the narrator addresses her earlier self, and says:

Wenn wir diese Hoffnung auf den weisen Völkerlenker aufgegeben hätten, hätten wir uns doch damit selbst aufgegeben. – Und du begriffst, dass dieses halbe Deutschland, dieser Staat, auch wenn er streng zu ihnen war, auch wenn er viele Fehler hatte, ihre einzige Zuflucht war.⁶⁸

Wolf did not deny the weaknesses of the East German state. She was painfully aware of most of its problems, but it was her home. And when it disappeared, the void was filled with the criticism of the former *Unrechtstaat* alongside a harsh critique of Wolf herself.⁶⁹

The aspect of *Heimatsverlust* was a hard case for Wolf to accept. Although she had experienced it once before in 1945, the challenge associated with the political disappearance of her homeland affected her greatly. Although Wolf would be among the first to admit to weaknesses and failures within East Germany, the fact that almost overnight it ceased to exist created a problem for her. However, the years of contemplation provide a positive reflection for her as she learns that not only her generation, the „29ers,“

⁶⁷ Julia Schoch, personal interview, February 19, 2013. For further reference/evidence, see her work, *Mit der Geschwindigkeit des Sommers* (München: Piper Verlag, 2009).

⁶⁸ Wolf, *SdE*, 188.

⁶⁹ See Wolf, *SdE*, 113-114.

felt the remorse and embarrassment about being German, for their own reasons, but subsequent generations and groups felt the load, too. Realizing that she was not alone in her regrets lessened the frustration and embarrassment that the narrator experienced as a German.⁷⁰

In *Stadt der Engel*, the memory analysis of Christa Wolf's time in the GDR is threefold. It includes first an angel as an allegorical figure who helps, comforts, and points toward hope for something better, as represented by the Buddhist nun, Pema, then by the literal angel, inspired by Wolf's Ugandan cleaning lady, who carries her across the city, and third, through Walter Benjamin's analysis of the mythical angel of history.⁷¹

From the nun, the narrator learns that "man Schmerz nicht vermeiden soll. Daß man einfach dasitzen soll und sich auch selbst ruhig ansehen: So ist man eben. Man ist nicht auf der Welt, um sich zu bessern, aber um sich zu öffnen."⁷² As the narrator chose to learn from her pain, she gained insight into her past, and attempted to find meaning in what had happened. In her apartment in Los Angeles, the narrator had the opportunity to sit back and look at herself and her challenges from the past, and open herself to what she should learn. Then, through her interactions with Angelina, whose suffering in leaving behind her own children in order to provide for them arguably exceeded anything Wolf endured, and who seemed to understand the meaning of life, the narrator found comfort and peace in

⁷⁰ Wolf, *SdE*, 110. It is noteworthy that Germans have an idiom for this, „Geteiltes Leid ist halbes Leid.“

⁷¹ Wolf, *SdE*, 54, 240. Interestingly, this seems to mark Wolf's life as coming full circle in some ways, as she mentioned in a discussion with her husband in 1963, "Ich frage mich: Was muss in einem Menschen, der bis in seine letzte Regung Kommunist ist, los sein, daß er sich als letzten Ausweg ans Mythische klammert?" In this work, Wolf does not present the reader with her conversion to Christianity. Rather, Wolf returns to mythology, as she has done twice before, to reflect on the past, and comment on the present. See Wolf, *Jahr*, 67.

⁷² Wolf, *SdE*, 240.

questioning why parts of her past still haunted her. Her relief in letting go of those haunting memories because of Angelina's presence helped her move on.⁷³

Finally, the third level of evaluation that Wolf incorporates borrows from Walter Benjamin's angel of history. The angel observes the rubble produced by the past, but because of the winds that blow from paradise, he is constantly propelled into the future, unable to mend or repair the broken pieces.⁷⁴ As is evident in her final discussion with the "real" angel version of Angelina, the narrator accepts her past, and is able to look forward with a recognition that what has happened has a meaning. She is able to see the past, acknowledge that she cannot change it, and allow broken things to remain broken without the expectation of dwelling on them any longer.⁷⁵ The book closes with the question, "Wohin fliegen wir?" with Angelina's answer, "Ich weiss es nicht."⁷⁶

By examining her past through several different "angels," Wolf is finally able to come to terms with the questions that plagued her at the time of reunification and shortly thereafter. The close of *Stadt der Engel* concludes with the implication that the narrator is finally able to move forward, having successfully confronted the riddle of her history. In that moment, the three angels are synthesized, and her narrative becomes complete.

Conclusion

Since long before the time of German reunification, Christa Wolf has consistently been in the spotlight, chronicling current events during the time of divided Germany. Although the political division between the two countries ended in 1990, a significant cultural barrier remained for years to come. For Wolf, the writing of *Medea* gave the author

⁷³ Wolf, *SdE*, 405.

⁷⁴ See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1968).

⁷⁵ Wolf, *SdE*, 415.

⁷⁶ Wolf, *SdE*, 415.

the much-needed opportunity to consider events of the distant and recent past. By integrating her own experiences with Medea's, she was able to begin to distance herself from those events, and thus gain perspective about what had happened. Although it took decades to complete the process, *Medea* served as a catalyst in understanding the full effects of what had happened in the time immediately surrounding reunification.

Wolf's role as a scapegoat for the GDR answers the question posed by Ernst Toller while reflecting on his youth in Nazi Germany, "Must the person who acts become guilty, always and always?"⁷⁷ As a byproduct of the GDR, Wolf lived and acted within that society. Her personal guilt is mitigated by the fact that she was a member of that society, and a product of her upbringing. In writing *Medea*, Wolf began to confront that past and attempted to obtain closure for herself as she compared relative pasts with the characters in her novel. However, her creative work and extensive research helped her accomplish that without entirely confining specific aspects of the book to her own story. This helped her move beyond societal restrictions between East and West and create a broader analysis of the problems she was facing.

Although the process began with the writing of *Medea*, it took Wolf 20 years to fully grasp, work through, and move on from the history of the GDR and reunification. As writing progressed over the years and as she wrote *Stadt der Engel*, she was able to release herself from the role of scapegoat and lap dog of East Germany, and put the past behind her. Thus, what remains for Wolf is emancipation for herself and for her characters, whose interpretations of the past created a path for them to move forward.

⁷⁷ As quoted in Paul, 236. "Die Ohnmacht ist gewollt, denn die eigentliche, vielleicht nicht ganz offen zugegebene Erkenntnis beider Texte ist, daß es nicht möglich ist, historisch zu handeln, ohne schuldig zu werden."

CONCLUSION: CHRISTA WOLF—A LIFETIME OF FAITH IN SOCIALISM

Throughout the 40-year span of the German Democratic Republic, Christa Wolf was a significant contributor to cultural perspective, both within the GDR and in the West, as other critics looked to her works to define many of the weaknesses of East Germany. Wolf was loved by her readers for her acknowledgment of the country's strengths and weaknesses and for her suggestions on how to live within its confined social order while remaining loyal to socialism. For those same reasons, she was viewed with skepticism, yet tolerated, by the East German government. Her great ability to convey a message that encouraged others to embrace socialism stemmed from the fact that she truly believed in socialism, that it had merit and was based on more than just SED paranoia. The author acted on what she believed, and she wrote volumes about it. More than just writing about the issues, Wolf built a public reputation for credibility by living the rules that she believed in and hoped for.

In *Der geteilte Himmel*, Wolf's protagonist was confronted by the problem of decision-making about loyalty to the East German State and the obligations to work hard for the benefit of everyone. In the story, Wolf openly admits that there are people like Manfred within the society who feel unfulfilled, but then points out that leaving the GDR would not fill the void. Rather, dedication to the purposes of the State will bring fulfillment with time. By acknowledging the problems of the working class according to the prescription of the Bitterfeld Movement, she was able to reach the masses by writing something with which they could relate.

As the time of publication would reflect, the readership in East Germany was troubled by the recent construction of the Berlin Wall. By indirectly writing about it, she was able to help them accept the purpose of the Wall, and move forward. The novel contributed in major ways to the reassociation of identity within the GDR from German to *East* German citizens. She was

especially successful at this because of her dual subjective and authentic writing style that related the experiences of both young and older Rita, through whom the masses could be educated for the good of the state. With Rita's suicide attempt as the point of her conversion to socialism, the flashback is a path for readers to follow to arrive at the starting point for loyalty to the regime. Her recovery provided a deeper understanding of the goals of the socialist experiment. Because Wolf also wrote about difficult subjects, such as the state criminalization of *Republikflucht*, she pointed out that, in spite of the nation's weaknesses, the effort was still worth the work to stay and be loyal to the GDR.

Although Wolf's attitude is different in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, her loyalty to socialism does not fade. After the frustrating chain of events at the XI. Plenary session of the Central Committee, the acknowledgment that the GDR was not nearly a utopian society became plainly apparent in the novel. By publishing a work that expressed her disappointment in the party, Wolf received heavy criticism and was censured by the government, losing her candidacy for official leadership positions in the GDR as well as publishing rights for over a year. In the character of Christa T., the sentiment that lies in a person's attempt to find her place in society and constant feeling of being restricted was particularly dangerous because by doing so, she altered a tenet of GDR culture that everyone was able to work together and happily contribute to the myth of the "allseitig entwickelte Persönlichkeit". When it was not the case for Christa T., Wolf took one of the strengths of East German society and turned it on its head, resulting in insult to the already paranoid leadership of the state.

By writing from the perspective of a narrator to the story, Wolf gives dimension to the preservation of Christa T.'s memory. She is able to reflect on the story of her misfit friend, and pose questions to herself. The reality of both characters relates again to dual subjective authenticity. Although the characters in this case are separate beings, the connection between the narrator's memory and her own internal voice provide a starting point for the comparison of the characters. As her memory develops an image of Christa T., her own understanding of herself and those around her develops as well. In this way, both characters are enriched by the memory of Christa T.

After living her whole adult life in East Germany, becoming familiar with each restriction imposed by the state, and knowingly living under the surveillance of the government, Wolf's publication of *Was bleibt* reflected on her interactions and impressions of the Stasi. While identifying with many aspects of the novella, the result of her choice to publish when she did caused Wolf to become the scapegoat for a great number of things. Because she was so trustworthy and well-loved by people within the GDR, it was particularly beneficial for western officials to discredit her as opposed to other loyal writers of the regime. By removing Christa Wolf-the representative of any successes of East Germany- from the greater picture of a unified Germany, they could damage the entire reputation of the former GDR.

In coping with her total character assassination, Wolf's decision to go into self-imposed exile in Southern California coincided with her goals to work on the Medea project, where her objective was to exonerate the vilified character from the unjust charge of child murder. In the writing process, Wolf accomplished a number of things. A primary success was to change the course of the myth. Whereas with older interpretations of the myth, Jason—in his enlightened state—sees through Medea's mysticism, Wolf turns the tables and it is Medea who sees through

Jason's egotism. Through the therapeutic process of writing, Wolf reflected on her experience where critics and journalists claimed to see her true colors as an opportunist through her façade of honest, loyal author. In the end, she claimed to see through their greed, and realize that their attitudes were baseless.

Wolf clarified her position in writing *Was bleibt*, creating a comparable predicament for Medea, and allowing the character to speak for and defend herself. The comment, "Ich wollte mir nur klarmachen, wo ich lebe," reflects on the fact that the author wrote *Was bleibt* years earlier, and was using the same process of writing as a form of therapy. The interpretation that *Medea* was a *roman à cléf*, however, fails after a basic observation of the novel because the author's perspective changed over time.

Through the timing and setting of Wolf's final major novel, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* in 2010, it is clear that Wolf was not able to completely come to terms with the past through her authorship of *Medea*. Twenty years after the fall of the wall, the author was still contemplating what happened, and just how all of it was possible. Through the narrator, Wolf is able to portray a tri-level evaluation of history, working through multiple possibilities for evaluation of the *Literaturstreit* and the accompanying events. In the end, Christa Wolf, the great author of the German Democratic Republic, was able to work through the events of the past. Through this final text, Wolf's recounting of her East German experience solidified the form of her own writer's canon, posing and answering the questions *What remains of East Germany?* And *What will people learn from these lessons in the future?* The answers are left to the reader, whose charge is to observe through *her* perspective, and East German perspective, and then decide what to preserve through history, and what should be forgotten.

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