

1989

Anna K. Kuhn: Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism

Carol Anne Costabile
Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/gdr>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Costabile, Carol Anne (1989) "Anna K. Kuhn: Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 15: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v15i2.922>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *GDR Bulletin* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Based on a careful reading of Wolf's Essays, particularly the earlier ones--Hörnigk portrays with astonishing sensitivity a woman of great personal integrity who stands up for her beliefs, even when they do not yet fit into the political landscape and cause her personal hardship. It is Wolf's moral stamina which holds her work together and lends it its conviction and credibility. Hörnigk subdivides Wolf's work into five chronological and thematic periods through which she traces the development of the author while also emphasizing the work's constant factors. The early works, Moscow Novella and Divided Heaven, serve to "discover the author's own voice"; An Afternoon in June, The Quest for Christa T., as well as The Reader and the Writer, and the co-production with Gerhard Wolf, Till Eulenspiegel, are the beginning of a "literature of reflection." The stories in Unter den Linden and the novel Patterns of Childhood are interpreted as a "case for sentimentalism" which eventually leads to the "projection of Romanticism" that is central to No Place on Earth. The theme of "myth and civilization" links the most recent publications Cassandra and Accident. Hörnigk also mentions Summerpiece as a work in progress, thus pointing to the open ended character of her account. She not only places Wolf's writing into the context of her personal history, but also looks at it in connection with the GDR's cultural politics. She acknowledges its often hindering and harmful effects on the author and her work and the often difficult and painful reception of Wolf's work in the GDR.

There is a strong sense of identification between Hörnigk herself and "her" author. At times her account almost reads like a self-portrait by Christa Wolf. Hörnigk's identification with Wolf would explain the book's greatest merit--its extraordinary sensitivity to issues in Wolf's life and work--most evidently displayed in the interview that takes the place of an introduction. But that quality is also responsible for the study's greatest problem. Hörnigk often holds back her own evaluation or opinion in favor of the author's own statements or reflections and thus becomes the voice of her subject. The reader therefore sometimes misses a critical distance which leaves him/her to wonder what Hörnigk herself thinks about a literary

figure as influential and possibly as intimidating as Christa Wolf.

Kathie von Ankum
Smith College

Kuhn, Anna K. Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. 281 pp.

Despite the abundance of secondary literature written on Christa Wolf in recent years, Anna Kuhn's monograph, as the first comprehensive analysis on Wolf in English, serves to fill a void in literary scholarship. Kuhn, using close textual analysis, emphasizes the interrelatedness of Wolf's fictional and essayistic endeavors. Acknowledging specific trends in Wolf's texts, Kuhn attempts to place Wolf into the context of an East German woman writer. These four parameters act as the general backdrop for Kuhn's interpretation, which illustrates Wolf's gradual progression from strict Marxist thinking to feminism. (Although the reader should bear in mind that Wolf does indeed remain a Marxist.)

In her introduction Kuhn attempts to explicate the various ramifications of the context East German woman writer. Her analysis demonstrates that each distinction by itself is arbitrary, but when taken together in this context serves as a viable means within which to examine Wolf's oeuvre.

The chapters of the book focus on Wolf's major literary texts, although Kuhn frequently refers to essays and short stories as they relate to the development of Wolf's identity. The early works Moscow Novella and Divided Heaven are discussed as a unit and portrayed as experiments within the context of Socialist Realism. Beginning with the discussion of The Quest for Christa T., Kuhn analyzes the relationship between Wolf's essays and her shorter fictional works and the major works. The Quest for Christa T. is interpreted as an attempt at self-actualization, a fact which Kuhn clarifies through the juxtaposition of the quest in the narrative with Wolf's search for a means of expression

in the essay "The Reader and the Writer." The desire for self-actualization is replaced with self-confrontation in the novel Patterns of Childhood. Through this examination of her own past, Wolf seeks to define her identity.

Kuhn interprets the choice of Kleist and Günderrode as protagonists in No Place on Earth as a necessary means for Wolf to come to terms with the Biermann expatriation. Wolf turned to these historically distant figures in order to express her feeling of being an outsider in her own society.

Kuhn sees, in Wolf's Cassandra and in the essays from the 1980s, a decided shift in focus to more global concerns and to a fear of nuclear disaster. The "Büchner Prize Acceptance Speech" combines this global aspect with a concern for the role which women play in society. Frustrated by women's exclusion, Wolf turned to a matriarchal society for answers. Kuhn portrays Wolf's Störfall as a present-day continuation of the criticism exercised in Cassandra. Of particular interest, Kuhn notes, is Wolf's ability to describe a recent event in the first person, thereby ending the search for a means of self-expression.

Throughout the book Kuhn demonstrates the links between all of Wolf's works. She postulates a development in Wolf's works from Socialist Realist experimentation to an emphasis on feminism, and interprets this development as a search for utopia. In lieu of a conclusion, however, Kuhn discusses Störfall as a destruction of utopia.

Overall Kuhn presents a thoroughly researched text and presents a deep understanding of both Christa Wolf and her works. The documentation is thorough and affords many insights to other secondary sources, particularly those available to the non-Germanist. The book's only pitfall is its lack of a conclusion, which arises from Kuhn's own reticence to conclude, as well as from the recent publication of Ansprachen and Sommerstück.

Carol Anne Costabile
Washington University

Der vorliegende Band zur DDR-Lyrik in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren besteht aus elf Aufsätzen von Germanisten aus der DDR (4), BRD (1), den USA (2) und den Niederlanden (4). Den ersten fünf Beiträgen liegen allgemeine Themen und sich herausbildende Tendenzen zur neuen Lyrik zugrunde, während die anderen sechs in Einzelstudien repräsentative Lyriker der verschiedenen Dichtergenerationen untersuchen-- Sascha Anderson, Volker Braun, Hanns Cibulka, Uwe Kolbe und Günter Kunert.

Richtungsweisend für die Problemartikulationen des Bandes ist der mit einer bewußt paradoxen Titelformulierung einleitende Beitrag von Anneli Hartmann (BRD), "Schreiben in der Tradition der Avantgarde: Neue Lyrik in der DDR." Hartmann sieht den Konflikt zwischen Fremdbestimmung und Selbstbestimmung, das Bedürfnis sich aller Verfügungsgewalt zu entziehen, als Grundproblem der Lyriker. Bezeichnend für die Entwicklung der DDR-Lyrik in der Tradition der Avantgarde (womit, wie Hartmann betont, heute eine Verbindung politischer und literarischer Motivationen, sowie ein Bezug zu den historischen und literarischen Avantgarden gemeint ist), ist das Anknüpfen an das literarische Avantgardeprinzip des "willkürlichen Verfügungens"--etwa an Verfahren und Kunstmittel des Dadaismus, Surrealismus und Futurismus. Hartmann diskutiert diese avantgardischen Bestrebungen am Beispiel der wichtigsten Dokumentation der neuen avantgardistischen Richtung, der von Sascha Anderson und Elke Erb herausgegebenen Anthologie Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung (1985, bisher nur im Westen erschienen). Hartmann verbindet Utopieverlust, Aussteigerhaltung und Sinnkrise, sowie das Aufbrechen von konventioneller Sprachregelung in den Texten dieser Anthologie mit dem Begriff "Politik der Verweigerung," (7)--eine Formulierung, mit der Hartmann eine Beziehung herstellt zur gemeinsamen Haltung des Sich-Abstoßens mit früheren Avantgarden und zu Elke Erbs positiver Beurteilung (im Vorwort zur Anthologie Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung) des "Austritts