

1991

## Lutz Rathenow: DER WOLF und die widerspenstigen Geißlein

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### Recommended Citation

Sax, Boria (1991) "Lutz Rathenow: DER WOLF und die widerspenstigen Geißlein," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v17i1.990>

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Rathenow, Lutz. *DER WOLF: und die widerspenstigen Geißlein*. Illustrations by Lothar Otto. Halle: Postreiterverlag, 1990. 17 pp.

A persistent problem for any critic of GDR literature has always been how far to go in understanding texts politically. On the one hand, authors like Christa Wolf, Volker Braun, and many others have repeatedly complained about their work being judged on the basis of politics, and most especially about being pegged as "dissident." On the other hand, their themes and public statements have been so obsessively concerned with political issues that I have sometimes wondered what else they could possibly expect. Faced with apparently contradictory expectations, it was extremely difficult for a critic to be fair.

Now I am finding political messages in *DER WOLF: und die widerspenstigen Geißlein* by Lutz Rathenow, a humorous story for children. Some people may feel that I am overinterpreting a simple tale, and that is certainly possible. Nevertheless, political concerns do penetrate even more intimate aspects of GDR life, so it is by no means absurd that they should be found in books for children. And, even if the interpretation turns out to be my fantasy rather than the author's, the idea may still be of interest.

The story by Rathenow is a playful variant of a famous fairy tale by Grimm. A nanny goat leaves home, and her seven little kids wreak havoc with their mischievous play. The wolf comes, and the kids, knowing their mother will be angry about the mess, beg him to swallow them, so they can hide. The wolf proves reluctant and the kids eventually kill him with their games. The little goats then leave home. When the mother returns to find them gone, she considers going to live in the zoo. Instead, however, she decides to look for the kids following their trail of mischief.

The nanny goat, a lover of order and discipline, could be understood as representing the GDR. The wolf, delightfully drawn by Lothar Otto, in a stereotypical Alpine costume, could represent West Germany, big and powerful yet helpless for all that. Wolves were a sort of totem animal for the Nazis, and GDR propaganda often identified West Germany with National Socialism. The mischievous kids might represent GDR citizens, childish but, largely for that reason, not under the control of any government.

History has now provided an ending for the story a bit different from what the author envisaged. The wolf has indeed swallowed the kids and perhaps the nanny goat as well. But no doubt the kids continue to play their childish games, and their adventures will not stop in his belly.

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Reid, J. H. *Writing Without Taboos. The New East German Literature*. New York: Oswald Wolff Books/Berg, 1990. x + 258 pp.

The title of this study by J. H. Reid, a Reader in German at the University of Nottingham, is a clear reference to Erich Honecker's 1971 speech in which the former SED party chief, just having assumed power in the GDR, proclaimed that there were to be "no taboos" in the arts, thus relaxing the hitherto strict cultural policies of his predecessor, Walter Ulbricht. Reid's study focuses then on the parameters of GDR literature following this pronouncement. The manuscript of the book was finished before the tumultuous events in the fall of 1989, and in the "Preface," written in December of that year, Reid points out that some of his prognostications about GDR literature will have to be regarded as historical. Nonetheless, the demise of the GDR put a cap on the Honecker era, making Reid's book one of the first complete, albeit

tentative, assessments of the literature written during that period. In this regard I do have a reservation I will discuss below. To back up his arguments, Reid concentrates on prose works, but references to drama (above all to Heiner Müller) are made, and, where appropriate, poems are also quoted.

Chapter 1, "Congruence and Divergence," addresses the question of the GDR's identity within the context of its literature and in relation to the literature of the other German-speaking countries, especially West Germany. "Writers, Politicians and Taboos," chapter 2, traces the often rocky road travelled together by writers and cultural politicians in the GDR between the dogmatic days of socialist realism and those of fewer taboos. In "Beyond Formalism," chapter 3, the aesthetics leading up to and during the time period in question are explored. Starting essentially with Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968) and ending with Brigitte Burmeister's novel, *Anders oder Vom Aufenthalt in der Fremde* (1987), Reid illustrates the considerable measure of aesthetic independence GDR literature achieved from the conventional forms of socialist realism. In the remaining chapters, Reid leaves aesthetics and concentrates on the content of the Honecker era literature, viewing it from different perspectives. The title of chapter 4, "Difficulties Crossing the Plain," refers to Brecht's early postwar poem, "Wahrnehmung," which had characterized the "difficulties of the mountains" as having been overcome, i.e., socialism had been established in at least a rudimentary form, and now, in crossing the plain, it was a matter of the complex process of refining it. It is Christoph Hein's *Der fremde Freund* (1982) which sums up most completely for Reid the themes of this chapter, namely the outstanding social issues of the GDR and the existential aspirations of the individual. "How Did We Become As We Are?," chapter 5, investigates one of the areas of the past to which GDR authors have often turned their attention, the Third Reich. Reid most closely analyzes Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* (1969) and *Der Boxer* (1976), Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) and Hermann Kant's *Der Aufenthalt* (1977) as significant examples in this regard. The GDR's Stalinist past and how it relates to the present is the focus of chapter 6. "Stalinism Past and Present." Quite appropriately, Reid offers the most detailed analyses of Christoph Hein's *Horns Ende* (1985) and Werner Heiduczek's *Tod am Meer* (1977), a novel certainly deserving of more attention than it has received in the past by literary scholars of the GDR. "Prussians, Saxons and Others," chapter 7, takes a look at many GDR writers' interest in the more remote past of German history. Reid is quick to point out, however, that GDR writers often used this past to allude to the present. With regard to the Prussians, Reid concentrates on Martin Stade's *Der König und sein Narr* (1975), a novel that deals with the relationship between Frederick William I and the philosopher, Jacob Paul Gundling. Joachim Walther's *Bewerbung bei Hofe* (1982) is the novel Reid has chosen to analyze most closely regarding the Saxons. It tells the story of Johann Christian Günther's failed attempt to become a poet at the Dresden court of August the Strong. "En Route to Utopia," the final chapter, inquires about what remained of the socialist dream in the works of GDR writers during the time period of the study. In such works as Irmtraud Morgner's *Amanda* (1983), Wolf's *Kassandra* (1983) and *Störfall* (1987), and Helga Königsdorf's *Respektloser Umgang* (1987), Reid explores the increasing scepticism toward the scientific-technical revolution. Whereas for Reid these works still contained utopian aspirations, the GDR's science fiction was replete with dystopian elements. In this connection Reid pays particular attention to Fritz Rudolf Fries' *Verlegung eines mittleren Reiches* (1984) and Franz Fühmann's *Saiäns-Fiktschen* (1981). It is Fühmann's collection of short stories that Reid sees as having manifested to the greatest degree the