

1991

Rewriting GDR History: The Christa Wolf Controversy

Anna K. Kuhn
University of California, Davis

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Recommended Citation

Kuhn, Anna K. (1991) "Rewriting GDR History: The Christa Wolf Controversy," *GDR Bulletin*: Vol. 17: Iss. 1.
<https://doi.org/10.4148/gdrb.v17i1.1088>

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If we then ask, for example, who these new political actors were, we are thrown back to the ostensible topic of my talk, i.e. the state of GDR studies. For East Germany, despite its indisputable achievements in a variety of fields, was a society almost entirely lacking in social and historical self-knowledge. How could it have been otherwise in a society where academic research was strait-jacketed within the narrow confines of a rigid, all-embracing party line, a country in which even census statistics were kept under lock and key, and in which independent research ran up against laws prohibiting the keeping of "private archives?" How well could one hope to understand a country whose ruling party, operating under the slogan "Everything for the good of the people!," refused to release such essential sociological data as the suicide rate?

Foreign specialists naturally labored under even greater handicaps, and I do not want to suggest that the dismal state of our knowledge concerning the GDR stems from the deficiencies of Western scholarship. Yet all too often, GDR specialists chose to overlook the grim reality of everyday life in the GDR, the omnipresent security apparatus, and even the existence of the Wall. Literary works were detached from their social and political context, elevated into so many "texts" and "discourses" independent of the life around them. It was considered bad form to point out the contradictions of writers with passports exhorting people to stay at home and help in the construction of "socialism," or to mention the hypocrisy of intellectuals silent on domestic militarism playing host to delegations from the World Peace Congress. Yet the reality was there for all who wished to see. Christa Wolf had many years to check out the state of East German education for herself, yet evidently chose not to. How many Western enthusiasts of GDR child care ever bothered to spend time in an East German day-care center? How many proponents of the so-called *soziale Errungenschaften* ever visited, say, a textile factory in Zwickau (an eminently feasible undertaking) to investigate working-class life for themselves? GDR studies became in effect a kind of *Mitläuferfabrik*, and many specialists were as surprised as the experts in the Normannenstraße when the whole edifice came tumbling down.

I definitely cannot agree with Stephan Heym, who on election night this March declared that nothing would now remain of the GDR but a "footnote" in history. The entire history of the GDR stands as eloquent testimony to the ability of a cynical regime and its intellectual fellow travellers to demoralize thoroughly an educated population, eradicate the best traditions of the labor movement, and paralyze democratic initiative. And there is one "achievement" of the GDR which is definitely worthy of preservation: the inspiring example of a massive, sustained, non-violent revolt for democratic change. Owing to the peculiarities of German history, this movement culminated in the overwhelming demand for the wholesale destruction of the "other Germany," but its memory deserves to be preserved. And I think that serious research into the history of these events and their background will provide more insight into the contours of East German history than all the critical commentaries on the writings of Christa Wolf have

The Christa Wolf Controversy

For the very first time, I would argue paradoxically, there is now an unparalleled opportunity for GDR scholars really to get down to work. Now that the archives may be opened, historians, sociologists, and literary critics have their work cut out for them--provided the historical record can be saved from the rapacious grasp of cynical politicians, and the sad legacy of academic apologetics can be worked through and transcended in the spirit of genuine understanding.

Notes

¹Reprinted in the West German *Tageszeitung*, 31 Oct. 1989.
²and were treated to the grotesque spectacle of Christa Wolf playing guru to a Western peace movement which was by and large afraid to meet with them, let alone defend them from the depredations of the security forces.
³Cf. for example my essay on "The East German Left" in *The Nation*, 7 May 1990.

Rewriting GDR History: The Christa Wolf Controversy

Anna K. Kuhn
 University of California, Davis

The recent events in Eastern Europe that have fundamentally transformed the political, economic, and social topography of the world occurred so unexpectedly and with such rapidity that they precluded a meaningful, differentiated analysis of these events as they were taking place, even--indeed, arguably especially--by those directly involved. By withholding Soviet military support from East-bloc regimes, Mikhail Gorbachev helped ensure that 1989 did not enter the annals of history, along with 1953, 1956, and 1968, as a year of bloody suppression of populist insurgency in East European communist countries. Lack of Soviet intervention, coupled with widespread internal weaknesses in individual states, contributed immeasurably to the success of the "revolutions" in Eastern Europe. Catapulted on by unprecedented successes, the players became increasingly emboldened, making up the scripts as they went along. The scenarios were so thoroughly improvised that the "happy" endings doubtless came as a surprise to many, if not most, of the participants.

The situation was, and remains, as complex for Western observers, especially for those sympathetic to socialism, for whom the collapse of East-bloc communism brought with it revelations about the pervasiveness of corruption, oppression, and other political abuses. These revelations have forced many of us to reassess our attitudes both toward individual East-bloc countries and toward socialism¹ per se. It has become painfully obvious that we were badly misinformed about many aspects of life in the East, and that we need to fundamentally reexamine conventional wisdom about everything pertaining to this part of the world.

In considering the German case, it is clear that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) collapsed like a house of cards and that its collapse was inextricably connected to Soviet *perestroika* and to the increasing economic inviability of East European communism in general--factors all too often overlooked or minimized in euphoric accounts of Germany's "bloodless revolution." I take issue with the use of this term to describe those events in East Germany in late 1989 that led to the collapse of the Honecker regime, the fall of the Wall, and the (re)unification of

the two Germanys. To be sure, we may want to reassess our definition of the term "revolution" in the context of a world in which notions of human agency have been called into question. But precisely such a reassessment has not taken place: the term is being used without being sufficiently problematized. As Karl Heinz Bohrer has pointed out, the term "revolution" (in its traditional sense) denotes not simply the disappearance of the previous regime; it presupposes the power of a new idea and a willingness to impose that idea with every possible means against all odds.² Bohrer bases his definition on the classic paradigm of the French and Russian Revolutions, a model that may well be untenable for a discussion of revolution in the late twentieth century. A definition of revolution grounded solely in a state model appears outdated in light of significant transnational revolutionary movements of the late twentieth century.³ For instance, I find Bohrer's caveat that the lack of a revolutionary intelligentsia in the GDR prior to late 1989 prohibits using this term to describe the overthrow of communism in that country rather problematic: by focusing on the intelligentsia,⁴ it valorizes notions of leadership and obscures the role of the populace in staging insurgency. However, I do question whether, and to what extent, a revolutionary consciousness existed in the GDR at all before October 1989. In addressing this question, we also need to consider the degree to which an albeit nonrevolutionary, but nonetheless critical intelligentsia may have helped prepare the ground for the events of 1989 in East Germany.⁵

Self-critical evaluations on the part of those living in formerly communist nations are currently underway and are likely to proliferate in the coming months and years. Coming to terms with communism, specifically with communism's Stalinist legacy, is essential for all former East-bloc nations. For citizens of the former GDR, however, this process is a particularly crucial and loaded issue because it is closely linked to that uniquely German phenomenon: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the Nazi past). As a homology to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, I propose that we adopt the term *Gegenwartsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the present)⁶ to designate the process of confronting Stalinism in the GDR, specifically as it shaped reactions to the events of 1989 and continues to affect the present.⁷ Necessary for both *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and *Gegenwartsbewältigung* is *Trauerarbeit* (the work of mourning) in the sense expounded by Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich in their famous study *The Inability to Mourn*.⁸

Like the other East-bloc countries, the GDR owed its existence to the outcome of the Second World War. Unlike them, however, it, together with its capitalist Western counterpart, the Federal Republic, carried the burden of responsibility for the war and shared the legacy of the Third Reich. How these respective German states have dealt with their fascist past constitutes a fascinating chapter of postwar history, one that needs to be perused at this particular historical moment. In both the East and the West, we are in the midst of rewriting GDR history. In my view, there exists a very real danger that this new history will be a revisionist one.

For many in both the East and the West the collapse of the GDR brings with it the sense of the loss of utopia. For these individuals, the GDR's "real existing socialism" did not embody a desired or desirable goal. Instead, its mere existence as an alternative to the Federal Republic--seen as the German state more compromised by its Nazi heritage⁹--served to keep alive hope for the possibility of a different, more humane social order. For many GDR intellectuals (and some Western leftists) the virtue of the German socialist state lay more in its potentiality than in its actuality. Some of them recognized the need to confront their fascist past and undertook a painful process of self-examination, probing their relationship to the Third Reich. Some of them distanced themselves from the official

party line that exonerated the GDR of any responsibility for Nazism and celebrated the German socialist state as the fundamental Other. Rejecting as dishonest the facile displacement of responsibility for fascism onto the Federal Republic, they took issue with the GDR's official antifascist lineage and argued that while such a tradition indeed existed, it had been overemphasized. Breaking with the GDR's historical discontinuity theory, they pointed to the continuities between Nazi Germany and the "new" socialist Germany. In increasingly more critical writings they not only probed the shortcomings of the capitalist system, but those of the socialist system as well.

The prime exemplar of such a GDR writer is, of course, Christa Wolf. One of the most salient themes of her writing is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and her life work is devoted to championing the cause of socialism as potentiality. Her reaction to the collapse of the GDR is typical of many of her country's intellectuals. Stunned by the startling historical events of the last two and a half years, in particular the mass exodus of East Germans to the West, she must now confront the fact that she had misread the situation in the GDR. For someone who considered herself the spokesperson of many of her fellow citizens, the recognition that she had been misled by those in power, that she had been blind to many wrongs in her country, that she had, in effect, been as deluded as her fictional character Cassandra, is doubtless a bitter pill to swallow. She faces an even more difficult task: coming to terms with the possibility that there were things she had not wanted to see, that she had been complicit in helping to sustain a reprehensible system. Wolf's ongoing political engagement, as documented in her most recent volume of essays *Im Dialog*¹⁰ as well as the collection of letters, *Angepaßt oder Mündig?: Briefe an Christa Wolf im Herbst 1989*,¹¹ written in response to her sharply critical essays on the GDR's education system, "Das haben wir nicht gelernt," and "Es tut weh zu wissen,"¹² bears testimony to the fact that she has already begun the painful process of *Gegenwartsbewältigung*.

And what about *Was bleibt*, Wolf's most recently published fictional text¹³ which provoked the acrimonious debate that prompted this series of position papers? I do not intend to enter into this debate by speculating on whether, or to what degree, this text, reportedly written in 1979, was "doctored" in 1989. Nor do I plan to draw conclusions about Wolf's character from the date of its publication. To do so would not only be highly speculative and redundant, it would also mean accepting the terms of the debate as they have been set--which I emphatically do not. Instead, I will attempt to read the Christa Wolf controversy within the context of the rewriting of GDR history that is currently under way.

Before turning to my analysis of the debate, however, I want to sketch its chronology--to the extent that I am familiar with it. For those of us living abroad, the Christa Wolf controversy first surfaced with the *Zeit*'s double review of *Was bleibt* on 1 June 1990. There Ulrich Greiner dubbed Christa Wolf a "state poet" (*Staatsdichterin*) and accused her of dishonesty, opportunism, and insensitivity toward the true victims of the Honecker regime.¹⁴ His argument hinged solely on the text's publication date: had Wolf published this autobiographical narrative, in which she reveals that she was under surveillance by the security police (*Stasi*) in the late seventies, before 9 November 1989, Greiner's assessment, by his own admission, would have been totally different: the text would have caused a sensation, its author would have been celebrated as a heroine.¹⁵ The fact that she published it after this watershed date, the day the Wall fell, makes the text "embarrassing" and makes its author a coward. Reading the text as the author's self-serving attempt to ingratiate herself, to join the ranks of those oppressed by the communist regime, Greiner goes on to accuse Wolf of dishonesty, both toward herself and toward

her own history. Thus his "review" is an *ad feminam* attack on Wolf's entire person. Given the polemical nature of Greiner's review, it is hardly surprising that his voice drowned out that of his co-reviewer, Volker Hage. Hage's positive review of *Was bleibt* was, unfortunately, framed as a response to Greiner. In contrast to his co-reviewer, who fails to consider the text at all, Hage tries to situate *Was bleibt* within the context of Wolf's entire oeuvre. However, he spends most of his review trying to defend her against Greiner's charges, thereby not only assuming the weaker position, but also accepting and dignifying the terms of the "debate."

Hot on the heels of Greiner's review came Frank Schirmmacher's long essay on Christa Wolf in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2 June 1990). Unlike Greiner's, Schirmmacher's more sophisticated piece addresses Wolf's other writings. He prefaces his remarks by acknowledging Wolf's international literary reputation, but then goes on to call that reputation into question, claiming that she is highly overrated, that "several of her books have already been forgotten" and that *Was bleibt* borders on kitsch. Like Greiner, Schirmmacher rejects the text primarily because it appeared too late.¹⁷ In his view, *Was bleibt*, with its "hidden resistance plot,"¹⁸ is informed by a "guilty conscience and is sentimental and unbelievable." Moving from the literary to the personal, Schirmmacher paints Wolf as an opportunistic careerist, an authoritarian personality¹⁹ who has failed to learn from her experiences during the Third Reich. He links Wolf's appeal to her fellow citizens on 28 November 1989²⁰--after the collapse of the Wall--to remain in their country and work to create a socialist alternative to the Federal Republic to her protagonist (*Divided Heaven*) Rita Seidel's decision in 1961 to renounce her lover in the West to stay and help develop socialism in the GDR. Eliding fiction and biography, he implies a continuity in Wolf's life and writings from her earliest texts to the present.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that Rita Seidel is Wolf's mouthpiece and grant that her stance and Wolf's appeal share a certain moralistic stoicism. We must then also concede that what informs both positions is the belief that the socialist state, despite its many shortcomings, is superior to its capitalist counterpart and that it is worth enduring hardships to help realize its utopian potential. It is this belief, which is the cornerstone of all Wolf's writings and to which she stubbornly clings in the face of insurmountable obstacles,²¹ that Schirmmacher seems to find incomprehensible and objectionable.

Those who reject the notion of an organized campaign against Christa Wolf on the part of the West German press would do well to do a careful textual analysis of the "reviews" by Greiner and Schirmmacher, paying particular attention to the essays' hostile, accusatory tone, their avoidance of any meaningful discussion of the text, and their common strategy of using the delayed publication of *Was bleibt* as a springboard for a general attack on Wolf's character, as a means to discredit her work, her literary stature, and her person. By far the most disturbing and irresponsible aspect of Schirmmacher's piece is his willingness to resort to rumor to implicate Wolf with the repressive communist regime. Thus he faults her with not opposing the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia²² and suggests that she privately recanted her public objection to Wolf Biermann's expatriation.

The Christa Wolf of these reviews bears little resemblance to her earlier persona as constructed by the West German literary establishment. The image of a cowardly, servile, opportunistic, authoritarian personality has replaced the once familiar image of Wolf as a scrupulously honest, self-searching, critical writer, someone worthy of the Federal Republic's most prestigious literary²³ and political awards. I find it particularly difficult to reconcile the "state poet" Christa Wolf with the writer who

received the Geschwister Scholl award in 1987.²⁴ Greiner and Schirmmacher fail to mention any disparities between the new image they are creating and her earlier counterpart, proceeding instead as though their perspectives were based on general consensus. Overall, they seem intent on destroying the literary icon West Germany had been so instrumental in helping to establish.

Greiner's main "contribution" to the Wolf "debate" is the analogy he draws between Nazi Germany and the GDR.²⁵ Clearly these two regimes share certain repressive structures and comparisons can be made between them. However, the transgressions of the communist regime are qualitatively different from the crimes of the Third Reich and to equate one with the other, which Schirmmacher's article--its protestations to the contrary notwithstanding--insinuates, is misleading and pernicious. To subsume Nazism and East German communism into the single rubric of "totalitarianism" as Schirmmacher does is irresponsible. The facile equation of the two systems has already gained currency in the West; the danger exists that we will take a leaf from the GDR's book, point our fingers at the other system, and claim that East Germany is the proper heir to the Third Reich.

Before reading Günter Grass's eloquent defense of Christa Wolf in his interview with *Spiegel* on 16 July 1990,²⁶ I had assumed that Greiner and Schirmmacher had initiated the attack on her. From Grass I learned that the gauntlet had, in fact, first been thrown down by West Germany's *Literaturpapst* Marcel Reich-Ranicki in his television show *Literaturmagazin*. That, of course, made a lot of sense. Reich-Ranicki has never appreciated or understood Wolf's writings. Indeed, he has produced some of the most egregious misreadings of her texts--see, for example, his analysis of *Kindheitsmuster*.²⁷ I need not have despaired about missing Reich-Ranicki's remarks on German television since he reiterated his position on Wolf and *Was bleibt* in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The 25 June 1990 "Feuilleton" section of the paper conducted a series of interviews with writers, critics, and academics in both East and West Germany. The survey was introduced by a short essay by Klaus Podak which cautioned Western readers of the dangers of complacently and moralistically judging GDR intellectuals. Citing the attack on Christa Wolf as a negative example, he called for a more equitable level of public debate among people who would shortly be citizens of the same nation. At issue in the survey was the question of whether a GDR author who had enjoyed privileges under the communist regime, and whose criticism of the state had been partial rather than universal, should be considered a collaborator (*Mitläufer*). Among those responding, Reich-Ranicki distinguished himself through the self-righteous vehemence of his remarks. Categorically endorsing Greiner's and Schirmmacher's remarks, Reich-Ranicki went on to single out Christa Wolf for censure.²⁸

Given this sequence of events, it seems fair to characterize Reich-Ranicki, Greiner, and Schirmmacher as the gang of three in the Wolf "purge."²⁹ The question that remains, of course, is what is at stake in this below-the-belt attack on the former GDR's most distinguished writer. Greiner's recent (9 November 1990) update on the Wolf controversy in *Die Zeit*,³⁰ may shed some light on this matter. There he notes that the Christa Wolf debate has entered a new, more general and abstract level of discussion. It appears that *Was bleibt* served as the catalyst for a fundamental rereading of postwar German literature that is now under way, one that argues for a single German literature in lieu of the hitherto prevalent notion of two separate literatures. The latter reading, which became popular in the wake of Willi Brandt's successful *Ostpolitik*, was predicated on the belief that two discrete German literatures had evolved in the postwar period, each derived from a different political, economic, and social context and informed by

a different consciousness. The single German literature reading currently being advanced obliterates the notion of context, substituting for it the absolute of aesthetic value. In short, it's the old *littérature engagée* versus the literary autonomy argument--in a new wrapper, and with a twist: a call to reread several decades of German (literary) history.

It strikes me that these conflicting readings both have their roots in a cynical accommodation to political exigencies:³¹ as long as the division of Germany was perceived to be a protracted, perhaps permanent, arrangement, it was expedient to acknowledge the existence of a separate GDR literature and to evaluate that literature within the context in which it had appeared. Now that the GDR no longer exists, it is equally expedient to argue for a single German literature, one that can be evaluated by "objective" aesthetic categories, i.e., categories dictated by Western literary production.

The single literature reading carries with it the danger of effacing all of GDR history by reading it as forty years of the aberrant. To reduce the GDR to a mere interim period in *großdeutsch* (pan German) history is consonant with what has been described as the Federal Republic's imperialist behavior in its heady push for (re)unification, qua *Anschluß* (annexation) of East Germany.³² The *Anschluß* interpretation argues that (re)unification occurred at the GDR's expense, that it did not represent the joining together of equitable entities, but rather the annexation of the GDR by its more affluent, more successful Big Brother--an annexation that was, unhappily, ratified by the GDR parliament. This reading elevates the Federal Republic, along with Western capitalism, to the ranks of the victors of history and might help account for the paternalistic, morally superior tone of the attacks on Christa Wolf. It may also help explain the choice of Wolf as its target.

In the 22 October 1990 edition of the *Nation*, Christine Schoefer offers an insightful analysis of the attack on Christa Wolf, placing the "literary" campaign against her within the larger context of conservative post-Wall German politics.³³ She cites Günter Grass's admonishment that we "'not repeat in literature that which happens daily in the political sphere; namely, the colonization of the G.D.R.," and argues that the attack on Wolf "reveals the hidden agenda of the conservative model of German unification, which is intent not only on doing away with the Communist East but on erasing the history of the G.D.R. and the very idea of socialism itself."

As someone whose moral credibility had earned her respect in both the East and the West, Wolf's immunity to unification fever, her call for a socialist alternative to the Federal Republic, her refusal to play the reunification game by the conservatives' rules may well have been perceived as a threat to the Pan-German agenda.³⁴ I concur with Schoefer that there was no better way to discredit Wolf and to destroy her reputation as a spokesperson than by identifying her with the hated Communist regime. The fact that the Christa Wolf controversy has become subsumed into a debate about the aesthetic viability of socialist art supports Schoefer's thesis that the attack on Wolf was part of a larger agenda: "the ideological shaping of unified Germany."

My one quibble with Schoefer's analysis is her statement that in choosing to scapegoat Wolf, "the fact that she is a woman may be coincidental." In my view, gender, far from being peripheral, played an important role in the Christa Wolf controversy. It hardly seems coincidental that the all male coterie that attacked Wolf directed its invective against a writer whose feminist analyses have fundamentally challenged male dominance and hegemonic culture. Nor was the timing of the attack coincidental. Capitalizing on the ill-timed release of Wolf's story, the attack coincided with a debate about the Federal Republic's colonialist tendencies and with a discussion of the process of the reunification for the GDR. The real losers of the reunification are GDR

women who have lost many privileges guaranteed them by the former GDR, such as equal pay for equal work protection, easy access to abortion, paid maternity leave, and subsidized day care programs. Given these configurations of events, it seems to me the fact that Wolf is a powerful GDR woman is hardly coincidental. I therefore tend to agree with Helga Königsdorf's assessment of the Wolf controversy: "it is easier to behead a queen than to behead a king."³⁵ The issue of gender in the Christa Wolf controversy needs to be examined in depth. But that is the topic of another paper.

Notes

¹In reviewing my attitudes toward the GDR, it became clear that I had uncritically adopted the term "socialism" (albeit in its pragmatically circumscribed form of "real existing socialism") to describe the East German government from 1949-89. In the future, I propose that we differentiate between "socialism," as a utopian project and "communism," as the failed attempt to implement Marxism-Leninism in Eastern Europe. Thus, in the context of the GDR, "communism" would replace the misleading term "real existing socialism." GDR scholars may well have shunned the term "communism" to circumvent the Cold War rhetoric which so decisively shaped the reception of GDR literature.

²Introduction to the 500th edition of *Merkur*, Okt./Nov. 1990: 807.

³A definition of revolution grounded solely in a state model appears outdated in light of significant transnational revolutionary movements of the late twentieth century, such as feminism, the Red Army Faction, and numerous national liberation movements and the cross-cultural terrorist groups associated with them.

⁴We in the West are still not sufficiently informed about conditions in the GDR before the *Wende*. One of our chief sources was established writers like Christa Wolf, Volker Braun, and Heiner Müller, writers who were critical of the system, but who sought to reform it rather than overthrow it. The question remains what role the utopian component of these authors' writings, by pointing to what was lacking in the GDR, may have played in creating expectations and fostering a process of self-assertion.

⁵No doubt, the former East-bloc nations were politically and economically intertwined. However, the differences between individual countries are sufficiently pronounced and manifold that it would be meaningless to try to treat them as a homogeneous whole. I take exception to (the surprisingly many) accounts that indiscriminately speak of "the revolutions in Eastern Europe." Such a designation is tantamount to grouping countries under the rubric "Third World" countries, as though this constituted an identifiable entity.

⁶The term "*Gegenwartsbewältigung*" was taken from the title of a conference held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor on 25-27 Oct. 1990. The conference, organized by Marilyn Sibley Fries, dealt specifically with issues related to the former GDR.

⁷Such accounts, especially those based on models of communist self-criticism, may prove embarrassing to audiences in the West. They are, however, in my view, vital for the psychological and political health of former GDR citizens. I therefore disagree with Bohrer ("*Kulturschutzgebiet DDR?*," *Merkur*, Okt./Nov. 1990: 1015) that the work of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*) involved in such accounts constitutes a repression of the actual problem.

⁸Originally published in German as *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967); English translation by Beverly R. Placcek, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (New York: Grove Press, 1975). Although written twenty four years ago, this study still has resonance today and can perhaps serve as a theoretical framework for examining *Gegenwartsbewältigung*.

⁹This view is based on a recognition of the superiority of the Soviets' more rigorous denazification program. In what subsequently became the GDR, Nazis were systematically removed from positions of power and replaced with "antifascists," either old communists or others who had resisted the Nazis. The situation in what became the Federal Republic was considerably different: since the Western Allies failed to systematically remove former Nazis from positions of power, many moved into high ranking positions in the new government.

¹⁰Christa Wolf, *Im Dialog: Aktuelle Texte* (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand, 1990).

¹¹Christa Wolf, *Angepaßt oder mündig? Briefe an Christa Wolf im*

Herbst 1989 (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand, 1990).

¹² "Das haben wir nicht gelernt" was first published in *Wochenpost*, Nr. 43/1989. It was reprinted in *Angepaßt oder mündig?*, pp. 12-16. "Es tut weh zu wissen" was first published in *Wochenpost*, Nr. 47/1989 and reprinted in *Angepaßt oder mündig?*, pp. 12-16.

¹³ Christa Wolf, *Was bleibt* (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand, 1990).

¹⁴ These allegations are defamatory. Wolf is an unlikely candidate for the position of state poet. A far more appropriate candidate is Hermann Kant, former president of the *DDR-Schriftstellerverband* and SED functionary, who often was the mouthpiece of the GDR government. Interestingly enough, his name has not surfaced in any meaningful way in the recent "literary debates" about GDR literature. Aside from an interview with Kant conducted by *Spiegel*, "Ich war ein Aktivist der DDR" (*Spiegel*, 6 August 1990: 156-60), in which he admitted that he had deluded himself about a lot of things but also reiterated his ideological commitment to communism and defended his political behavior in the GDR, there has been no media coverage of Kant. In contrast to Kant, Wolf (with the exception of her earliest texts "Moscow Novella" and *Divided Heaven--* from which she has distanced herself) became increasingly more critical of the GDR regime. As a result, she often encountered obstacles from official sources. Ironically, her writings were more appreciated by critics in the West than by those in the East. Her texts did, however, spark great debates in the GDR and her critical stance made her a popular figure at home. Once she attained an international reputation, she became a jewel in the GDR's government's crown. While she hardly aspired to this position, it did afford her a certain protection from official reprisal. It seems particularly ironic and offensive to accuse Wolf of dishonesty since her writing, which she regards as a vehicle for gaining self-knowledge, is characterized by relentless self-scrutiny.

¹⁵ What Greiner conveniently overlooks is that Wolf was unable to publish *Was bleibt* in the GDR before the demise of the communist regime and obviously chose not to publish it in the West. Indeed, she never published any text in the West that could not also appear in the GDR. To do so would have made her a dissident. Ultimately, therefore Greiner is faulting Wolf for not being a dissident.

¹⁶ The hostile, sarcastic, and accusatory tone of Greiner's piece leaves little room for any other designation. Greiner's subsequent defensive attempts to minimize the gravity of both his and Schirrmacher's review is unconvincing. See "Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit," *Die Zeit*, 9 November 1990.

¹⁷ He does, however, at one point also fault Wolf for bad German in *Was bleibt*.

¹⁸ The original German term is "apokryphe Widerstandshandlung," an unusual turn of phrase.

¹⁹ This reproach may well have been garnered from Wolf's writings. In her introspective autobiographical novel *Kindheitsmuster*, she probed the roots of authoritarianism and has often faulted herself and other members of her generation with authoritarian tendencies.

²⁰ Wolf's speech, "Für unser Land" (For our country) was first published in *Neues Deutschland* on 28 November 1989 and then reprinted in *Frankfurter Rundschau* on 30 November 1989. It is also reprinted in *Im Dialog*, p. 170-71.

²¹ Wolf's appeal was issued too late. The ground swell movement for (re)unification with the Federal Republic, together with a widespread suspicion/rejection of socialism, rendered her call ineffectual and showed how out of touch she and other intellectuals were with changing populist demands.

²² See "Schreiben im Zeitbezug: Gespräch mit Aafke Steenhuis," in Christa Wolf, *Im Dialog*, p. 149, for Wolf's description of the pain and sense of disillusionment she felt in 1968.

²³ Wolf is the recipient of virtually every major West German literature award. These include: literature prize of the city of Bremen (1977); the Georg Büchner prize of the German Academy for Language and Literature, Darmstadt (1980); Friedrich Schiller Memorial Prize of Baden-Württemberg (1983). In addition, she was asked to hold the prestigious Lectures on Poetics at the University of Frankfurt (1982) and she holds honorary doctorates from the University of Hamburg (1985) and the University of Hildesheim (1990).

²⁴ It is another question entirely whether Wolf should have been awarded this prize. It is debatable whether Wolf's resistance to the communist regime can be compared to the overt resistance to the Nazis offered by the Scholls.

²⁵ Once again Wolf has beat him to the draw in *Kindheitsmuster*. In a sense, Schirrmacher uses Wolf's insights against her, accusing her of

precisely those attributes with which she faults herself and other members of her generation.

²⁶ "Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung?" *Spiegel* 29/1990: 138-143. Grass, whose position is very similar to mine, defends Wolf on the basis of her biography and writings. He challenges the faulty premises of the attack, pointing out, among other things, that Wolf had never claimed to be a heroine; since heroism or expatriation would have been entailed in publishing *Was bleibt* before the collapse of the GDR, he considers the criticism levied to be unfair. Pointing out that the "reviews" of *Was bleibt* did not address themselves to the text of *Was bleibt*, he reveals the strategies operable in Greiner's and Schirrmacher's reviews.

²⁷ "Christa Wolfs trauriger Zettelkasten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 March 1977.

²⁸ One of the questions posed in the survey was: "of which contemporary West or East German writer are you proud? Of which not proud at all?" While not everyone interviewed was asked this question, Reich-Ranicki was the only one among those asked to respond to the second half of the question. In singling out Wolf, he maintained that his judgment was predicated not on moral or political issues, but on the aesthetic inferiority of her last books.

²⁹ I do not hold with a conspiracy theory per se, one that reads these attacks on Wolf as a scheme masterminded by Reich-Ranicki and executed by him and his henchmen, Greiner and Schirrmacher. However the concerted effort exerted by all three convinces me that there is more at stake here than they are willing to admit.

³⁰ Greiner's article is entitled "Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal: Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit."

³¹ The same cynicism is at work in academic circles in this country where, since the collapse of the GDR, many armchair Marxists have disavowed any connection to socialism.

³² Both Christa Wolf and Günter Grass subscribe to this theory; both called for a federation between the Federal Republic and the former GDR and tried to impede the headlong rush toward (re)unification on the West's terms.

³³ The article is entitled "Germany Rewrites History: The Attack on Christa Wolf."

³⁴ Ironically, of course, given the massive disenchantment with socialism, such a fear was probably misplaced. Neither Wolf nor other members of the GDR literary establishment, such as Christoph Hein, Volker Braun or Helga Königsdorf were able to win the disenchanted GDR populace for their alternative socialist cause.

³⁵ My translation. The original German reads: "eine Königin köpfen ist einfacher als einen König köpfen." Königsdorf made this statement at the 1990 Women in German Conference, held on 23-26 October in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When the Mirror is Broken, What Remains? Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*

Marilyn Sibley Fries
The University of Michigan

Nichts geht mehr. Alle guten Geister, sogar meine Heiligen, hatten mich verlassen. Einzelne Zeilen mochte es noch geben. Mit meinem Mörder Zeit. Das ging. Mit meinem Mörder Zeit bin ich allein.¹

Forsaken by all her good spirits--by the *Geister* of literature in which she seeks solace, through which she wants to reestablish some sense of connection--the narrator of *Was bleibt* is left at the end with the utter despair of a quoted fragment from Ingeborg Bachmann, abandoned to solitary imprisonment with "my murderer, time." Her narration, written down in journal-like fashion in June-July 1979, records not only the author's actual experience of being under surveillance by East Germany's secret police (the *Staatssicherheitsdienst*, or *Stasi*); it also marks, as do so many of Wolf's works, a critical moment (a caesura, as Wolf would term it) in her life and oeuvre--a rupture that would