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

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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 Schirmmacher'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 Schirmmacher uses Wolf's insights against her, accusing her of

Sibley Fries: When the Mirror is Broken, What Remains? Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, 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 Schirmmacher's reviews.

27 "Christa Wolf's 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 Schirmmacher. 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 disenchanting 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.

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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

generate a new way of seeing and of being in the world. As such, it is a significant document for understanding particularly Wolf's works of the 1980s, but its evaluation as literature has been impeded by the critical storm unleashed by its 1990 publication. This "discussion" (to use, for the nonce, a euphemistic term for an astonishingly vindictive enterprise) generally fails to address the place of *Was bleibt* in Wolf's work or, for that matter, to judge it in any literary context at all. It neglects the signals the narrator gives us regarding her predicament as author, preferring--not surprisingly, given the political circumstances surrounding the publication--to focus on the narrator's evident protest against her status as victim of the state machinery.

While I will not maintain that *Was bleibt* is among Wolf's major literary products--for I do not think it is--, I do want to argue that the overwhelming sense of disconnection and alienation, represented by the curtains hung on the windows, the broken bathroom mirror, and the loss of the "good spirits" of literature, produce a text that is uncharacteristically hermetic for Christa Wolf. It is a narrative of paranoia, claustrophobia, and self-referentiality that closes in on itself and denies most of the access routes familiar to Wolf's readers. The curtain, "die dazu angebracht worden war, daß ich mich hinter ihr verbergen konnte" (10), also blocks the gaze of the *Stasi*. The barricade it erects between inside and outside marks the communicative impasse that haunts the narrator's actual experience as well as the gesture of the narrative, for this text does not, like so many others, appear to presuppose an interlocutor, to ignore the boundaries between text and reader (or between author and world). It does not address itself to a spoken or unspoken receiver--dialogue, it seems, is impossible under the circumstances--, nor does it play in the abundant intertextual realm evident in many of Wolf's other works. Its intertext is constructed not by reference to the "good spirits" that repose on the narrator's bookshelves, but remains self-referential, open only to those readers who recognize, for example, a reversal of *Unter den Linden* in the scenes involving a "Mädchen," a desperate walk through the streets of Berlin's center, a visit to a liquor store, and, of course, the narrator's inability to "see herself" at the end, as does the narrator of the dream in that story.² A narrative enclosure of this sort, lacking any of the mediating devices that might be symbolized by the reflecting mirror of texts through which the narrator can view herself, radically diminishes the space of reader participation. With this loss of mediation symbolized by the broken mirror--a mediation that permits a critical distance of self from self and of self from the implied (empathetic) reader--the narrative makes itself vulnerable. For what remains on the surface for most readers to see (and react to) is the forlorn protest of the narrator who has been betrayed and abandoned by the holiest of her *heiligen Geister*, the socialist State she has elected to serve. And there is scant patience, in 1990, for a protest of this sort from the pen of that state's most prominent author.

The critical storm for which this publication served as catalyst was of surprising magnitude, and will likely rage for some time to come. Throughout the summer and fall of 1990, in the wake of the German-German border's collapse and in anticipation of reunification, the *Feuilleton*-pages of major and minor newspapers and magazines carried the opinions of major and minor critics, most of whom were engaged not in an evaluation of this work's literary aspects, but rather in a much broader and highly politicized agenda. The published pros and cons constituted a debate (or debacle) that soon came to be known as the "*Fall Christa Wolf*," in which term the double meaning of *Fall* is surely intended. This personal "case" or "fall" of East Germany's singularly renowned author rapidly merged with and was made to stand for the larger "*Intellektuellenstreit*" that parades as being pan-German but is, in

fact, a matter concerning mainly the former East German intelligentsia. The authors of the debate, the judges of what they regard as the just and winning cause (capitalist democracy) who may now regard themselves as "free to tell the truth,"³ are mostly male members of the West German literary industry, primarily professional literary critics for newspapers and magazines. Although it is not my purpose here, it would be revealing to chart the critical attitudes in the *Was bleibt*-debate according to the gender, the nationality, and the political leanings of the authors. It is certainly notable that the "defense" of Christa Wolf is spoken by left-of-center people like Günter Grass⁴ and Lew Kopelew,⁵ or by a woman journalist in the (American) *Nation*,⁶ while those organs (such as *Die Zeit*, *Der Spiegel*, *Die Frankfurter Allgemeine*, *Die Welt*, *The New York Times*, and others) that orient themselves with deference to the level of conservatism in their respective federal governments reflect, despite the "objective-reporter tone," what appear to be popular sentiments.

In a *Zeit* article of 27 July 1990, Ulrich Greiner, whose earlier critique of *Was bleibt*⁷ did much to set the course of the debate, writes: "Ein Literaturstreit tobt derzeit in Deutschland, der mehr betrifft als nur die Literatur und mehr ist als nur ein Streit.... Es geht... um die Mitschuld der Intellektuellen der DDR, um die Mitverantwortung für die zweite deutsche Katastrophe--nach der nationalsozialistischen die stalinistische.... Der Streitwert ist hoch: Er heißt intellektuelle Moral." If this be the case, then Christa Wolf's *Fall* assumes a position parallel to other cases involving the "guilt" of prominent thinkers--Heidegger and de Man come immediately to mind--in which we, the receivers of their thinking, are pressed once again to sort out questions of value. Can we (is it morally defensible to) attend to a text without reference to its social/political/historical context? Did de Man embrace deconstruction, as some argue, in order to "protect himself" by practicing such a "detached" theory? Does Christa Wolf mislead herself and her readers by obscuring her own blindness with the power of her insight, by insisting on subjective authenticity and the morality of the author while engaged in the artful construction of a literary "context" of mediation that makes her acceptable and accessible to a large readership? These questions must be asked, I think, although I shall not promise to answer them.

However we may approach them, we will not find much guidance in an authoritative proclamation such as Greiner's, which reflects in cultivated language the harsh binarism that rules the discussion. For it not only entirely displaces the discussion of Wolf's work (and, by implication, all of her oeuvre, all of East German cultural production) from the arena of literary and aesthetic criticism to that of ideological positioning, it also virtually prohibits any textual analysis in the process. The narrative, read entirely at face value, is dismissed with references to some of its less felicitous moments⁸ in ways that suppress the struggling narrative voice to make room for the booming organ of the critic and to reinforce the we/they, criminal/victim oppositions such as to leave little room for ambiguity or ambivalence. What transpires here is an ironic, and perhaps tragic, repetition of the sort of revision seen all too frequently in German history and cultural politics. Herself the problematic product of certain "patterns of childhood," Christa Wolf (I equate her with the story's narrator), is silenced by the police machine of her state, and silenced again, a decade later, by the censoring mechanisms of the West. What no critic I have read is willing to recognize is the demonstrative if ambiguous role of the self-censor with whom the narrator engages in lengthy interior dialogue, to see in this narrative the extreme representation of the controls to which all of us are subject to a greater or lesser extent. The reasons for this lack of recognition reside, in part, in the critics' own ideological blindness, but they are also grounded fully in the narrative itself--

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a narrative that deletes the space for reader-identification and dialogue into which so many readers of Wolf's earlier texts have eagerly entered. Just as the broken mirror symbolizes the absence of self-reflection and critical distanciation that are a prominent structural feature of much of Wolf's work, so it may stand as well for the reader's inability to recognize aspects of the self in this text. Thus the narrative is reduced, or reduces itself, to the lonely protest of the absolutely alienated narrator, isolated from self and others by the paranoia brought on by the *Stasi*'s constant observation. The protest is further weakened--indeed, it loses any force it might have had as protest--by the fact of its post-revolutionary publication. For many readers, it signals: "Look at me. I, too, was a victim of the State and its oppressive secret police. I, too, have suffered; don't align me with the criminal system. I am not guilty." And for many, this protest could not be convincing, coming, as it did, after the East German collapse, after Christa Wolf's misguided attempts to rally "the people" to remain and work for a truly democratic socialism,⁹ after her eleventh-hour withdrawal from the Party she had joined at the birth of the GDR, after her refusal to lend her total support to that country's late-born oppositional groups,¹⁰ after her enjoyment of several years of privileged status in the GDR.

Now it is true that the two German states have rarely succeeded in viewing each other's literary and other artistic products outside the political realm, nor is it, in many cases, appropriate to attempt this. But to judge these works solely on the basis of an ideological position deemed "correct" by the judge, and to discredit them when they will not square with that position, defines a kind of manipulation that discounts formal or aesthetic consideration. If a work--such as *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, for instance--can be made to fit a given ideological frame (in this case, the superiority of capitalism over socialism, or of individual freedom over restrictive collective behavior) and heard to resound with familiar intertextual echoes,¹¹ it may be hailed as a great work. If it locates itself with respect to a generally recognized and accepted literary canon, especially if this means appropriating the "Western" canon for the East--as in *Unter den Linden, Kein Ort. Nirgends, Ein Brief über die Bettine*, and others--then it is bold and good. But when it begins to rewrite that Western canon, as does the *Kassandra*-project, and to privilege nature over culture, everyday (women's) life over heroic (male) moments (see also *Störfall* and *Sommerstück*), it no longer fits the ideological frame and becomes suspect, subject to dismissal as "mystical." Christa Wolf's development can be (and has been) seen as a search for self that intersects at times with the more general self-identification problems of one or another of the constituencies of the two Germans. The moments of evident intersection are those that bring her highest praise; there is little critical patience, however, when her path diverts from the common one, regardless of the "sense" this might make in the scheme of her individual development. The chorus of critical praise for the insistently individualistic and self-defining Christa T. falls silent when Christa Wolf enacts the freedom her character could not experience.

This critical uneasiness, engendered by Wolf's departure from familiar paths, and as evident in the East as in the West, preceded the publication of *Was bleibt* by several years and was prompted by Wolf's movement, to use Edward Said's terminology, from "social affiliation" to "natural filiation." In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said argues for the "worldliness" of texts (and against the "pure textuality" of literary theory), maintaining that "much that goes on in texts alludes to [historical events and circumstances], affiliates itself directly to them."¹² In his elaboration of the word, "culture" (that double-edged "something to which one belongs [but also] something that one possesses" [8-9]), and to which the individual/author who is "out of place, exiled, alienated" seeks

access by means of affiliation, he asserts: "It is in culture that we can seek out the range of meanings and ideals conveyed by the phrases *belonging to* or *in a place*, being *at home in a place*" (8, his emphasis). In delineating what he calls "criticism," Said maintains the following:

On the one hand, the individual mind registers and is very much aware of the collective whole, context, or situation in which it finds itself. On the other hand, precisely because of this awareness--a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture--that the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it. And because of that perspective, which introduces circumstance and distinction where there had only been conformity and belonging, there is distance, or what we might also call criticism. A knowledge of history, a recognition of the importance of social circumstance, and analytical capacity for making distinctions: these trouble the quasi-religious authority of being comfortably at home, at home among one's people, supported by known powers and acceptable values, protected against the outside world. (15-16)

"Natural filiation" has, for Said, to do with the generative impulse, the natural continuity between one generation and the next. It is telling that he cites as examples of/reasons for the disruption of this continuity not only modern cultural history (via the literary examples of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, *Death in Venice* and many others). He also points to the "immensely authoritative weight of Freud's psychoanalytic theory, a significant and influential aspect of which posits the potentially murderous outcome of bearing children" (16), as well as to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (surely familiar to Wolf), in which (in Said's words) Lukács maintains that "reification is the alienation of men from what they have produced, and it is the starkly uncompromising severity of his vision that he means by this all the products of human labor, children included, which are so completely separated from each other, atomized, and hence frozen into the category of ontological objects as to make even natural relationships virtually impossible" (16-17). Said is "describing...the transition from a failed idea or possibility of filiation to a kind of compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship,...affiliation.... [I]f a filial relationship was held together by natural bonds and natural forms of authority--involving obedience, fear, love, respect, and instinctual conflict--the new affiliative relationship changes these bonds into what seem to be transpersonal forms--such as guild consciousness, consensus, collegiality, professional respect, class, and the hegemony of a dominant culture. The filiative scheme belongs to the realms of nature and of 'life,' whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society" (19-20). Said's description of "passage from nature to culture" (or the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*), serves his larger purpose of examining the effect of the pattern described on the study of literature today. He posits the existence of the "notion within [specialized scholarly] fields that the originating human subject is of less importance than transhuman rules and theories, [which] accompan[ies] the transformation of naturally filiative into systematically affiliative relationships. The loss of the subject, as it has commonly been referred to, is in various ways the loss as well of the procreative, generational urge authorizing filiative relationships" (20).

I have cited Said at length here in order to argue that Christa Wolf, denied any sense of "natural filiation" by the experiences of her youth in Nazi Germany and, subsequently, by her early overwhelming commitment to socialism--exiled from "home," alienated from "self," victim of cultural discontinuity,

ideological authority, and generational difference--inscribes in her increasingly subjective works a necessary process of cultural affiliation (via literature) that ultimately takes her beyond or outside the "culture" and its citadel to a realm of progenitive nature and filial relationships. Anna Kuhn sees this movement as one from Marxism to feminism.¹³ Although I do not argue that view, I prefer to see it as one from culture to nature, in which we can trace Wolf's gradual alienation from and abandonment of "transhuman rules and theories," located first for Wolf in political philosophy, later in a "cultural heritage" of literary allusion and quotation that generates that extraordinary intertextuality with which Wolf invests so many of her narratives. The shock of recognition is recorded in *Was bleibt* when the narrator registers the loss of "alle guten Geister, sogar meine Heiligen." Its results will play themselves out in the ensuing years, in the *Kassandra*-project in which she revises and then rejects the aesthetics of western civilization, and in *Störfall* and *Sommerstück*, devoted almost entirely to the discovery of natural filiation.

Wolf's intertextuality, present especially in her works from the mid-sixties (*Juninachmittag*) through the mid-eighties (*Kassandra*), serves both the author and her critics. At the primary level, it demonstrates Wolf's attempt to "catch up" on the culture denied her in her youth (and under socialism), to expand her own self-definition via books ("Denn ich, ohne Bücher, bin nicht ich."¹⁴) In a larger and more general sense, however, this activity describes her eager acquisition of "culture" in her attempt to locate a place of belonging and a sense of continuity. Two important things transpire in this process which, as Said notes, generates criticism via distanciation. First, the author herself becomes increasingly alienated from precisely that culture she strives to appropriate and which serves as *Vermittler*--as mediator between the individual author and "life"; and second, the critical reception of the works written during this time eagerly grasps at the interpretative opportunities provided by precisely this mediated space between the author and her "subjective experience." The "culture" by which she seeks to define--in which she seeks to reflect--herself turns out, for Christa Wolf, to be yet another tool of self-alienation, barring the way to the subject, to "I." In her most recent works, in *Störfall* and *Sommerstück*, ultimately, that "I" is one defined by relationship to family, friends, and nature--what I see as an attempt at "natural filiation" succeeding the process of "cultural affiliation."

The "trouble" is, of course, that this highly subjective enterprise (in comparison to which the "subjectivity" of the earlier works is subject to greater scrutiny than most critics have given it), alienates those readers who continue to insist on the putatively normative and universal terms of their cultural hegemony, who cannot find the narrative space in which to insert their own voices because the author has moved to less familiar mediating devices. This, I think, partly explains the lackluster reception (in Germany) of the two above-named works.¹⁵ Indeed, the critical attitudes regarding these seem carefully guarded and not a little resentful of Wolf's departure from our "common culture."

Thus it is not surprising when Christian Hart-Nibbrig notes the ambivalent critical atmosphere into which *Was bleibt* was launched in 1990, characterizing the critics as so many tigers waiting to spring, anticipating that unguarded moment which would allow them to voice the suppressed disapproval of a writer of whom, until that time, it was not "politically correct" to disapprove.¹⁶ Like the Trojans' discovery of Achilles's heel or Hagen's of the spot on Siegfried's back, the publication of *Was bleibt* laid bare the vulnerable spot of attack. (Christa Wolf would probably not appreciate this comparison with Achilles ["das Vieh" *Kassandra*, 170] or Siegfried, for that matter, whose

representation as the incarnation of *Germanentum* was so important to the Nazi myth-makers. But I see the analogy as apt, even if twisted, for the attack on Wolf as the representative of the East German intelligentsia [thus parallel to the representative positions occupied by Achilles and Siegfried as leaders of their people] seems intended to bring the entire people, and the culture for which it stands, to a fall.)

In any event, these critics, especially Wolf's accusers, deliver enough low punches to take our collective breath away. When we recover it, we may be tempted to respond in equally intolerant language, especially if we are long-time admirers of Christa Wolf. For many readers, she has served as mentor and guide; her self-searching has coincided with ours in propitious ways, so that we could find our questions in her works and the strength to reiterate them ourselves in our own. We assert that we, with her, have become *mündig*--we have found our voices as she has found hers. We congratulate her, and ourselves, for daring to be subjective and authentic, for taking moral responsibility, for insisting on the importance of the author, and so on. But what do we ultimately mean by all this? And are the undeniably seductive aspects of her work what makes it "great" and "significant"? Have we been blinded to the realities of "real existing socialism" because we want to agree with Wolf's version of "*die Wahrheit*"? And to what extent are we implicated if we ignore the (real, historical) context for the sake of the (transhuman, theoretical) text, subtext, and intertext?

These are the tough questions which those of us who claim *Mündigkeit* will have to try to answer. Obviously, the several voices raised against Christa Wolf in the *Literaturstreit* are not of those admiring and identifying readers. They belong to an other group difficult to define, since its contours have a way of changing. The politics of this amorphous chameleon body of "critics" are striking in their exemplariness and in their readiness to rearrange the ideological structures with respect to which they locate themselves. It is tempting to denounce and discredit many of them by interpreting the debate, as Christiane Zehl Romero does, as an antifeminist, androcentric, misogynistic attack,¹⁷ or, as others have done, as an all-out attempt to discredit and disclaim the entire project of GDR literature for which Wolf stands as representative.¹⁸ I see it as yet another chapter of the German identity crisis, which so often seems to lead to the tragic impasse in which the self (whether individual or collective) is definable only by means of establishing putative difference. However we might characterize this unusually nasty press campaign, what remains is the question of what will remain. In *Lesen und Schreiben*, Wolf writes: "... untergehen wird nur, was nicht gebraucht wird" (*DA* 492). We shall, I submit, continue to need Christa Wolf's work. No amount of self-referential criticism will destroy its importance. But, to return to the tough questions above, wherein does that importance lie? Not, I would argue, (only) in the historical and cultural-political context that produces this oeuvre. What makes it important is, rather, its uncanny tracing of our times (by that I mean the times of "western civilization"), its anticipation of our moral and philosophical and psychological preoccupations of the past decades, and its ability to provide that space created by self-reflexivity in which both text and reader can realize "endless possibilities."¹⁹

Whether *Was bleibt* provides that space is questionable. When there are no possibilities for the narrator--"Nichts geht mehr"--, when she is enclosed in a small space with only her murderer as companion, only her self-censor as interlocutor, she closes the gap into which our voices might slip. But if "wir wissen, was kommt,"²⁰ we can identify this *Erzählung* as that crucial point in Wolf's life that leads, first, to her identification with Heinrich von Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode, condemned to death by their

historical asynchronicity, to her subsequent move beyond the "citadel of reason" and into a realm that grows increasingly inaccessible to those whose value systems are determined by the authority of that proprietary "culture" that "designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play" (Said, 9).

In every other respect, *Was bleibt* is a work of closure. The "endless possibilities" Wolf thought to find in the correspondence between literary activity and the socialist project are utterly canceled out--here more than once: first by the experience described by the narrator, the total loss of freedom brought on by the *Stasi*-surveillance in the late seventies, and second by the collapse of the GDR shortly before the publication of this work in 1990. But, as I have been suggesting, it is important to bear in mind the date of this narrative with regard to Wolf's publications. 1979 would produce the polyphonic montage of *Kein Ort. Nirgends*. Subsequent years would bring Wolf's revision of the Cassandra legend (and the accompanying lectures), *Störfall*, and *Sommerstück*. There is, in other words, a self-contradiction within this text in which the mirror is broken, which drops the curtain on the "guten Geister" only to lift it again on a cave by a river, a willow branch, and a cherry tree.

Notes

¹Christa Wolf. *Was bleibt*. (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1990) 105. Subsequent citations refer to this edition.

²Cf. *Unter den Linden*. (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974).

³Cf. the narrator's thus-expressed freedom in *Unter den Linden*, after she has released herself (or been released through her dream) from the censorship of an unnamed "greater authority."

⁴"Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung? Spiegel-Gespräch mit Günter Grass über die Debatte um Christa Wolf und die DDR-Literatur." *Der Spiegel* 29, 1990.

⁵"Für Christa Wolf: Ein Brief von Lew Kopelew an die 'Zeit,' die 'FAZ' und die 'Welt.'" *taz*, 14 June 1990.

⁶Christine Schoefer. "Germany Rewrites History: The Attack on Christa Wolf." *The Nation*, 22 October 1990.

⁷"Mangel an Feingefühl." *Die Zeit*, 8 June 1990.

⁸Note the smug condescension, for example, of Greiner's dismissive references to "dieser angenehme Christa-Wolf Sound, diese flau Unverbindlichkeits-Melodie in der apart formulierten Sprache...[a]ch ja, diese anmütige Melancholie Christa Wolfs, diese zarte Entsagung!" (*Die Zeit*, 8 June 1990), or Hellmuth Karasek's tell-tale title in *Der Spiegel* (26, 1990): "Selbstgemachte Konfitüre."

⁹See the two collectively-authored petitions of which Wolf was co-signer: "Bleibt hier bei uns" (read by Wolf on German television, 11 November 1989) and "Für unser Land" (published 26 November 1989). Both are printed in full in *DDR Journal zur Novemberrevolution*, Tageszeitungsgesellschaft "die taz" mbH, December 1989.

¹⁰This according to the environmental activist and photographer, Siggie Schefke, who articulated the resentment of many members of the GDR opposition with respect to Wolf's reluctance to become fully involved in their cause in his presentation, "Perspektive der Linken," at the University of Michigan symposium, "*Gegenwartsbewältigung: Coming to Terms With the Present*" in Ann Arbor, 25-27 October 1990.

¹¹The title of Fritz Raddatz' review of Christa T., "Mein Name sei Tonio K.," is an excellent demonstration of this kind of literary contextualization.

¹²Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983, p. 4 (Said's emphasis). All further citations refer to this edition.

¹³Anna Kuhn. *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision: From Marxism to Feminism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

¹⁴Christa Wolf. "Lesen und Schreiben." *Die Dimension des Autors*. (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1987) 478. Subsequently cited in text as *DA*.

¹⁵The reception of *Accident* in the U.S., on the other hand, differs markedly from that in Germany. This may well have to do with the "decontextualization" of this work with respect to Wolf's oeuvre. Few of the reviewers demonstrate familiarity with Wolf's works, but are much impressed by the impassioned and lyrical reaction to nuclear threats.

What Remains? Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* in her report on the 1989 Frankfurter Buchmesse at the University of Michigan in the fall of that year.

¹⁷Such was the gist of Romero's argument in her presentation, "Was bleibt?" at the University of Michigan symposium, *Gegenwartsbewältigung*.

¹⁸Cf. Schoefer. "Germany Rewrites History."

¹⁹Cf. "Lesen und Schreiben," *Nachdenken über Christa T.*

²⁰Cf. the last line of *Kein Ort. Nirgends*. (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979).

Zur Genese und Berechtigung der Christa Wolf Debatte.

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Vanderbilt University

Christa Wolf wird Feigheit vor einem Feind vorgeworfen, der allerdings ihr Feind nicht war und unter dessen Regime die Kritiker nie leben mußten.

Wolf Biermann¹

Die Veröffentlichung eines Buches von Christa Wolf machte wieder einmal Furore, allerdings diesmal mit umgekehrten Vorzeichen. Die Presse in dem Territorium der alten Bundesrepublik--zuvor meist äußerst positiv gegenüber den Werken der Autorin--ging plötzlich zu einer extrem scharfen Kritik über. Der Anlaß war die Veröffentlichung von *Was bleibt*, einem Buch, welches zehn Jahre zuvor im Jahre 1979 geschrieben worden war und nun kurz nach der "Wende" etwas überarbeitet auf den Markt gebracht wurde. Der Inhalt behandelt etwas für den DDR-Staat durchaus nicht Ungewöhnliches: die Überwachung der Protagonistin durch die allgegenwärtige Stasi, ein Thema also, das seit dem Mauerdurchbruch eingehend in den deutschen Medien dargestellt und analysiert worden ist. Was also erregte und erregt die Gemüter?

In mehreren Rezensionen war es vor allem der Zeitpunkt der Veröffentlichung von *Was bleibt*, über den sich die Kritiker empörten, wie z.B. Ulrich Greiner in *Die Zeit*, der mit einer gewissen Selbstgerechtigkeit darauf verweist, daß die Publikation vor dem 9. November 1989 eine "Sensation gewesen wäre, die sicherlich das Ende der Staatsdichterin Christa Wolf und vermutlich ihre Emigration zur Folge gehabt hätte."² Aber gerade das war eben--trotz aller Erwägungen³--keine Alternative für Christa Wolf. Natürlich hätte sie das Buch gegen den Willen des Staates im Westen veröffentlichen können, aber das hätte unter anderem das Risiko eines völligen Publikationsverbots in der DDR bedeutet. Das Beispiel Stefan Heym war ihr sicherlich allzu bewußt. Und so mußte das Werk 1979 in der Schublade versinken. Christa Wolf wollte und konnte keine "Heldin" sein, und hat sich stets davon distanziert.⁴ Wer wollte oder dürfte ihr das jetzt vorwerfen? Trotzdem hat Greiner nicht ganz unrecht, wenn er den Zeitpunkt der Veröffentlichung in Frage stellt. Selbst wenn dies teilweise unter Druck ihres Verlages geschah, war es jedenfalls kein geschickter Zug und muß als eine entschiedene Fehleinschätzung gewertet werden. Andererseits ist es jedoch kaum ein Versuch von Christa Wolf--wie es *Der Spiegel* in einem Gespräch mit Hermann Kant suggeriert hat--sich "nachträglich zum Opfer"⁵ stilisieren zu wollen. Ebenfalls Greiners Ansicht, es wäre besser gewesen, einfach stillschweigend über "diese Bagatelle"⁶ hinwegzugehen, stellte keine akzeptable Lösung dar. Für Christa Wolf war die Bespitzelung durch die Stasi keine Bagatelle, sondern eine für sie tiefgreifende persönliche und gesellschaftspolitische Erfahrung, die sie als Autorin beschäftigte und die sie gestalten mußte.