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Brigitte Struzyk: In vollen Zügen. Rück-Sichten

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BOOK REVIEWS

vocabulary and the reality, the thinking and the problems of the time, and is enriched with the experience of the unification process from a retrospective standpoint.

Morris Vos
Western Illinois University

Struzyk, Brigitte. *In vollen Zügen. Rück-Sichten*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1994. 167 pp.

In the years since German unification, many East German writers have begun the laborious process of re-mem-bering their GDR pasts, whether in the form of essay, public speech, memoir, or somewhat less frequently, fictional narrative. In virtually all cases this looking back entails grappling with issues of victimization and/or complicity within the GDR. This confrontation is often expressed in the language of blame or self-justification. More often than not, these writers tell their stories against the backdrop of post-unification losses: the loss of hopes, of utopia, and of a clear sense of home.

Struzyk's volume participates in this evolving dialogue in both expected and unexpected ways. *In vollen Zügen* is at first glance a loosely structured, episodic memoir, obliquely framed by the present, following a generally coherent chronology from the author/narrator's childhood in Weimar, through her coming of age in Leipzig, to her adult life as a writer in Berlin. The text is broken into small sections ranging from one to seven pages, each offering a discrete vignette. Born in 1946, Struzyk grew up with the GDR, and the stories she tells combine to construct a self defined by resistance: resistance to her family's past of quiet collusion with the Nazi regime, resistance to the ideological rigidity she experienced in school and in work, and resistance to the creeping materialism of the Honecker years.

Interwoven in the descriptions of her evolving political awareness are the stages of her personal maturation through various love affairs and the births of four children (a fifth died within a day of delivery). The subject matter ranges from the quotidian (the various typewriters she has owned) to the monumental (her reflections on visiting Buchenwald). At times, this pastiche seems burdened by cliché or contrived word play, as in the dreams that are sprinkled throughout the text, or in a passage describing her father's safe return from the war and prison camp: "Davongekommen zu sein, von gekommen sein. Sein. Mehr nicht? Mehr, von vorn anfangen. Alles anders machen. Verbissen verbessern – Esser sein" (16). This tendency is often rescued by the vividness of Struzyk's concrete images: "Der Geruch von Mandelkleie und nassem Hundefell, das Geräusch von schmirgelndem Bimsstein – wir hatten ein Bad" (15). The common feature that ties many of the various threads together is of a rhetorical rather than a thematic nature: an overwhelming number of the stories foreground ironies and paradoxes of GDR society. Some of these surface in her ruminations upon language as, for example, in her refunctioning of "Verrat," a dirty word in the GDR ("Verrat am Sozialismus"), into an "Akt von Zivilcourage" (78). Existing alongside betrayal as

resistance was the betrayal of people's private lives: "Eine Freundschaft, Liebe verraten, indem man sie entdeckt. Was Stasi-Schnüffler auch taten" (78). One of these "Schnüffler" was her one-time husband, whose emotional betrayal was matched only by his physical abusiveness. In other episodes the irony is situational, as in the story of a Moroccan friend who, in December 1989, sought asylum in the GDR because of his impending expulsion from the Federal Republic, only to be "greeted" by a Taxi driver spouting Nazi slogans and racial epithets.

The most compelling part of this tale of self-revelation comes in the later chapters. Following the birth of her first child midway through the text, an increasing number of the short chapters are addressed to this daughter in the second-person, and gradually, the apparent purpose of the telling shifts, lifting it out of the mode of self-justification. Increasingly, the reader finds herself thrust into the middle of an intimate family story. The personal and the political converge in a startling way when, on the occasion of the monetary unification of July 1990, the daughter is picked up by the police and subsequently committed to the psychiatric ward of a hospital. From this point to the bitter end, the narrative acquires a note of urgency, as the narrator struggles to grasp the unraveling of her daughter's life. Struzyk does not go so far as to claim that unification is responsible for the apparent suicide, but in order to explain this personal tragedy, she turns to an elegiac rendering of her daughter as a rebel against the norms of a society that, in an ultimate irony, calls her insane. For Struzyk, who casts her own life as a struggle against the insanity of the social order, this daughter seems to represent the consequences of living out her own values. The text does not descend into a macabre, self-pitying lament. Moving away from the pointed barbs of earlier chapters, Struzyk wrestles instead with the open questions of a time between times, acknowledging losses without attempting final answers:

... Steinekarren die Versuche mit der Ärztin zu reden
Du wärst ernsthaft krank weil Du damals als Du in
die deutsch-deutschen Binsen gegangen bist Dich
nicht entscheiden konntest gehst Du zurück in ein
zum Vergehen verurteiltes Land wo Deine Freunde
sind oder bleibst du in der Zukunft die Dir so schal
und fremd erschien. (166-167)

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Wallace, Ian, ed. *Christa Wolf in Perspective. German Monitor*. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1994.

In his preface to *Christa Wolf in Perspective*, editor Ian Wallace notes that "a volume devoted to the work of a major writer requires no justification." Indeed, academic research on Christa Wolf and her works is not only justified, it is also needed. Especially now, post-*Wende*, and post-"*Fall Christa Wolf*," when GDR literature and Wolf alike are regarded with some suspicion, balanced perspectives on Wolf's biography and writings are indispensable.

But the thirteen essays of this volume are striking not so much for their fresh perspectives on Wolf as for their range of perspectives. Wallace has gathered articles that assess themes and motifs, as well as articles that approach Wolf's works from distinct theoretical perspectives. Some essays in the collection focus on the links between the early and later Wolf, between Wolf and socialist realism, between Wolf and romanticism. Still others attempt to come to terms with *Was bleibt*, and the discovery that Wolf had been a *Stasi* informant in the 1950s. The volume also features an assessment and transcript of a question-and-answer session held with Wolf after a *Dichterlesung* held at the German School in London in 1992.

Of all the essays, those that emphasize the intertextuality (and intratextuality) of Wolf's *oeuvre*, and there are several, provide the most interesting interpretations. Georgina Paul's essay on Wolf's "Brief über die Bettine," Renate Rechten's on the Faust theme, Ricarda Schmidt's on religious metaphors in Wolf's works, and Brigid Haines's on *Störfall* all connect elements of Wolf's *oeuvre* to the political, cultural, and literary contexts in which she wrote. Together they provide an account of her work that is as dense and detailed as it is broad and varied.

Anna Kuhn's "'Zweige vom selben Stamm'?" Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, *Kein Ort*, *Nirgends*, and *Sommerstück*" is exemplary for its chronological and thematic grounding of *Was bleibt*. Kuhn draws attention to the ways in which *Was bleibt* is intricately connected to other texts written by Wolf in the late 1970s, at a time when Wolf was engaged with both contemporary political dilemmas and texts of German Romanticism. Kuhn, Peter Graves ("The treachery of St. Joan: Christa Wolf and the *Stasi*"), and Christopher Colton ("*Was bleibt* – eine neue Sprache?") offer aesthetic analyses of *Was bleibt* that are removed from the biographically reductive arguments that surrounded its publication.

Christa Wolf in Perspective is also notable for its inclusion of Martin Kane's "'Das Grauenhafte des bloß Schematischen' (Franz Kafka): Christa Wolf's 'Kleiner Ausflug nach H.' in the context of her early writing." In the only essay of adequate length or substance that