Christa Wolf: Divided Heaven

Ludo Abicht

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

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License.

Recommended Citation

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

One recurrent problem western, even Marxist Western readers and reviewers have with GDR literature is a misconception of what constitutes a genuine "political reading" of a novel or play. Through our training and ideological modification we tend to look at those literary works as somewhat shallow, easy-to-decode "messages" from the other side of the Berlin wall: how much criticism and dissent is explicit, how much more is implicit and ambiguous? Thus we reduce a novel such as Divided Heaven to a rather feeble attempt at voicing some opposition against the negative aspects of the East German regime and by doing so we often ignore the real political scope of the work. (The lucid analysis of Robbe-Grillet by the Goldmann student Jacques Leenhardt, "Lecture politique du roman," could serve as a helpful model for anyone trying to understand literature from the socialist countries.)

Rereading Christa Wolf's Divided Heaven after about eight years made me realize how quickly I had categorized it then as a veiled protest novel, a cautious "roman à thèse" which essentially said all the things we in the west had of course known for years. That is precisely why a renewed reading comes as a shock, for this novel about the dual German reality and its human implications is much more than a substitute for a humanist socialist pamphlet. Christa Wolf did not need to resort to a liter-