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**EMANCIPATION, COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY:
A STUDY OF CHRISTA WOLF'S WRITING**

submitted by Renate A. Rechten

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis examines the aspects of emancipation, commitment and responsibility in Christa Wolf's writing. Adopting a variety of critical strategies as the means of rendering the complexity of the author's experience, the thesis approaches Wolf's work as a complex network in which life and art are inextricably intertwined. The first part of the thesis focuses on the development of Wolf's understanding of the role and function of literature in society, with a particular emphasis on her development of the concept of responsibility from the early 1950s onwards. My examination positions Wolf's literary work, including her essays, within the wider historical dimensions of her poetological and aesthetic development, showing the way in which the author liberates herself gradually from commitments which are no longer productive. The second part of the thesis exemplifies some of the distinctive features of the complex tapestry which Wolf's work provides in three separate chapters. The first of these is Wolf's relationship with Bertolt Brecht, which takes her back to her Marxist and communist roots and helps her to understand them more critically. The second of these is the Faust theme, which can also be traced through her work as a whole and can be linked in a wider sense to her gradual self-distancing from the cultural ideals of Weimar classicism which formed the original basis of GDR cultural policy. A third feature of the network is illuminated by an examination of images of men and women in Wolf's writing, which shows the development of her feminist consciousness through the 1970s and 1980s. The final part of the thesis consists of a detailed textual analysis of some major aspects of Wolf's *Kassandra*, which marks the culmination of her journey towards self-realization and emancipation as a writer.

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ABBREVIATIONS

References in the text are to the following editions of Christa Wolf's works:

- Chr.T.: *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 22nd edition, 1984
- DdA I: *Die Dimension des Autors. Aufsätze, Essays, Gespräche, Reden, 1959-1985*, edited by Angela Drescher, Berlin and Weimar, 1986
- DdA II: *Die Dimension des Autors. Aufsätze, Essays, Gespräche, Reden, 1959-1985*, edited by Angela Drescher, Berlin and Weimar, 1986
- FPV: *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra*, Frankfurt/Main, 1983
- GE: *Gesammelte Erzählungen*, 10th edition, Frankfurt/Main, 1989
- GH: *Der geteilte Himmel*, 15th edition, Munich, 1982
- ID: *Im Dialog*, Frankfurt/Main, 1990
- K: *Kassandra*, 9th edition, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1984
- KON: *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, 7th edition, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1984
- KM: *Kindheitsmuster*, 9th edition, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1983
- MN: *Moskauer Novelle*, Halle/Saale, 1961
- SoStck: *Sommerstück*, Frankfurt/Main, 1989
- Stf.: *Störfall. Nachrichten eines Tages*, 2nd edition, 1987
- Tabou: *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou. Texte 1990-1994*, Cologne, 1994
- Wb: *Was bleibt*, Frankfurt/Main, 1990

Für mich ist Emanzipation: Befreiung von bestehenden, sozial fixierten, oft verinnerlichten Werten und Vorstellungen, die man oder frau als falsch und gefährlich erkannt hat oder deren Widersprüchlichkeit ausgeklammert wird. Emanzipation ist nichts Abgeschlossenes. Sie ist eher Haltung als Ergebnis. Sie ist für den einzelnen, denn nur er oder sie kann sich emanzipieren, eine lebenslange Auseinandersetzung mit der Innenwelt und der von Menschen geschaffenen und gestalteten Umwelt, die sich heute durch heuchlerische Moral, tödliche Rigidität, falsche und verhängnisvolle Ehr- und Rechtsbegriffe auszeichnet. (Margarete Mitscherlich, *Über die Mühsal der Emanzipation*)

INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the SED regime in the autumn of 1989 most of the political, economic, legal, and scientific institutions of the former German Democratic Republic have successfully undergone a difficult transformation to Western-style democracy and the capitalist market economy. But in other areas the process of unification is still far from complete. As far as the reintegration of the Germans as a people who share a common culture and history is concerned, four and a half decades of distinctly separate experiences have left a difficult legacy, the precise nature of which still needs fully to be comprehended. The many processes of change in German society since the 'Wende' have affected above all the citizens of the former GDR whose biographies as well as their social, professional and personal identities have been deeply ruptured. One of the reasons why communication and understanding has been difficult is the different expectations with which people from East and West have approached each other. Many West Germans approached GDR citizens with a sense of superiority stemming from the perception of having lived on the morally and politically 'right' side of the common border. Consequently, they anticipated that the new citizens would exhibit characteristics such as humility and restraint. In contrast to this, the majority of East Germans entered unification with the pride, self-esteem and independence of people who had succeeded, by way of a peaceful revolution, in liberating themselves from a repressive and politically as well as economically untenable regime. What seems particularly deplorable about the difficult and painful experiences which the German people have had with unification ever since is the manner in which opportunities for important learning processes and necessary self-criticism have on both sides been lost, in a climate where both private and public discourse have become increasingly locked into polarized positions of self-justification and unproductive cycles of attack, defence and counter-attack.

In the area of art and literature the impassioned and seemingly endless debates, which began in the German cultural media after the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt*, and continued over the relationship of GDR authors, whether as collaborators or victims, with the *Stasi*, encapsulated precisely the kind of tensions and contradictions briefly outlined here. In view of the fact that these debates, today generally referred to as the *Literaturstreit*, have been covered and analysed extensively elsewhere¹, any direct discussion of individual aspects of the debates here would be superfluous. Nevertheless, it is important to draw attention again to some of the conclusions which we can draw from their timing as well as the manner and tone in which they were conducted.

First of all, the attacks against Christa Wolf began immediately after the publication of *Was bleibt* in July 1990 and continued until well into the autumn, thereby coinciding with important political stages between the decision in favour of unification and its implementation in September of that year. The attacks thus served purposes which were essentially political, and they sent out important signals to the population of the GDR and to their representatives with regard to the low esteem in which Western institutions held the legacy of the other Germany. The tenor of the debates had above all a psychologically unsettling and destabilizing effect which deprived GDR citizens of their dignity by refusing to recognize their separate and different history. It is hard to escape the conclusion that these actions of West German literary critics ruthlessly exploited the opportunity which was offered by Wolf's decision to publish *Was bleibt* at that time. It can be argued that insult was later added to injury by the terms of the unification treaty which explicitly forbade actions of the kind which had already been carried out to such damaging effect, "Die kulturelle Substanz in dem in Artikel 3 genannten Gebiet [d.h. in der ex-DDR, RR] darf keinen Schaden nehmen."²

¹The reception of *Was bleibt* has been fully documented in the volumes Karl Deiritz and Hannes Krauss (eds.), *Der deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit* (Hamburg, 1991) and Thomas Anz (ed.), *Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf* (Munich, 1991).

²*Einigungsvertrag*, article 35. See also *Der Einigungsvertrag. Deutschland ist Eins*, series 'Politik-Information', (Bonn, 1990), p 44, which stresses this point: "Der Einigungsvertrag unterstreicht nachdrücklich, daß die deutsche Einheit neben dem wirtschaftlichen, finanziellen und sozialen Bereich auch eine kulturelle Dimension hat. [...] Die kulturellen Werte in der bisherigen DDR dürfen keinen Schaden nehmen."

Secondly, despite the personal nature of the attacks, their target was by no means Christa Wolf alone, but the cultural values and artistic achievements of the GDR in general. As Eva Kaufmann concluded in her review of *Was bleibt*, the attacks were designed to undermine above all the confidence and strong sense of identity of a whole group of critical writers who had never shied away from exposing the inadequacies, contradictions and hypocrisies of their own system. But they had also fundamentally challenged many of the concepts and assumptions on which Western culture is based, a factor which seems to have made the authors and their work appear potentially dangerous and subversive to the Western reader:

Mit ihr [Christa Wolf, RR] soll DDR-Kunst im Ganzen getroffen werden, insbesondere jene Künstlerinnen und Künstler, die eine im weitesten Sinne alternative Denkkultur entwickelt hatten, eine Kultur, die sich gegen jede Form von Herrschaftsdenken und -praxis richtet.³

But it is a third aspect of the *Literaturstreit* which is particularly relevant for scholars of GDR literature, namely the extent to which the debates lacked both an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of Wolf's work and any serious attempt to comprehend the specific process by which above all authors of Wolf's generation in the GDR have developed their understanding of their role and of the function of writing in modern society. This specific sense of identity may also go some way towards explaining the timing of the publication of *Was bleibt* which may, with the benefit of hindsight, be described at best as unfortunate and at worst as naive. However, within the framework of Wolf's position in GDR culture and society and within the general context of her work, it represented a perfectly consistent and logical step in her development. Initially, therefore, the vehement and venomous nature of the attacks on her came not only as an utter shock, but constituted also a severe threat to her entire sense of self as both author and private person, an experience she later described in terms of a "Totaldemontage des

³Eva Kaufmann, 'Gegen den "gläsernen Blick"', in *Wochenpost*, (no. 32, 1990).

Selbstbewußtseins"⁴. However, Christa Wolf belongs to a generation of East German writers whose inner and outer biography has repeatedly been ruptured by profound historical and socio-political change. Having witnessed the complete collapse of the society which had shaped their early childhood experiences at the crucial stage of the transition from youth into adulthood, their personal and public sense of identity continued to be threatened by the vagaries and upheavals in the socio-political and cultural history of the GDR. As a consequence, writers such as Günter de Bruyn, Stephan Hermlin, Volker Braun, Franz Fühmann, Irmtraud Morgner, Helga Königsdorf and Christa Wolf experienced more frequently and intensely than any other generation the need for defining and redefining themselves within a political climate that endangered their personal integrity as well as their artistic achievements. In her writing, Christa Wolf has explored with increasing intensity the complexity of levels on which such crises in outer reality interact with the inner, emotional and psychological circumstances of the individual, insisting that the "Spuren, die die Ereignisse in unserem Innern hinterlassen" (Chr.T., 170) deserve just as much attention and critical reflection as those phenomena more readily accepted as significant social facts within the institutionalized discourses of modern society. Seeking greater self-knowledge through the honest and open reflection of the totality of human experience on the basis of her own biography, Wolf's endeavours in her literary work have aimed at breaking down the many manifestations of alienation and self-alienation which inhibit individuals and collectives from gaining the kind of critical self-awareness which is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of a secure sense of identity. As a result, Christa Wolf may be said to have been better equipped than many of her fellow citizens for meeting the challenge of redefining oneself in a new and hostile set of circumstances. Instead of allowing herself to become embroiled in an unproductive cycle of accusation, self-defence and counter-accusation, Wolf's efforts since the 'Wende' have largely focused on re-asserting an East German identity. Together with fellow writers (e.g. Christoph Hein, Günter de Bruyn, Volker

⁴Christa Wolf in an interview which appeared under the title 'Ich bin eine Figur, auf die man vieles projizieren kann', in *Freitag*, 18.3.94, pp 9-10, p 9.

Braun) she has repeatedly drawn attention to the fundamental differences between East and West Germans as a result of their separate experiences.⁵ In a letter to Jürgen Habermas of 7 December 1991, for instance, which was published in her volume of essays and speeches, *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (1994), she wrote: "So viel ist mir sicher: Wir haben unterschiedliche Geschichten, darauf sollten wir bestehen, und wir sollten anfangen, uns diese Geschichten zu erzählen." (Tabou, 154). Two years later, in a conversation with Günter Gaus, she pointed out that the necessary learning processes had still not taken place, owing to the fact that "die Kenntnis des Lebens in der DDR [im Westen, RR] nicht vorhanden ist. [...] Wir sind uns gegenseitig ganz fremd."⁶ In contrast to the self-satisfaction and superficiality which had characterized much of the *Literaturstreit*, Wolf's understanding of asserting identity is clearly based on a more productive approach which attaches equal importance to self-criticism:

Im Moment kommt mir nichts so wichtig vor, wie das Selbstbewußtsein zu stärken. Natürlich nicht im Sinne von Selbstüberhebung, sondern in der wörtlichen Bedeutung als "Bewußtsein von sich selbst". [...] Man muß auf sich selbst bestehen im Sinne kritischer Selbstbefragung. Anders geht es nicht.⁷

A key objective of this thesis is to define a framework of analysis which will permit a re-investigation of the implications of Wolf's specifically East German identity for her writing and simultaneously do justice to the scope and complexity of her work, within today's context of politically united, yet culturally, socially and economically still divided Germany. Germany's unification process has seriously called into question the validity of some of the more conventional approaches to GDR literature which flourished in East and West before the 'Wende'. While the teleological perspective fostered in the GDR sought to demonstrate an author's evolution within the progression of GDR

⁵See also Dennis Tate, 'Trapped in the past? The identity problems of East German writers since the Wende', in *German Monitor*, (no. 34, 1995), pp 1-16.

⁶'Auf mir bestehen. Christa Wolf im Gespräch mit Günter Gaus', (25 February 1993), in *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf. Zerrspiegel und Dialog. Eine Dokumentation*, edited by Hermann Vinke, (Hamburg, 1993), pp 242-263, p 261.

⁷ Christa Wolf, 'Ich bin eine Figur', p.10.

literature from 'Aufbau' to 'Reife'⁸, West German critics focused on the extent to which a particular work deviated from the once-canonized Socialist Realism or elaborated the value of its 'Ersatzöffentlichkeitsfunktion', thereby making the information a text provides about each phase in the socio-political history of the GDR the yardstick for its inclusion in an alternative literary canon.⁹

The critical reception of Christa Wolf's work in the two German states has not diverged in any significant way from this convention, although her work has been more widely discussed than that of any other East German writer. While critics have agreed that Wolf is a significant writer, the reception of any particular work has generally failed to go beyond the scope of competing ideological systems, with most German critics praising or censoring her works according to their opinion of the GDR and their perception of Christa Wolf's relationship to the socialist state.¹⁰ Contextualizing her work too narrowly within the framework of its evolution within the cultural politics of the GDR, most German criticism tended to obscure the specific value and significance of Wolf's contributions to modern European literature and even world literature.

Yet, to a far greater extent than has been the case with the reception of other East German writers, such trends have also been on the decline since the later 1980s where Wolf's works are concerned, owing to the growing interest which these have sparked within a rapidly expanding body of scholarship. Colin Smith was among the first scholars in Anglo-American criticism to abandon the need for a detailed contextualization of Christa Wolf's works after *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, arguing that such specifics are of less importance once Wolf widens her interests and begins to see her role as one of

⁸See, for instance, *Geschichte der Literatur der DDR*, ed. by H. Haase et al, (Berlin/DDR, 1976).

⁹The reception of Stefan Heym's *5 Tage im Juni* (1974) and of his novel *Collin* (1979) furnish examples of this tendency in West German criticism. The point that Germany's unification process calls for a re-evaluation of conventional approaches to GDR literature in both East and West was also made by Wolfgang Emmerich in 'Für eine andere Wahrnehmung der DDR-Literatur: Neue Kontexte, neue Paradigmen, ein neuer Kanon', in *German Monitor* (no. 29, 1992), pp 7-22.

¹⁰Katharina von Ankum's recent, most detailed analysis of the reception of Wolf's work in East and West up to the early 1970s has convincingly demonstrated the extent to which competing ideological systems encroached upon an appreciation of the aesthetic as well as poetological significance of Christa Wolf's work. See Katharina von Ankum, *Die Rezeption von Christa Wolf in Ost und West. Von "Moskauer Novelle" bis "Selbstversuch"*, (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1992).

responding to major international concerns. Instead, he offers a reading of Christa Wolf's texts which focuses more on the relevance of the general than of the specific topicality of any particular text, in order to stress the more enduring aspects of Wolf's aesthetic and moral purpose. Smith's study makes an important contribution to Wolf criticism also in terms of his exploration of the uses to which Wolf puts literary tradition, pointing to the conscious reception of other writers in her work in order to offer alternative lines of tradition to those considered appropriate for socialist society by the cultural functionaries of the SED.¹¹ Marlene Schiwy's analysis of the significance of 'Sprachlosigkeit' in Wolf's fiction, on the other hand, is representative of the recognition in Wolf scholarship that insufficient attention had hitherto been paid to the role and aesthetic significance of specific linguistic and stylistic patterns and strategies in Wolf's narrative.¹² There have also been attempts to treat Wolf in the context of the West German literary movement of 'New Subjectivity' on the basis of the emphasis in her works on the psychological depth of her characters and the significance which Wolf attributes to the subjective, personal experience of the individual. These scholars have demonstrated in particular the value of a thematic approach to an author of such complexity as Christa Wolf. Colin Smith, above all, strikes a balance in that he retains some emphasis on the specific GDR context in which Wolf's work evolved, while focusing chiefly on the literary quality of her work as well as on her reception of other writers. These approaches have, however, inevitably been unable to appreciate the full significance for Wolf's writing, in particular for the development of her poetological ideas, of the historical and cultural context of the GDR which has so strongly influenced her work. In addition, these scholars have tended to pay insufficient attention to the extent to which Wolf speaks not only for herself, but quite consciously also for her generation, ensuring at once specificity and typicality.¹³

¹¹ Colin E. Smith, *Tradition Art and Society. Christa Wolf's Prose*, (Essen, 1987).

¹² Marlene Schiwy, *Language and Silence: 'Sprachlosigkeit' in the work of Christa Wolf*, unpublished PhD thesis, University College, University of London, (London, 1988).

¹³ See also Anna K. Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision. From Marxism to Feminism*, (Cambridge, 1988), p 3.

The most drastic move away from a contextualization of Wolf's fiction within the framework of the GDR has come from (initially above all American) feminist criticism which, as Anna Kuhn has pointed out, has approached Wolf's writing in three new ways. Firstly, it has drawn attention to Wolf's critical reflection of the problems facing the woman writer in a patriarchal world. Secondly, it has made us aware of the relationship between Wolf's expression of female subjectivity and the narrative methods she has evolved. Thirdly, feminist criticism has developed a framework of analysis which has highlighted the possibilities for investigating Wolf's writing from more formalistic, linguistically oriented angles.¹⁴ These approaches in feminist criticism have proved extremely fruitful and they have provoked an ever more prolific response from female scholars, but, as Kuhn has suggested, their exclusive emphasis on the significance of women's subjective experience and consequent neglect of the socio-historical and cultural context in which Wolf's writing has evolved is also reductionist. Despite the fact that the feminist framework of analysis concurs with a broader trend in today's criticism to devalue authorial intention¹⁵, it overlooks, in the case of Christa Wolf, the significance of the more profoundly critical and challenging nature of Wolf's inquiries into the complexities of intersubjective relationships and their relevance to the wider issue of power structures in modern society. A fruitful alternative to this line of inquiry has been suggested by Kuhn, who has given particular emphasis to the influence which Wolf's

¹⁴Kuhn, (1988), p 3.

¹⁵Christa Wolf has frequently distanced herself from dominant strands in Western feminist thought, highlighting that her interest in the perspective of women's experience in modern society is not to be misunderstood as a desire to apportion blame or instil guilt feelings at the expense of seeking greater understanding of the more fundamental challenges inherent in intersubjective relationships. Although her angle of vision has become more critical by the 1980s when she writes *Kassandra*, she clearly attributes her interest in the perspective of women by the late 1970s to the specific differences between men and women to which their socialisation and historical position in society and culture has given rise. In an interview in Edinburgh in 1979 she stated: "I have never thought of myself as a woman's writer; and I have never attempted and still never attempt to treat women's problems in isolation [...] It is not that I am less interested in men's problems. But at the moment women as a group really seem to be asking the more productive questions in our society. Maybe this is because, for historical reasons, they have not, like men, been forced for centuries into a certain pattern of role-playing by the pressures of a competitive society, and can therefore think more freely and ask more original questions. That is why I find it more productive to write about women, but I am not dogmatic about it and do not approve at all of women's literature in the narrow sense of the word." Karin Mc Pherson (ed.), 'Christa Wolf in Edinburgh. An Interview', *GDR Monitor*, (no.1, 1979), pp 1-12, pp11-12.

acquaintance with Marxism-Leninism during her formative years continued to exert on her philosophical outlook later. In doing so, she has been able to outline continuities and tensions in Wolf's political and poetological outlook alongside an evaluation of the relevance which gender issues come to assume in Christa Wolf's writing.

Some West German criticism also became more concerned by the mid-1980s to define the significance of Christa Wolf's writing outside the ongoing struggle between East and West for political and cultural supremacy. The thematic, philosophical and aesthetic complexity of Christa Wolf's writing has provoked a wide range of critical approaches to her work, many of which have endeavoured to uncover possible literary influences or theoretical comparisons. As Colin Smith has pointed out, these developments have not been entirely unproblematic:

The openness of Wolf's works to such a wide range of intellectual readings entails [...] at least two serious dangers. Firstly, one area of comment can easily be stressed at the expense of others. In the West, curiosity as to the political reference has often constituted a reduction of the literary substance to banal talk of 'Leiden an der DDR'; equally, potential allusions to the author's situation can lead to interpretations based on crude autobiographical symbolism. Secondly, it could prove possible to see Wolf's generalizations, stripped of their original context, as nothing more than derivative cliché.¹⁶

Smith expresses reservations about the tendency in West German criticism of the mid-1980s to establish a relationship between Wolf's writing and a variety of theoretical and philosophical frameworks encompassing theories of Adorno, Horkheimer, Jacques Lacan and Walter Benjamin¹⁷ - a trend which was consolidated by the publication of Wolfram Mauser's anthology *Erinnerte Zukunft* in 1985 which brought together some of the most

¹⁶Smith, pp 25-26.

¹⁷As Colin Smith has pointed out, numerous articles by West German critics refer to the relevance of Benjamin's 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' for Wolf's understanding of history at least since *Kindheitsmuster*. See in particular Anthony Stephens/Judith Wilson, 'Entwurf einer Poetik der Klage', in *Text und Kritik*, volume 46, third, revised edition, (Munich, 1985), pp 26-37. See also Ortrud Gutjahr, "'Erinnerte Zukunft". Gedächtniskonstruktion und Subjektconstitution im Werk Christa Wolfs', in Wolfram Mauser (ed.), *Erinnerte Zukunft. 11 Studien zum Werk Christa Wolfs*, (Würzburg, 1985), pp 53-80.

important critical approaches within this debate.¹⁸ Although I share some of Smith's reservations, I consider that Bernhard Greiner's essay in this volume deserves special attention in that he goes furthest in rejecting the traditional categories of political interpretation altogether. Greiner sees links in Wolf's texts to a tradition which encompasses the early Romantics, the early Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Walter Benjamin, suggesting that her texts resemble a process of psychoanalysis.¹⁹ The particular value of Greiner's approach is the emphasis he gives to Wolf's determination to go against the grain of official GDR views on heritage and tradition and its importance in the context of the endeavours of a whole group of GDR authors to establish alternative lines of tradition. While some of Greiner's views remain controversial, such as his claim that categories like alienation do not play a role in Wolf's writing, he has opened up a dimension to the interpretation of Wolf's texts which plays a significant role also for our reading of her later works. In *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* the author herself stresses the importance which the theoretical framework of human psychology came to play as a point of orientation in her writing: "Früh habe ich mich vor allem mit Psychologie beschäftigt, Freud, Mitscherlich, Reich waren wichtige Orientierungspunkte."²⁰ What Greiner failed to appreciate in the 1980s, however, is the extent to which Christa Wolf also seeks to distance her literature from the framework of the dominant and institutionally defined theoretical discourses of this discipline. Prose writing, Wolf explained in the clearest of her earlier statements on aesthetics, 'Lesen und Schreiben':

[...] hat nur dann Aussicht, am Leben zu bleiben, wenn sie etwas kann, was alle jene Mächte nicht können, die ihr zu Leibe rücken. Ganz und gar gerettet wäre sie, wenn wir dahinterkämen, daß es für uns wichtig, vielleicht lebenswichtig ist, dahin zu gelangen, wohin sie uns führt.

¹⁸Wolfram Mauser, *Erinnerte Zukunft*.

¹⁹Bernhard Greiner, "'Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod': Kontinuität und Wandel des Erzählens im Schaffen von Christa Wolf", in Mauser, pp. 107-140. See also Bernhard Greiner, "'Sentimentaler Stoff und fantastische Form': Zur Erneuerung frühromantischer Tradition im Roman der DDR", in Gerd Labrousse and Josef Hoogeveen (eds.), *DDR-Roman und Literaturgesellschaft*, (Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik 11/12, Amsterdam, 1981), pp 249-329 and Bernhard Greiner, "Die Schwierigkeit 'ich' zu sagen: Christa Wolfs psychologische Orientierung des Erzählens", in *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, (55/2, 1981), pp 323-342.

²⁰Christa Wolf an Jürgen Habermas', in *Tabou*, p 153.

Die Frage ist, ob wir ihr Mut machen, zu wollen, was sie kann. (DdA II, 1968, 16)

Writing, envisaged by Wolf as a dialectical process of self-exploration and self-assertion, is, on the basis that it is rooted in the authentic individual experience of the reading and writing subject, at once a private and public task. In this way, it can serve the function of overcoming the inevitable processes of alienation and self-alienation which result for the individual human being from the increasingly specialized, theoretical and technical nature of other professional discourses in modern societies. Wolf's interest in exploring the possibilities of writing as a tool for gaining greater insights into the complex mechanisms of the human psyche with a view to probing the blind spots of modern civilisation, which she recognizes also as her own, is particularly discernible in *Kassandra* (as well as in the highly autobiographical works which followed, *Störfall*, *Sommerstück* and *Was bleibt*).

There are indications that some East German critics were, by the late 1980s, also more open to treating Wolf's work within the wider European and international context, seeking possibilities for greater collaboration between scholars in East and West and a synthesis of their critical efforts. Therese Hörnigk's monograph on Christa Wolf is invaluable to the Western reader in terms of the deeper insights it allows into the specifically GDR-related background against which the author's major works were conceived. As an East German scholar who is also a close personal friend of Wolf, she has been able to offer an unusually comprehensive contextualization which is based on insights and information otherwise not readily available in the West.²¹ Angela Drescher's anthology of essays, on the other hand, has drawn attention to points of consensus as well as difference in perspective in East European and Western criticism through the juxtaposition of important critical essays from either side of the ideological divide.²² The particular value of these works to the Western critic is that they draw attention precisely to those aspects of Wolf's identity which are rooted in her experiences as an East German citizen and author. Consequently, they can offer further insights which we can bring to bear in our reading and

²¹Therese Hörnigk, *Christa Wolf*, (Göttingen, 1989).

²²Angela Drescher (ed.), *Christa Wolf. Ein Arbeitsbuch*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1989).

re-reading of Christa Wolf's texts today. Critics who have oversimplified or reduced this dimension to the mere chronological perspective of important stages in the socio- or cultural-political history of the GDR have so far failed to appreciate the wider and far more complex dimensions of this East German identity.

Writing from the perspective of a critical woman writer of Wolf's generation in the GDR implies writing from a position between conventionally recognized and institutionally reinforced categorizations of a historical, geographical, political, social and cultural nature which resulted from the division of Germany. It involves having shared the experiences of a generation that was encouraged to leave behind the memory of the Third Reich in order to focus fully on the promises of a perfect future in a socialist utopia, with no public acknowledgement of the often more than problematic present of the Stalin era. It means accepting responsibility as a young adult who has not yet fully developed a sense of self, but who is asked, both as private person and as a socialist author, to postpone any desire to experiment with life or literature in order to fulfil the, largely alienating, expectations of others. It implies a familiarity as a literary scholar and author with both East European and West European culture and literary traditions, despite the problems caused by the official disregard for important strands in German cultural history and by the severely restricted access to works written in the GDR which fall outside the official literary canon. It means writing from a position which is simultaneously part of the cultural, social and political system of the GDR, yet in opposition to it. It means writing from a geographical location which is immediately adjacent to post-war Western Europe, which is, however, denied official recognition by the Western powers as a society with an independent political and cultural identity. It involves writing in a society which has promised its writers a say and a share in the decisions concerning its future, only to present them with the false alternatives of either complying with the demands of an increasingly dogmatic and ruthless political regime to legitimize its existence, or of falling silent and thereby betraying not only themselves and their professional integrity, but also their readers and fellow citizens. It means writing as a woman in a society which continued to deny women access to influential social positions, despite its promise that it would put an end to the silencing of

women's voices which had been the hallmark of all previous patriarchal societies. It involves remaining morally committed to the individual human being and the preservation of human dignity and life in a world whose political, economic and scientific institutions are increasingly preoccupied with the development and perfection of the means of their violation and destruction. In short, it has involved, for Christa Wolf, the endeavour and total commitment to occupy through writing a position which transcends polarized and antithetical positions, one which, within the public discourses of post-war civilization, whether socialist or capitalist, has remained unacknowledged, which officially does not exist: 'Kein Ort. Nirgends'.

Given the wide-ranging critical acclaim of Christa Wolf's prose within an international body of scholarship that has increasingly distanced itself from the conventions of GDR literary criticism²³, there can be little doubt about the extent to which the author managed to emancipate herself aesthetically from the official discourse of the GDR state. Wolfgang Emmerich has made this aesthetic emancipation the basic criterion for the elevation of works of GDR literature into the new canon of modern European literature, stressing that: "es ist ja vor allem die schrittweise ästhetische Emanzipation der (besseren) DDR-Literatur, die ihre Qualität, ihre Würde, ihren Schutz vor Vereinnahmung und Instrumentalisierung ausmacht."²⁴ Concerned to identify fresh criteria which will provide an enduring sense of orientation and purpose in the face of the re-emergence of the somewhat crude and personalized framework of evaluation suggested by the *Literaturstreit*, Emmerich defines these criteria as those of European modernism, understood in the broad terms of its focus on the crisis of values which has remained unresolved since the late nineteenth century. While Wolf's fiction, beginning with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* at the latest, makes this transition unscathed, Emmerich seems to have reservations about the extent to which Wolf managed to

²³Marilyn Sibley Fries published a collection of critical essays just before unification which re-emphasized the international critical acclaim Wolf's writing has enjoyed. See Marilyn Sibley Fries (ed.), *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical essays*, (Detroit, Michigan, 1989).

²⁴Emmerich, 'Für eine andere Wahrnehmung', p 16. See also Emmerich's article 'Gleichzeitigkeit: Vormoderne, Moderne und Postmoderne in der Literatur der DDR', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Bestandsaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur*, (Munich, 1988), pp 193-211.

emancipate herself, in terms of her poetological concept and her understanding of her role and function as an author, when he suggests that her purpose as a writer in the GDR remained essentially a didactic one:

Die interessante DDR-Literatur verbleibt gerade nicht 'eine Literatur des geschlossenen Regelkreises, geschrieben von Bürgern der DDR für Bürger der DDR' [...]. Vielleicht bleibt sie es noch allzu sehr, weil auch Autoren wie Müller, Wolf oder Braun illusionär an ihre sozialpädagogische Aufgabe auf dem Terrain der DDR glaubten.²⁵

Emmerich's view illustrates how the development of Christa Wolf's concept of herself as a writer and the poetological and aesthetic developments which are so intricately bound up with this specific self-understanding are aspects about which fundamental misconceptions have continued to flourish in Wolf scholarship. The more comprehensive works of criticism relating to Christa Wolf's work which have been published in the post-1989 period have continued to emphasize the openness of Wolf's works to a wide range of readings.²⁶ At the same time, they point to the persistence of a basic tension within the body of Wolf scholarship between the perceived need to redefine her writing within the specific context of the literary history and socio-political background of the GDR on the one hand, and endeavours to re-read her texts outside this framework on the other. While some critics have specifically explored the development of Wolf's poetological conceptualization or the development of her concept of 'subjective authenticity',²⁷ others have focused on the re-reading of a particular text against the backcloth of the cultural-political climate in the GDR at the time of its creation.²⁸ Without doubt, both approaches are fruitful and necessary steps in our

²⁵Emmerich, 'Für eine andere Wahrnehmung', p 16.

²⁶See in particular Ian Wallace (ed.), 'Christa Wolf in Perspective', *German Monitor*, (no. 30, 1994). See also Michel Vanhelleputte (ed.), *Christa Wolf in feministischer Sicht*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1992).

²⁷See Barbara Dröscher, *Subjektive Authentizität. Zur Poetik Christa Wolfs zwischen 1964 und 1975*, (Würzburg, 1993). See also Georgina Paul, "Subjective Authenticity" - *Contemporaneity and Commitment in the Works of Christa Wolf*, unpublished PhD thesis, St. Hilda's College, Oxford, (Oxford, 1990).

²⁸Marion Stock, *Der traumatisierte Schriftsteller. Eine Untersuchung zur Darstellung des Schriftstellers im Normkonflikt anhand der Figuren Karoline von Günderrode und Heinrich von Kleist in Christa*

endeavours to redefine individual texts - and GDR culture in general - within the wider context of European literature. However, as is especially the case with Peter Teupe's re-reading of Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends* as a text which, though set in the nineteenth century, is deeply critical of the cultural policies of the mid-1970s, there is a continued tendency to offer a context which amounts to little more than a chronological list of party-political decisions and proclamations. Continuing to work on the assumption that writers in the GDR developed literary strategies and theories in direct response to or as a reaction to cultural policies, such an approach fails to provide an analysis of the complex interrelationship between art and life, or between the artist and society, which Wolf's writing has persistently reflected.

In this thesis I propose to examine the interrelationship between Christa Wolf's rootedness in GDR culture and society and her independently evolving understanding of the role and responsibility of the writer in modern society. My approach is based on the view that, both before and after the 'Wende', studies of Wolf's work have generally given insufficient consideration to the specific historical and political context in which Wolf's writing has evolved. Particularly in view of the malicious attacks on Wolf in the *Literaturstreit*, I propose to re-examine this context now that the limitations of the more conventional approaches to GDR literature have been recognized. I consider that East German critics such as Therese Hörnigk have provided valuable insights into the specifically GDR-related background of Wolf's writing, above all since they have illuminated this dimension without reducing the international significance of Wolf's achievement. In her sixtieth birthday tribute to Christa Wolf, Karin Hirdina succinctly summed up how closely Wolf's life and work have been intertwined with the history of her country and with the distinctiveness of its cultural accomplishments:

Beim Lesen des Manuskripts, das Therese Hörnigk über Christa Wolf geschrieben hat [...], ist mir bewußt geworden, wie sehr Christa Wolf in ihrem Werk mit der Geschichte der DDR verknüpft ist. Zu Recht gilt sie in der

Wolfs Erzählung 'Kein Ort. Nirgends', (Munich, 1991). See also Peter Teupe, *Christa Wolfs 'Kein Ort. Nirgends' als Paradigma der DDR-Literatur der siebziger Jahre*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1991).

Welt als Repräsentantin der DDR-Literatur. Liest man ihre Texte chronologisch, kann man die Geschichte der Ideologie, der kunstpolitischen Orientierungen, des Selbstverständnisses unseres Landes rekonstruieren. Ihre Mahnungen und Polemiken, die Suche nach Übereinstimmung und die rigorose Selbstbehauptung, Schmerzen und Reflexionen - sie sind zeitgeschichtlich datierbar.²⁹

Christa Wolf herself also stressed the importance of this historical and cultural context for a complete appreciation of specific developments in her work in a letter to me in the late 1980s. With regard to the emphasis placed by her and her colleagues on the reception of Romantic literature from the mid-1970s onwards, for instance, she underlined that developments like these need to be examined on the basis of "eine[r] genaue[n] Kenntnis der Verhältnisse in der DDR - sonst kann man da falsche Schlußfolgerungen ziehen."³⁰

One of the noteworthy earlier exceptions to the tendency in Wolf scholarship to take insufficient account of this historical context is Manfred Jäger's comprehensive essay of 1973 'Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit'.³¹ Starting with Wolf's involvement in GDR culture as a literary critic during the 1950s, Jäger's study provides valuable insights into the author's development up to and including the creation of her first major narrative, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Jäger takes the view that Wolf's development as a writer is representative of dominant trends in the literary life of the GDR as a whole which he regards in terms of a continuous process of emancipation from official cultural policy.³² Georgina Paul has taken a similar approach in her examination of Christa Wolf's principle of 'subjective authenticity'. Her PhD thesis investigates in detail the narrative methods which Wolf developed between the 1960s and the 1980s, highlighting in

²⁹A selection of birthday tributes to Christa Wolf was published under the title 'Christa Wolf zum 60. Geburtstag' in *Weimarer Beiträge* (3/1989), pp 472-484. Hirdina's contribution is on pp 472-474, the passage I have quoted is on p 472.

³⁰Quoted from Christa Wolf's letter to the author of this thesis, dated 15 August 1988.

³¹Manfred Jäger, 'Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit. Fragen, Antworten und neue Fragen in den Erzählungen, Aufsätzen und Reden Christa Wolfs', in his *Sozialliteraten. Funktion und Selbstverständnis der Schriftsteller in der DDR*, (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp 11-101.

³²M. Jäger, (1973), p 13.

particular the author's literary response to specific events in GDR culture and politics during this period. Anna Kuhn, furthermore, has provided an important study of Wolf's major works (up to and including *Störfall*) in which she has taken pains to illuminate and give appropriate weight to each facet of Wolf's identity as an 'East German woman writer'.³³

In this thesis I propose to adopt a similar approach to Jäger, Paul and Kuhn, although for the purposes of my argument a particularly broad base will be established. As the title of my study suggests, I wish to argue that Christa Wolf's writing both reflects and promotes the emancipation of the individual through the process of gaining self-knowledge. In contradistinction to the officially sanctioned representations of GDR society which fostered the production of schematic and affirmative literary works, Christa Wolf has persistently explored writing as an instrument of self-realization as well as of constructive social criticism. The narrative methods she has developed have emerged directly from the author's personal commitment and emotional investment into expressing herself authentically. In striving for the achievement of authenticity and personal emancipation, however, Wolf has never lost sight of her social responsibility as a writer. This thesis aims to examine the interplay between Wolf's emancipatory endeavours on the one hand and her commitment to GDR culture and society on the other. This will illuminate the changes which her understanding of her responsibility as a writer has undergone over time. My study will be subdivided into three main parts, each of which adopts a different critical strategy as a means of highlighting the complexity of this task.

Some critics have claimed that Christa Wolf's literature reflects an over-optimistic and utopian conceptualization of the possibilities of literature in society, arising from the over-inflated sense of self which GDR writers developed on the basis of the central role which the GDR state accorded to literature.³⁴ Alternatively, the exploratory, inquisitive and experimental nature of her work has been attributed to an essentially problematic and

³³Kuhn, (1988).

³⁴Dröscher, p 18 ff.

insecure sense of identity, resulting from the restrictive practices and frequent encroachments on artistic production by the cultural policies of the SED regime.³⁵ In this thesis I wish to argue that the dynamics created through the complex interplay of these conflicting aspects of Wolf's personality have played a considerable role in creating the distinctive quality of her writing. It is evident, furthermore, that Wolf speaks not only for herself, but also for her generation of GDR intellectuals born around 1930, whose specific development she has persistently reflected. In the cultural domain of the GDR, it was this generation of writers which initially defined its task in relation to the ideals and visions of their elders whose faithful students they became, only to discover later that they needed to assert themselves against the more questionable aspects of their elders' relationship with SED authority. Wolf and her contemporaries experienced in intensified form, compared to their West German contemporaries, the difficulties of liberating themselves from authoritarian relationships and of letting go of commitments which they no longer found productive. More than any GDR writer of her generation, I wish to argue, Christa Wolf has been willing to criticize herself for the length of time she has taken to emancipate herself on the basis of her particular biographical circumstances. Wolf's writing reflects upon the painful processes of disillusionment suffered by her generation, but nevertheless manages to convey a sense of optimism and trust in the future. I propose in the first part of this thesis to examine the specific self-understanding which Wolf developed in the context of the key experiences of her generation of writers in the GDR, since it is only against this background that we can gain a complete understanding of the particular tensions and contradictions against which she had to emancipate herself.

In his recent autobiography, *Vierzig Jahre*, Günter de Bruyn has emphasized that Wolf's role in GDR culture extended far beyond her public position as one of the country's most respected authors. Together with her husband Gerhard, de Bruyn tells us, Christa Wolf was a focal figure in the literary community of the GDR, not only on

³⁵Myra Love, *Christa Wolf. Literature and the Conscience of History*, (New York, 1991), chapter one.

account of her sincere commitment to the development of a credible socialist culture, but also because of the strong personal support and encouragement she was able to offer numerous colleagues and friends above all during the bleaker periods of the GDR's history.³⁶ De Bruyn's account highlights the extent to which Christa Wolf's entire life has revolved around literary and cultural matters and the concerns and experiences of creative individuals. Her writing, of course, closely reflects this, since Wolf has created a complex network in which the strands which link her life and her work and thus also her personal experiences and her public responsibilities are inextricably intertwined. Through the reception of the work of other writers, however, Wolf has also linked her life to those of other creative individuals from both past and present. In this process, she has endeavoured to uncover the particular subjectivity of other writers, exploring the interconnections between their life and their work and locating them within their concrete historical and geographical context. Wolf has summed up her understanding of the complex interrelationship between an author's life and work in her essay on Anna Seghers, 'Glauben an Irdisches', where she describes it as a network:

'Wo fängt das beschriebene Leben an, wo hört das gelebte Leben auf?' Es geht wohl ineinander über, wenn man sechzig Jahre schreibend gelebt hat. Jeder Faden, den sie behutsam aus dem Gewebe zieht, nimmt andere Fäden mit - geschriebenes Leben, gelebtes Leben? -: Wirklichkeit.
(DdA I, 1968, 314)

In view of the complexity of the network which emerges when we begin to examine Wolf's life in the same way, no single analytical approach can do justice to the entire structure. In this thesis, therefore, I adopt a variety of critical strategies, each of which will throw light on some aspects of Wolf's writing; taken together, these different approaches illuminate its distinctive quality when viewed as a whole. Inevitably, my method involves a modest degree of overlap in the treatment of the same works in different contexts. This is counterbalanced, however, by the opportunity my approach

³⁶Günter de Bruyn, *Vierzig Jahre: Ein Lebensbericht*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1996); see esp. pp 144-146.

provides to combine a broad historical approach with a close analysis of some key aspects of Wolf's writing and of the experiences which have informed it.

The first part of this thesis will explore critically the development of Christa Wolf's self-understanding as a writer within the context of the experiences of her generation in the GDR. It will focus on the development of Wolf's understanding of the role and function of literature in society, with a particular emphasis on her development of the concept of responsibility from the early 1950s onwards. The most important stage in this process began in the late 1960s, when she first put forward her own prose theory, after she had established a secure sense of identity and purpose as a writer. My analysis critically reflects the fundamental shifts in perspective of her understanding of her role and function as a writer, while allowing us to glean vital information on the manner in which Wolf explored writing as a process of self-discovery and self-questioning, even during periods of crisis when she was tempted to fall silent. In addition, it will position Wolf's literary work, including her essays, within the wider historical dimensions of her poetological and aesthetic development, showing the way in which she liberated herself gradually from commitments which were no longer productive.

A specific feature of this part of the thesis is the weight I give to Wolf's account of her own history, drawing particularly on her essays and on the conversations and correspondence now available to us. In view of her commitment to authenticity, this material forms an appropriate basis for an examination of Wolf's literary responses to the circumstances of her life. I wish to argue that, because Wolf herself has given such emphasis to doing justice to the particular personality of other writers, supplementing her reading of their creative writing with an examination of authentic material such as diary entries or recorded conversations, we should equally expect her own non-literary statements to shed considerable light on her creative writing.

The processes and interconnections which I illuminate in the first part of the thesis are so significant to our understanding of Wolf's writing that they need to be revealed in detail in order to provide the basis for the later thematic chapters. I have sought in the second part of the thesis to exemplify some of the distinctive features of the complex

network of Wolf's work which have not previously been adequately explored in other studies of her work. The first of the three chapters examines Wolf's extended engagement with the work of Bertolt Brecht, which takes her back to her Marxist and communist roots and helps her to understand them more critically. Even though she had rejected Brecht's aesthetics and theoretical ideas by the 1980s, they remained an important point of reference for her right up to the 'Wende', as is indicated by her continued engagement with his work on an intertextual level. The second of these chapters deals with the Faust theme, which can also be traced through her work as a whole and can be linked in a wider sense to her gradual self-distancing from the cultural ideals of Weimar classicism which formed the original basis of GDR cultural policy. The key moment in this process is Wolf's replacement of Goethe's Faust as a model of human experience by Bettine von Arnim in the late 1970s. A third feature of the network is illuminated by an examination of images of men and women in Wolf's work, which shows the development of her feminist consciousness through the 1970s and 1980s. Here the original adherence to a more stereotypical view of male-female interaction in society gradually gives way to a highly differentiated understanding of gender relationships, as exemplified by her study in *Sommerstück* of intersubjectivity in the private sphere. My exploration of these three strands allows me to develop themes I have examined in more general terms in the first part of the thesis without in any way exhausting the potential of my treatment of her work as a network.

The final part of the thesis exemplifies a third approach, focusing on a single text. It consists of a detailed textual analysis of *Kassandra*, the text which marks the culmination of the author's journey towards self-realization, from a perspective of 'reading' and 'writing'. The *Kassandra* project seen as a whole (including the Frankfurt lectures) demonstrates Wolf's achievement of personal and aesthetic emancipation within the context of the GDR, while illuminating the interrelationship between commitment and responsibility in her work. In contrast to the conventional line of interpretation of *Kassandra* as a heroine, my reading will show that this mythologically based figure is one with whom contemporary women can identify profoundly, but in a differentiated way.

My analysis also shows that the allegation that Wolf has fallen into the trap of reproducing patriarchal patterns of thought in *Kassandra* is unjustified. What she does show is that the 'house of the father' has become unsafe and that the journey towards discovering a 'house of the mother', although an essential task for contemporary women writers, has only just begun.

1. CHRISTA WOLF'S LIFE AND WORK AS A NETWORK

1.1 Identity and responsibility

One particularly noticeable aspect of the debate triggered by the publication of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* (1990) was an acute absence of sensitivity for or even curiosity about the separate identity and self-understanding with which critical GDR authors like Wolf were confronting the new historical situation created by Germany's unification process. An intricate part of this separate identity is the different concept that Christa Wolf has developed of what writing in twentieth century Europe means in terms of the responsibility the author has towards herself, her art and her public role.

In clear contrast to the debates in the West German cultural media which tended to view the GDR as a brief totalitarian interlude and reduce its status, as Stefan Heym put it, to that of a footnote in history, academic investigation should develop a more differentiated view of life and culture in the GDR. Some Western criticism has tended to restrict the concept of socialism to the version embodied in GDR history. Such reductionist notions, however, do not do justice to socialism as a multi-stranded and dynamic system of values which has evolved over more than a century and which many GDR authors, Christa Wolf included, were prepared to engage with in its broadest sense, seeing this task as a life-long process. Socialism is an ideological frame of reference full of contradictions and needs to be accepted as such. As R.N. Berki has argued:

The contradictions of socialism are the contradictions of the age: the uncertainties and desperate gropings of our modern consciousness, the characteristically modern search for human 'identity' and our ways of trying to understand the 'human predicament', our ever increasing scientific and

technological power coupled with the growing recognition that the forces unleashed cannot always be subjected to conscious human control, the whole gamut of our political, economic and cultural life, with its extremism, its violence, its resignations and escapisms, fantasies and guilt-complexes, are all reflected - best reflected - in the mirror of socialism.¹

The demise of the socialist societies of Eastern Europe will, without doubt, continue to be a subject for critical debate, but it should not be accepted as evidence that socialist thought no longer has a contribution to make as an alternative frame of reference to bourgeois liberalism for the study of Western culture and society. Similarly, it should not make us unreceptive to the experiences of people who grew up and lived in a different society. As Christa Wolf has pointed out in a recent interview: "Kann es nicht auch sein, daß der Blick von Leuten, die in einer anderen Gesellschaft aufgewachsen sind, schärfer ist für die Schwächen des neuen Systems, in das sie nun hineingeworfen werden?"² Although Christa Wolf's writing has captured essential aspects of socialist thought, its overall scope is evidently much broader. Wolf has viewed writing as a dynamic process which accompanies life, "[...] als einen Vorgang, der das Leben unaufhörlich begleitet, es mitbestimmt, zu deuten sucht [...]" (conversation with Hans Kaufmann, DdA II, 1973, 324) Ideally, she has suggested more recently, it should be a process as complex as life itself:

Eine Art Mit-Schrift wäre mein Schreibideal: Ein Griffel folgte möglichst genau der Lebensspur, die Hand, die ihn führte, wäre meine Hand und auch nicht meine Hand, viele und vieles schriebe mit, das Subjektivste und das Objektivste verschränkten sich unauflösbar, 'wie im Leben' [...]. ('Selbstanzeige', Tabou, 9)

All of Christa Wolf's writing closely reflects the complex experiences that have directly or indirectly shaped her perception of herself as an author and of the world around

¹R. N. Berki, *Socialism*, (London, 1975), p 20.

²Christa Wolf in an interview in *Der Tagesspiegel* of 30 April / 1 May 1996, p 21.

her. The constant processes of change, adjustment and readjustment to which this has given rise have naturally also affected Wolf's way of accepting responsibility as a writer. As Harro Zimmermann has pointed out, authors are not "[...] entrückte Sinnproduzenten und moralversessene Hohepriester [...], sondern in spezifischer Verantwortung verstrickte Subjekte."³

It is by turning to Wolf's fiction and to her theoretical reflections that we can gain greater insights into the interrelationship between the shifts in Wolf's understanding of responsibility and the concomitant changes these have produced in her creative writing. However, as Therese Hörnigk has remarked with reference to Franz Fühmann, an author's life experiences constitute the substratum of his or her writings. As a result, an author's biography will in turn also yield essential insights into his or her literary texts.⁴ In contrast to conventional approaches to the contextualization of Christa Wolf's work, I therefore intend in this part of the thesis to locate Wolf within the specific context of her personal experience. I want to focus in particular on those experiences which have brought about shifts in her ideological and political outlook and have thus made a significant difference to her aesthetic and poetological approach. Christa Wolf has referred to these turning points as "Wechsel der Weltempfindung" (DdA II, 1968, 7) or as rifts which have altered the course of life for her entire generation.

Wolf considers her development as a writer to have been a gradual but profound process of emancipation. In a conversation with Therese Hörnigk in the late 1980s she explained that this process had comprised much more than the rejection of the official discourses of the GDR state and its interpretation of Marxism: "Ich habe mich [...] von den Abhängigkeiten weitgehend befreit, die ein selbstbestimmtes, vorurteilsloses Denken behindern."⁵ But Wolf goes on to stress the important distinction between such dependencies and the deep emotional attachments and the sense of responsibility which have remained a lasting source of motivation, inspiration and commitment in her work.

³Harro Zimmermann, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 9 February 1993, p 11.

⁴Hörnigk, p 7.

⁵Hörnigk, p 31.

The distinct identity of Christa Wolf's literature has evolved out of the specific conflicts and contradictions within which she has asserted herself as a woman writer in the GDR. But it is rooted also in her deep and lasting attachment to that society. My examination of the emancipatory processes which have influenced Christa Wolf's concept of responsibility will identify the nature of the dependencies which Wolf has sought to overcome at particular turning points in her life. It will also analyse how Christa Wolf has mediated, through the process of writing, between her emancipatory endeavours and these attachments and responsibilities, which have sustained her commitment even at the bleakest moments of her career. The dynamic and complex interrelationships between these factors have persistently informed Wolf's writing and have decisively influenced the manner in which she has understood her responsibility as a writer at specific points in her development.

Christa Wolf has a proclivity for analysing post-war history in generational terms. Many of the experiences and contradictions which she has articulated in her writing have been shared by other members of her generation, in particular by those whose intellectual, spiritual and political development has been similar to her own. Wolf has become increasingly concerned to understand how the process of separation from the previous generation which her generation experienced may have differed from that of other generations on account of the particular historical situation in Germany. Her main interest here has been to identify those factors which have delayed or acted as an impediment to her generation's development of maturity and personal autonomy. It is clear from Christa Wolf's essays and from her fiction that she has been interested from an early stage in psychoanalysis, and there are many indications of this interest scattered through her writings. Her intriguing grasp of the psychological aspects of human existence and interaction stems from her growing interest in the psychological ramifications of her wider social experience and from her rejection of the conventional split between the private and the public sphere. I will begin the contextualization of Wolf's work therefore by taking a fresh look at the key experiences which Wolf has identified as a crucial formative influence on her own and her generation's development within the socio-political context of the early

history of the GDR. In this exposition I shall give particular emphasis to ideas from Christa Wolf's conversations with Therese Hörnigk and Günter Gaus. On these occasions Wolf spoke more openly than before about her experiences in the cultural sphere of the GDR in the 1950s. Wolf here looks back at her generation's relationship to its elders with particular honesty, revealing both its authoritarian nature and its inspirational character. Particularly interesting is her assessment of the inhibiting influence this relationship had on her generation's development of personal independence and maturity. A further feature of these conversations is Wolf's articulation of the notion that there were points of contiguity between Nazism and Stalinism and of the issue of repression in both the Soviet Union and the GDR, viewing the relationship between the two countries in a particularly critical light.

Wolfgang Emmerich has suggested that a contextualization of East German literature which takes as a starting point the "gemeinsame Generationserfahrungen, Traumata, Hoffnungen und Projektionen" of the authors concerned might be illuminating.⁶ Within this first part of the thesis I will therefore consider particularly the cultural context within which Wolf's work has evolved, with a view to examining the nature of these shared experiences, traumas, hopes and projections. This will focus on the factors which shaped Christa Wolf's understanding of the role of literature in modern society and its possibility of impact, particularly her exploration of the interrelationships between aesthetics and politics and her endeavours to reconcile the rival claims of aesthetic and political commitment. I will draw attention above all to the significance of the positive formative experiences that characterized Christa Wolf's early years in the cultural life of the GDR since these help to explain Christa Wolf's continued commitment to her task as well as the intensity of her growing disillusionment with actual developments in the GDR. A reminder of Johannes R. Becher's vision of the GDR as a *Literaturgesellschaft* and what became of it will form part of this investigation. The first part of the thesis will also consider the extent to which writers of Wolf's generation in the GDR may be said to have been caught up in a classical double bind situation. This will put us in a position to draw

⁶Emmerich, 'Für eine andere Wahrnehmung', p 19.

conclusions about the extent to which the specific contradictions and conflicts within GDR cultural life paradoxically both hindered and furthered the development of the distinctive voice which Christa Wolf has added to European culture.

1.2 New beginnings and an unresolved past: Christa Wolf's commitment to a career in culture (1953 - 1959)

Christa Wolf has revealed little about her personal life to her biographers. It is in her fiction as well as in the essays, speeches and interviews that are now also accessible in published volumes that she has offered her readers insights into significant moments of her life. This has allowed her readers to appreciate the highly individualized fabric of her experience. It is clear that Wolf sees herself as part of a larger society than the one in which she has lived and worked and that her concerns with political and moral issues have transcended the context of divided Germany. But it is also true that Wolf has located her personal experience within the framework of the key experiences or *Grunderlebnisse* that have had a significant impact on the lives of members of her generation as a whole. Christa Wolf belongs to the middle generation of citizens of the former GDR (of those born around 1930) and as such her biography has coincided with key phases of that society's socio-political and economic history. As a result of the emphasis Wolf has placed on the exploration of the complex interrelationships between external events and the inner, emotional and psychological experience of individuals, Wolf's critical reflections have offered a highly individualized perspective on her generation's development that cannot be found in the textbooks or in the official historical sources of either the former German Democratic Republic or the Federal Republic of Germany.

Christa Wolf's inclination to view postwar history in terms of the distinctive quality of each of its decades has been widely noted⁷. What is less clearly understood, however, is her insistence that none of these chapters in her life has ever been concluded or resolved,

⁷See, for instance, Kuhn; also Marilyn Sibley Fries, 'Locating Christa Wolf', in her *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays*, and Joseph Pischel, 'Gewebe von Gesittung - Gewebe des Erzählens. Christa Wolfs Verhältnis zu Anna Seghers', in Drescher, pp 371-379, p 379.

least of all the crucial years that marked the beginning of her commitment to the cause of socialism. In the late 1980s, she spoke about her experiences during the late 1940s and the 1950s more openly and with a greater sense of urgency than ever before. It is therefore well worth considering from today's perspective these early years of Wolf's background in order to reevaluate their bearing on her later ideological and aesthetic outlook.

One of the crucial formative experiences that Wolf has in common with her contemporaries is without doubt the fact that she was a child of the Third Reich who experienced twelve years of German history under Hitler. At the age of sixteen Wolf shared the fate of millions of other Germans when she had to flee from her home (in Landsberg on the Warthe, now the Polish town of Gorzow Wielkopolski) at the approach of the Red Army in 1945. At the level of subjective emotional and psychological experience, the liberation by the Allied Forces appeared anything but a personal liberation. It involved not merely a geographical dislocation and the loss of close personal relationships that had helped to create her sense of self up to that point (the conscious process of mourning the loss of such personal bonds forms one strand of Wolf's narrative *Nachdenken über Christa T.*), but also the sudden collapse of the system of values she had absorbed and learned to defend as one of Hitler's children. This profound rupture of her identity at the crucial stage of her personality development from adolescence into adulthood was compounded by the shock of having to take on board the full weight of the truth about her country's crimes under the terror regime of National Socialism. In her short, clearly autobiographically based narrative 'Blickwechsel' (1970) Wolf first portrayed the emotional and psychological distress caused to her protagonist when these events force her to perceive herself and the world at large in an unfamiliar light. Having been led to believe in the normality of her upbringing as a member of a nation fighting for a legitimate cause, she now has to suffer the humiliation and shame of realizing that she had in fact been part, albeit only as a child and innocent bystander, of an inhumane and immeasurably cruel system. Liberation is experienced not as joyful, but as threatening and shameful: "Ich war nicht neugierig auf das, was jetzt kommen würde. [...] Ich hatte keine Lust auf Befreiung." (GE, 19). A chance encounter with a former inmate of a

concentration camp sends out the clear message to her that her society's values and code of conduct have been turned upside down overnight. But it also triggers the first deep sense of guilt:

Und schon überhaupt keine Lust hatte ich auf das Gespräch
mit dem KZler, der abends bei uns am Feuer saß, der eine
verbogene Drahtbrille aufhatte und das unerhörte Wort
Kommunist so dahinsagte, als sei es ein erlaubtes
Alltagswort wie Haß und Krieg und Vernichtung. Nein.
Am allerwenigsten wollte ich von der Trauer und
Bestürzung wissen, mit der er uns fragte: Wo habt ihr bloß
all die Jahre gelebt? (GE, 19).

Christa Wolf remembers burning her diary in order to signal to the world that she was turning her back on her past life. Later, she gradually interpreted and depicted this dramatic gesture as a symbol of repression, self-hatred and self-disgust.⁸

In contradistinction to the cliché of GDR propaganda, what followed was in Christa Wolf's case not an entirely seamless conversion to the cause of socialism. Wolf suffered a severe breakdown, indicating a need for physical, mental and spiritual recovery from the stress and inner turmoil left by the rapid sequence of events at the end of the war: "Da war ich monate-, jahrelang in einer tiefen Verzweiflung und wußte nicht, wie damit weiterleben."⁹ The moral vacuum left by her rejection of all she had believed in during her former life led her to embark on "eine kurze, sehr intensive Phase eines Versuchs mit dem Christentum. Das ging nicht [...]."¹⁰ The crisis of values and the emotional and psychological disorientation brought about by the havoc that Hitler's rule and the war had wreaked on the moral fibre of the German people presented problems that could certainly not be solved within a few years. But on the level of national and international politics, the pressures to determine Germany's fate as a nation and the task of rebuilding her socio-economic base soon dominated the agenda of the victorious powers. While the task of reeducating the German people and of forcing them to understand the unspeakable nature

⁸Hörnigk, p 46.

⁹Christa Wolf, 'Auf mir bestehen', in Vinke, p 243.

¹⁰Loc. cit.

of their crimes against humankind and human civilization was certainly taken extremely seriously, and arguably more so by the Soviet military powers, there was insufficient understanding about the many ways in which this particular history had affected individuals emotionally and psychologically. There was equally little awareness of the deep rifts it had created between members of the same generation as well as between the generations. In Wolf's opinion, this caused lasting damage:

Als wir fünfzehn, sechzehn waren, mußten wir uns unter dem niederschmetternden Eindruck der ganzen Wahrheit über den deutschen Faschismus von denen abstoßen, die in diesen zwölf Jahren nach unserer Meinung durch Dabeisein, Mitmachen, Schweigen schuldig geworden waren. Wir mußten diejenigen entdecken, die Opfer geworden waren, diejenigen, die Widerstand geleistet hatten. Wir mußten es lernen, uns in sie einzufühlen. Identifizieren konnten wir uns natürlich auch mit ihnen nicht, dazu hatten wir kein Recht. Das heißt, als wir sechzehn waren, konnten wir uns mit niemandem identifizieren. Dies ist eine wesentliche Aussage für meine Generation. Es ist ein nachhaltiges Defizit für junge Menschen, wenn sie sich mit niemandem identifizieren können.¹¹

On the level of national politics, however, it was considered vital to focus on the economic reconstruction of Germany which could only be achieved with the active support and participation of the people. Therefore, it was important to give people new hope and to spread optimism about the future.

In the Soviet Zone of Occupation, this was done by giving people a chance to redeem themselves by committing themselves to the new leadership and the cause of socialism:

Uns wurde dann ein verlockendes Angebot gemacht: Ihr könnt, hieß es, eure mögliche, noch nicht verwirklichte Teilhabe an dieser nationalen Schuld loswerden oder abtragen, indem ihr aktiv am Aufbau der neuen Gesellschaft teilnehmt, die das genaue Gegenteil, die einzig

¹¹Hörnigk, p 11.

radikale Alternative zum verbrecherischen System des Nationalsozialismus darstellt.¹²

The fact that the new socialist Germany would stand for the obverse of all that they associated with the fascist state made it instantly attractive to the younger generation:

[...] das war genau das Gegenteil von dem, was im faschistischen Deutschland geschehen war. Und ich wollte genau das Gegenteil. Ich wollte auf keinen Fall mehr etwas, was dem Vergangenen ähnlich sein könnte. Ich glaube, das ist in meiner Generation häufig so gewesen. Das war der Ursprung dieser Bindung; das war auch der Grund, warum wir so lange an ihr festhielten [...].¹³

But Christa Wolf clearly suggests that for many people the identification with socialism was, at least initially, the result not so much of a thorough engagement with Marx's writings as of a psychological and spiritual need to obliterate the past and find a new sense of moral purpose and orientation: "Meine Generation hat früh eine Ideologie gegen eine andre ausgetauscht, sie ist erst spät, zögernd, teilweise gar nicht erwachsen geworden, will sagen, reif, autonom."¹⁴

To an extent, the Party's anti fascist doctrine accorded with the desire to escape a more critical and self-critical analysis of the past. The anti fascist doctrine explained the rise of fascism primarily in terms of its rootedness in the nature of bourgeois capitalist society. The notion that an understanding of the past was a task for individuals to achieve in isolation from this wider collective analysis was considered insufficiently illuminating. According to Christa Wolf, the depiction of the anti fascist democratic renewal as a point of new departure, a *Stunde Null*, in conjunction with the easy optimism of the small group of anti fascists who dominated the political arena in the Soviet Zone of Occupation, further undermined official endeavours to achieve a thorough process of coming to terms with the past along the lines of dialectical and historical materialism. Above all to those

¹²Hörnigk, p 11.

¹³Christa Wolf, 'Auf mir bestehen', in Vinke, p 244.

¹⁴Quoted from Lew Kopelew, 'Für Christa Wolf. Ein Brief an die "Zeit", die "FAZ" und die "Welt"', in Anz, (1991), pp 117-121, p 120.

who had collaborated with, or had simply accepted, the National Socialist megalomania it offered a welcome escape route. It permitted them to lay the blame at the door of the allegedly neo-fascist enemy in the West, while the Soviet Union was idolized as the morally, economically and politically superior state.

The failure of this generation to share their real experiences and to communicate openly and honestly with their sons and daughters acted as a severe impediment to the passing on of credible and enduring values. In Christa Wolf's opinion, it also left these younger people alone with their anxieties and questions about the past, making them more vulnerable to Stalinist indoctrination.¹⁵

Christa Wolf's generation had been raised in a rigidly structured authoritarian state that encouraged them from a young age: "[...] sich anzupassen, ja nicht aus der Reihe zu tanzen, besonders in der Schule sorgfältig die Meinung zu sagen, die man von ihr erwartete, um sich ein problemloses Fortkommen zu sichern, das ihren Eltern wichtig war."¹⁶ Having rejected their parents and their former teachers as role models and mentor-figures, most people fell back onto these acquired patterns of behaviour and thought. This led some of them to idolize the Soviet Union and the authority figures who represented it in the institutions and social structures of the GDR.

A further area of concern Wolf has raised in the context of her generation's key experiences during the early years of the GDR is the lack of emotional support and psychological understanding that had also characterized its upbringing. Taking her own development as an example, she has clearly identified some common ground between her upbringing and her experiences with Party dogmatism in the early years of the GDR's history:

Meine Kindheit lief in einer gespaltenen Erziehung. Das eine war die Hitler-Jugend mit dem Versuch, Härte zu erzeugen in den Kindern. Das andere war die protestantische Erziehung zu Hause, die auch nicht gerade überströmend gefühlvoll war. Und dann später, in den

¹⁵See Christa Wolf, 'Den Sklaven aus sich herauspressen', in Hans Neumann (ed.), *Träumen verboten. Aktuelle Stellungnahmen aus der DDR*, (Göttingen, 1990), pp 31-36, p 34.

¹⁶Wolf, 'Den Sklaven aus sich herauspressen', p 31.

Anfängen der Partei, natürlich auch: Man hat eigentlich glücklich zu sein, man ist verpflichtet, glücklich zu sein [...].¹⁷

From the beginning, Christa Wolf has suggested, this complex interplay of factors blinded her generation to the harsher realities of Stalinism and to the hypocrisy with which the Soviet state claimed to be creating the socialist structures in East Germany that it already so ruthlessly perverted in the USSR:

Gewisse Realitäten in ihrer ganzen Härte konnten wir nicht wahrnehmen, sie wurden auch nicht vermittelt. Unser Bild von der Sowjetunion war sentimentgeladen, verklärt und geschönt, auch durch Schuldgefühle mit bestimmt.¹⁸

Christa Wolf has never stopped inquiring into the reasons for the persistence of authoritarian personality traits and patterns of behaviour in the ex-GDR. Above all in the context of her generation's transition from fascism to socialism, she has persistently asked questions about their origins. (One of her most complex narratives, *Kindheitsmuster*, 1976, is largely devoted to this inquiry.) The complex interplay between acquired patterns of behaviour and thought and the idealization of political authority figures during these early years of the GDR's history has, in Wolf's opinion, clearly acted as an impediment to her generation's development of independent critical thought and personal maturity. It also impinged on people's understanding of Marxist ideology as a critical framework of analysis that is designed to encourage critical questioning of perceived truths and apparent realities as a life-long process. Many people of her generation, Wolf explained, failed to emancipate themselves from authoritarian relationships. Their lack of inner maturity discouraged the assertiveness and independence of mind that would have been necessary for a successful release from an excessive dependence on the values of the older generation in the form of a continuous process of critical questioning and self-questioning:

¹⁷Christa Wolf, 'Auf mir bestehen', in Vinke, p 247.

¹⁸Hörnigk, p 17.

Wir damals Jungen waren zu lange in Vater-Sohn-, Mutter-Tochter-Beziehungen eingebunden, die es uns schwer machten, mündig zu werden. Ich glaube, viele meiner Generation haben sich nie richtig davon erholt. Sie ließen es bei den alten, beengenden, aber auch bequemen Bindungen, anstatt im Prozeß der eigenen Reifung auch diese Beziehung noch einmal in Frage zu stellen, sie von innen her neu zu formieren, mit einem neuen Verständnis auch für die Widersprüche, Konflikte der älteren Generation, für ihre Fehler, für die Gründe ihres Versagens in bestimmten Punkten. Aus lebendigen Menschen Denkmäler, Standbilder zu machen - dazu gehören ja immer zwei.¹⁹

In her increasingly critical analysis of her generation's history, Christa Wolf has never exempted herself from blame. Her use of the first person plural when talking about her experiences, both in her literary and in her theoretical work, is an indication of this characteristic. But she has also consistently emphasized the important function that writing has played for her in the process of uncovering layer after layer of her dependence on authoritarian patterns of thought and behaviour:

Schreiben, wenn man es als Selbstbefragung betreibt, kann da eine Hilfe sein, ähnlich einer gründlichen Therapie, sich dieser Einschränkung durch Autoritätsgläubigkeit zunächst bewußt zu werden und dann, in einem jahrelangen, schmerzhaften Prozeß, die Angst loszuwerden, die einer echten inneren Freiheit entgegensteht.²⁰

However, Christa Wolf first discovered literature's potential as a source of enlightenment, inspiration and critical inquiry as a reader. In the confusions and spiritual and emotional vacuum of the immediate postwar years she turned to literature for moral guidance and inspiration and read: "[...] alles an alten Büchern, was mir zufällig in die Hände fiel [...]. Mit Gier und Genuß." (DdA II, 367). But the moment Wolf has identified as marking a profound turningpoint and the beginning of the "Vorgang [...], der dann mein Leben ausfüllte" (DdA I, 431), was her first reading of Marxist literature in the autumn of 1948. The lines in Friedrich Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen*

¹⁹Hörnigk, p 12.

²⁰Hörnigk, p 8.

deutschen Philosophie that she had carefully annotated clearly spoke a truth that corresponded to her inner understanding of the experiences she had recently undergone. But they also appealed to her longing to find her place in the new social system and to play her role in the processes of revolutionary change on which her country was embarking: "Und so wird im Lauf der Entwicklung alles früher Wirkliche unwirklich [...]. An die Stelle des absterbenden Wirklichen tritt eine neue, lebensfähige Wirklichkeit." (DdA I, 431).

The years that followed were characterized by rapid change both in GDR society and in Christa Wolf's personal life. She began to study for a teaching qualification at the University of Jena in 1949, joined the Socialist Unity Party in the same year, married a fellow student (Gerhard Wolf) in 1951 and gave birth to her first daughter a year later, by which time the family had moved to Leipzig. Christa Wolf graduated as a student of *Germanistik* at Leipzig University in June/July 1953 and submitted her final dissertation under the supervision of Hans Mayer, at the time one of the most controversial Germanists in the GDR. Wolf experienced these years as full of movement, excitement, confidence and optimism, believing: "[...] daß mit der grundlegenden Veränderung der Eigentumsverhältnisse eine nächste Phase der Menschheitsentwicklung eingeleitet sei [...], daß noch während meiner Lebenszeit die Vorzüge der sozialistischen Gesellschaft sich entwickeln und zeigen würden."²¹ But more than a decade later she looked back at these years with great scepticism, above all with regard to the gullibility and over-optimism that had characterized her generation's outlook. In her account of visiting the *Berliner Ensemble* as a student at Leipzig (DdA I, 83-85, 1966), for instance, she is clearly doubtful whether she and her fellow students would have absorbed the more challenging message embedded in Brecht's plays regarding the role her generation needed to play in the wider historical dimensions of shaping the new society. Her narrative *Nachdenken über Christa T.* pursues a similar line of inquiry, highlighting the way in which the wave of elation and euphoria that swept most people along in the early 1950s made them insensitive to the more mundane, yet equally real and valid, experiences of the restrictions

²¹Hörnigk, p 23.

and pressures that limited personal choices in life. Wolf here strikes a decidedly sombre note that expresses a much more existential human problem:

Viele Wege gab es damals nicht für uns, keine große Auswahl an Gedanken, Hoffnungen und Zweifeln. [...] Jedermann war gezwungen, den Mut zur Bewegung in sich wachzuhalten, die Zeit floß sehr schnell. Man überlegte nicht lange, fischte sich fast, ohne hinzusehen, ein Leben heraus, fragte nicht viel, ob es paßte, lebte es eben, da wurde es passend. Oder jedenfalls glaubte man das mit der Zeit. (Chr.T., 32/47).

The life that began to unfold for Christa Wolf in 1953 when she was invited to work for the *Schriftstellerverband der DDR* in Berlin (the official GDR Writers' Union that had been founded in 1952) was to offer her exciting opportunities to play a part in shaping the future of her society, but it was also to confront her with challenges she could not possibly have anticipated. This work, in an organisation which took a leading role in the cultural arena of the GDR, gave Wolf the opportunity to gain experiences and receive insights that are distinct from those of her generation at large. Wolf initially worked as an academic assistant for the Writers' Union, but was soon appointed to the editorial board of the Union's monthly journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur*. She continued to write reviews of works published by various publishing houses throughout the 1950s, amongst them *Neues Leben*.

Wolf's aesthetic understanding as a young literary critic was clearly dominated by the norms of orthodox GDR literary studies, above all by the theories and aesthetic judgements of Georg Lukács: "Lukács war ja nun wirklich unser Nonplusultra. Die Bände, die damals von ihm erschienen waren, haben wir nicht nur Wort für Wort studiert, auch seine Wertungen haben wir übernommen, um sie später teilweise zu korrigieren [...]." ²² In her reviews, Wolf applied the very limited yardsticks and tools available to literary critics at the time. According to Manfred Jäger, these consisted of little more than:

²²Hörnigk, p 15.

[...] ein paar grobe[n] Geräte[n] in Standardausführung - als Untersuchungsbefund kam nicht viel mehr heraus als schädlich oder nützlich, objektivistisch oder parteilich, pessimistisch oder optimistisch, dekadent oder lebensecht, krank oder gesund, typisch oder nicht typisch, aufbauend oder destruktiv [...].²³

But Jäger is right to object to any temptation we might have to classify the literary critic Christa Wolf in the 1950s in an undifferentiated way as a: "[...] willfährige, gar zynische Handlangerin in einer zentral angezettelten Kampagne gegen die sogenannte 'harte Schreibweise'."²⁴ Wolf's reviews were written with sincerity, inner conviction and commitment, reflecting her full support for the status quo. In contrast, writers like Günter de Bruyn look back on this period as a time when their public statements and their private thoughts were already very dissonant.²⁵ The corollary for Wolf of her sincere commitment, however, was the lengthy and painful process of emancipation that she later underwent. Even though her pronouncements may strike us as dogmatic from today's perspective, it is important to bear in mind the specific historical and cultural-political conventions within which they were made, as Therese Hörnigk has explained with regard to Wolf's review of Ehm Welk's novel *Im Morgennebel* (1953):

Das barsche Urteil der fünfundzwanzigjährigen Rezensentin und ihr Umgang mit den kanonisierten ästhetischen Kategorien gegenüber einer bestimmten literarischen Darstellung geschichtlicher Verläufe vermittelt - von heute aus betrachtet - eher Einsichten in kulturpolitische und ideologische Wertungskriterien der Zeit, als sie Aufschlüsse über das subjektive Vermögen der Kritikerin geben. Die Einwände wie der Ton der Polemik entsprachen einem verbreiteten Stil literaturwissenschaftlichen Argumentierens, wie aus verschiedenen Debatten nicht nur dieser Zeit bekannt.²⁶

²³Manfred Jäger, 'Die Literaturkritikerin Christa Wolf', in *Text und Kritik*, 46, (June 1980), pp 49-55, p 49.

²⁴M. Jäger, 'Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit', in his *Sozialliteraten*, p 17.

²⁵Günter de Bruyn, *Vierzig Jahre*.

²⁶Hörnigk, pp 53-54.

Christa Wolf's tasks within the Writers' Union included the responsibility for the development and promotion of literary works by young authors who were writing from the perspective of their experiences with and within the GDR. While Wolf's understanding of her task was clearly didactic and naive, her concern for the moral sincerity of the works she reviewed must at least to some extent be attributed to her own experiences with the power that the written word had held over her mind as a young reader in Nazi Germany. She was also concerned that readers should be able to identify with the experiences that were portrayed in the literary works. As Therese Hörnigk has explained, Wolf was disturbed about the increasing demand for 'Trivialliteratur' (which was more widely available in the GDR after the events of 17 June 1953, when the Party temporarily loosened its tight grip on the public sphere) amongst GDR readers, in response to which she pleaded that measures should be taken to raise literary standards as well as to make them more relevant to readers' actual experiences.²⁷ But topicality for Wolf was not tantamount to glorification of everyday life in the GDR. She was clearly appalled about the many aesthetically shallow, schematic and unconvincing plot-lines in the manuscripts submitted to her. Her essay 'Popularität oder Volkstümlichkeit?' (1956) sums up her concern about these oversimplifications and about the undialectical portrayal of GDR reality that grossly misrepresented the very real hardships and contradictions people were experiencing in everyday life.²⁸ Wolf was at this time clearly convinced that a socialist literature should and could directly influence social development through its impact on its readers. But she also felt that the social impetus literature could give should not compromise its aesthetic quality and that the abolition of material constraints on literary production would not in itself produce great literary works. Although her tone was still didactic and moralistic, the positions she adopted in the 1950s foreshadowed some of her later concerns with questions of literary impact. They also indicate that for Christa Wolf

²⁷Hörnigk, pp 57-58.

²⁸Christa Wolf, 'Popularität oder Volkstümlichkeit?', in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 4, (1956), vol. 1, p 118.

the needs of aesthetics and politics were not mutually exclusive, but could become reconciled and made productive in a socialist literature.

The expectations with which Christa Wolf approached literary production in the GDR during the 1950s had to a considerable extent been informed by her reading of such great authors of world literature as Gorki, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Thomas Wolfe and Louis Aragon.²⁹ In addition, Wolf enjoyed the privilege of working alongside such revered socialist authors as Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher whose works, such as *Das siebte Kreuz* and *Abschied*, will most probably have been major sources of inspiration and motivation for her. With the notable exception of Anna Seghers, Wolf's retrospective assessment of the many opportunities she had during these years to observe and work with great names in the cultural and cultural-political arena of the GDR (Willi Bredel, Arnold Zweig, Stephan Hermlin, F.C. Weiskopf, Louis Fürnberg, Kurt Barthel, to name but a few) is clearly ambivalent. On the one hand she believes these were "[...]beeindruckende Menschen" who were amongst the "[...] interessantesten Leuten [...], die einem damals in Deutschland hätten begegnen können [...]." On the other, she describes her relationship to them as "[...] Bindung, die zum großen Teil auch auf schlechtem Gewissen beruhte."³⁰ Wolf and her younger colleagues were awe-inspired by the past history of these colleagues who had suffered persecution, censorship, smear campaigns, exile and imprisonment in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany on the basis of their political convictions and commitment. From the outset, the relationship between the two generations was a "[...] Lehrer-Schüler-Verhältnis [...], sie waren die absolut und in jeder Hinsicht Vorbildlichen, wir diejenigen, die in jeder Hinsicht zu hören und zu lernen hatten."³¹ While these older colleagues were eager to pass on their wisdom to the younger generation, they showed little interest in or had little opportunity to question the validity of their aims in the light of the different ideas and expectations of the younger generation. This made it difficult for both sides to truly benefit from these

²⁹Hörnigk, p 51.

³⁰Christa Wolf, 'Auf mir bestehen', in Vinke, p 244.

³¹Hörnigk, p 11.

potentially fruitful encounters, and it made it particularly hard for Wolf and her younger colleagues to genuinely take over responsibility from their elders. In retrospect, Wolf has deplored the fact that these forebears shared so few of their disappointments, tensions and doubts with her generation. Since little of the darker side of their experiences has been documented³², their legacy became distorted by the "[...] erbarmungslose[s] Scheinwerferlicht der offiziellen Glorifizierung [...]"³³ in the official annals of GDR cultural history.

As a result of the very limited information available to them, it is doubtful that Wolf and her younger colleagues would have been particularly aware of the compromises that their forebears had been forced to make, above all during the four years before Wolf's entry into this area which are amongst the bleakest years of GDR cultural history. In the early 1950s the broad anti fascist basis on which the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands* had been founded in 1945, as a way of attracting large numbers of intellectuals to the Soviet Zone, had been replaced by a dogmatic view of what constituted 'formalism' in art and literature. The relative cultural diversity of the early postwar years, which encompassed Georg Lukács' support for a development of the classical bourgeois heritage as well as the attempts of Bert Brecht and Hanns Eisler to build on the alternative traditions of proletarian and modernist literature, had given way to a crude attempt to impose a simplified version of Lukács' theories as a new orthodoxy. Literature which did not comply with Lukács' aesthetic theories and his canon of literary exemplars (Tolstoy, Balzac, Thomas Mann) were accused of Western capitalist decadence and discredited. Amongst the authors that were classified as 'formalistic' were such great authors of world literature as Faulkner, Hemingway, Kafka, Joyce and Proust.

But there were already signs of a new openness when Christa Wolf joined the Writers' Union in 1953. The launch of *Neue Deutsche Literatur* as a forum for the younger

³²Johannes R. Becher's essay 'Selbstzensur' which he wrote in 1957 (one year before his death), but suppressed at the time, is a most distressing example of the real conflicts and tensions he had shared with many colleagues at the time. This essay was not published in the GDR until 1988: Johannes R. Becher, 'Selbstzensur', in *Sinn und Form*, (May/June 1988), pp 543-551.

³³Hörnigk, p 19.

and less well established authors during this year³⁴ represented a step towards greater independence for the Union's activities which had been under tight Party control after being separated from the *Kulturbund* in 1952. Johannes R. Becher's plan for the creation of a Ministry of Culture which would safeguard the interests of artists at government level was realized a year later, with Becher as first Minister of Culture of the GDR.

Furthermore, Stalin's death and the adoption of the policies of the "Neuer Kurs" in the GDR encouraged greater optimism during this period. Above all those writers who had spent the years of exile in the West rather than in Moscow (Anna Seghers, Stefan Heym, Arnold Zweig, Louis Fürnberg, Stephan Hermlin) and whose ideological and aesthetic outlook had remained far more 'liberal', pushed strongly for the abolition of the Party's control mechanisms³⁵ and the liberalization of cultural policy in the aftermath of the events of 17 June 1953. Although they continued to exercise restraint in the face of increasing hostility between East and West which had dashed their hopes of appealing to a West German audience, their endeavours towards the creation of a credible socialist culture in the GDR received a fresh impetus from the post-Stalinist relaxation of cultural control in Eastern European countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Christa Wolf was certainly involved in the preparations for the Fourth Writers' Congress of the GDR in January 1956 which represented the culmination of countless debates on the possible nature and development of a socialist culture liberalized from Party dogmatism and control.³⁶ Amongst the figureheads of the exile years who addressed the Congress was Johannes R. Becher who formally introduced his ideas for the organization of the GDR as a *Literaturgesellschaft*. This was to comprise much more than the Party's

³⁴Goodbody, Tate and Wallace have suggested that even in the years before 1953, there had been some positive developments, including the launch of *Sinn und Form* in 1949 which was noted for its openness to international influences and soon became a major organ of the *Akademie der Künste*. See Axel Goodbody, Dennis Tate, and Ian Wallace, 'The Failed Socialist Experiment: Culture in the GDR', in Rob Burns (ed.), *German Cultural Studies*, (Oxford, 1995), pp 147-207, p 156.

³⁵As Goodbody, Tate and Wallace have observed, a complex system of censorship was effectively in place as early as 1951 when the *Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen* and the *Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten*, controlled by the SED, had been given powers to reject manuscripts, allocate paper to publishers and withdraw unwelcome plays, concerts and art exhibitions. See Goodbody et al, in Burns, p 155.

³⁶Günter de Bruyn recalls meeting her for the first time at the congress, in her capacity as an organizer: see *Vierzig Jahre*, pp 89-90.

extensive system of financial support which had been inaugurated in 1950 to maintain established artists and encourage young talent in the cultural domain of the GDR.³⁷ Becher envisaged the social significance of literature in the GDR becoming radically different from the market-driven position it occupied in Western capitalism. Through the development of a comprehensive system of institutions that, together, were to function as a network, literature was to become a central medium of communication and *Selbstverständigung* between all areas of society designed to raise the consciousness of GDR citizens. As a result, the process of communication between literary production and distribution and between authors and readers would acquire a new, collective and democratic, quality in GDR society that would make the ideal of the well educated nation become a reality. As Dieter Kliche has observed:

Die poetische Idee der Literaturgesellschaft stellt sich [Becher, RR] jetzt als ein umfassender Begriff für den gesellschaftlichen Charakter der Literatur in ihrem Produktions- und Rezeptionszusammenhang dar: 'Der Charakter der Literatur als einer Literaturgesellschaft, der Charakter des Schriftstellers selbst als eines kollektiven Wesens verlangt von uns auch eine neue Betrachtungsweise des künstlerischen Schaffensprozesses. Die Literatur ist nicht nur ein Haus, das unendlich viele Wohnungen hat [...] An diesem gesellschaftlichen Zusammenleben, wie es die Literatur darstellt, nehmen auch alle wahrhaft Interessierten teil, und weder dürfen von dieser Teilnahme die Verleger, Redakteure, die Lektoren, die Buchhändler ausgeschlossen werden, aber schon ganz und gar nicht der Leser [...] Diese Literaturgesellschaft greift also über das eigentlich Literarische weit hinaus [...]'.³⁸

³⁷See Reinhild Köhler-Hausmann, *Literaturbetrieb in der DDR. Schriftsteller und Literaturinstanzen*, (Stuttgart, 1984), pp 128-131.

³⁸Johannes R. Becher, 'Von der Größe unserer Literatur', in Becher, *Über Kunst und Literatur*, quoted here from Dieter Kliche, 'Sozialistische Kultur und Literaturrezeption', in Manfred Naumann, (ed.), *Gesellschaft. Literatur. Lesen. Literaturrezeption in theoretischer Sicht*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1976), pp 237-298, p 297.

For Wolf's generation, the ideas debated at the Fourth Writers' Congress created inspiring goals to aim for, especially since the leading literary figures of the exile years were now openly insistent upon the need for literature to be independent from Party politics.

For Christa Wolf and her colleagues, Becher's ideas are likely to have appeared less idealistic than they may seem from today's perspective. The intense and spirited debates that characterized the climate amongst authors and intellectuals during the first half of this decade generated a sense of excitement and of direct involvement in crucial processes of social change. While, in this climate, the younger generation felt involved and needed, Wolf's retrospective view suggests that, in certain respects, it had unrealistic expectations: "Und wir Jungen waren in alles verwickelt. Wir nahmen Anteil, es war unsere Sache. Wir waren in einer Stimmung übersteigerter Intensität, alles, was 'hier und heute' geschah, war entscheidend, das Richtige mußte sich bald und vollkommen durchsetzen, wir würden den Sozialismus, den Marx gemeint hatte, noch erleben."³⁹ But this easy optimism was dampened when the revelations a few months later about the crimes of the Stalin era sent shock waves through the entire communist bloc and when, in the autumn of the same year, SED functionaries responded to the Hungarian uprising with vicious attacks and reprisals on writers and other intellectuals in the GDR. In Wolf's assessment, these were key formative experiences which forced her generation to face up to harsher and far more contradictory realities about the Eastern European communist movement. The impact of these historical events was certainly deeply disturbing, yet not crushing. Within the Writers Union of the GDR they created a far greater degree of openness and honesty between the generations which permitted the younger generation to perceive their elders in a more realistic and sober light:

Ihren Heiligenschein hatten sie verloren, das war nicht nur für uns gut - wir mußten erwachsen werden -, sondern auch für sie. Unfehlbar, unantastbar waren also auch sie nicht, aber dadurch doch nicht erledigt oder abserviert. Ich

³⁹Hörnigk, p 20.

verstand sie besser, selbst diejenigen, die ihre Starrheit nicht auflösen konnten [...].⁴⁰

On the whole, the first major crises in the Communist bloc were perceived by Wolf as emancipatory experiences for her generation of intellectuals in the GDR. For Wolf in particular, they gave rise to the first deep inner objections to the political rationale that was used to justify these actions: "Das böse Wort, das der Zweck die Mittel heilige, habe ich niemals akzeptiert. Aus dieser Nicht-Akzeptanz entstanden meine ersten Konflikte mit offiziellen Ansichten und Maßnahmen."⁴¹ This critical outlook created a greater sense of fellowship and resolve within the critical intellectual community of Wolf's generation who were now beginning to seriously re-assess their responsibilities towards the shaping of their society's future:

Nicht mehr ins Stocken gekommen ist unsere intensive Diskussion um die Probleme, die uns spätestens von diesem Zeitpunkt an auf den Nägeln brannten. Die Stunden kann man nicht zählen, in denen wir in unterschiedlichen Kreisen zusammensaßen - oft mit Älteren, die nun bereit waren, offen zu reden -, uns aus erster Hand Informationen holten über die verschiedenen Emigrationen, über das Überleben in deutschen Konzentrationslagern und Zuchthäusern, uns freiredeten von den Folgen des stalinistischen Denkens in uns selbst und eine Zukunft entwarfen, in der die 'freie Entfaltung des einzelnen die Voraussetzung für die freie Entfaltung aller' sein würde.⁴²

⁴⁰Hörnigk, p 21.

⁴¹Hörnigk, p 24.

⁴²Hörnigk, p 22. Wolf refers here to a sentence in Marx's and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* which reads: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (Penguin, London, 1985, first published in English translation in 1888), p 105. As Stephan Hermlin has suggested in his autobiographical prose text *Abendlicht* (1979), intellectuals in the GDR had mis-read these lines until the mid-1960s, failing to appreciate that the freedom of the individual was seen by Marx and Engels as the prerequisite for collective freedom and not, as they had understood it, the other way round. Hermlin was able to appreciate with hindsight that this mis-interpretation was attributable to the lack of intellectual maturity of his generation which led them to project into the text their own ideas. See Stephan Hermlin, *Abendlicht*, (Leipzig, 1979), 6th impression, 1984, p 21.

In *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Wolf has depicted her response to the revelations of this period as a decisive turning point in the development towards personal maturity, since it allowed her to perceive the extent to which the rigours of Party discipline had promoted both the failure of self-confidence and the lack of independent thought that had characterized her outlook hitherto. Although her generation of critical intellectuals could not immediately comprehend the full implications of these experiences, they became instinctively aware that their role in the historical movement with which they had identified was going to be far more challenging than they had appreciated:

Wir wußten ja selbst nicht, was das für eine Nacht war, wir haben Jahre gebraucht, es zu wissen. Nur daß die Kämpfe der Alten auf einmal unsere Kämpfe wurden, das fühlten wir gleich, mit großer Deutlichkeit. Und daß sie uns nicht gestatten würden, in die Rolle der Betroffenen zurückzuweichen. Doch auch die Rolle der eisern Gläubigen war abgesetzt, die Bühne, auf der man solche Rollen spielte, war verdunkelt. Ja, ein plötzlicher Lichtwechsel hatte stattgefunden, vorausgesehen hatten wir ihn nicht. Erst später fragten wir uns: Warum eigentlich nicht? In jener Nacht bei unserem Tee, der kalt wurde, als die vielen hämischen Stimmen sich in unserem Zimmer trafen, merkten wir nur die Verdunkelung der Welt und merkten nicht, daß bloß die Bühnenscheinwerfer gelöscht waren und wir uns daran gewöhnen mußten, in das nüchterne Licht wirklicher Tage und Nächte zu sehen. (Ch.T., 132)

These experiences laid the seeds for Wolf's preoccupation with issues of truth, openness, and subjective authenticity in later years, since she resolved: "künftig wollte ich zu meinen Erfahrungen stehen und sie mir durch nichts und niemanden ausreden, verleugnen oder verbieten lassen. - Sonst hätte ich ja übrigens niemals eine Zeile schreiben können."⁴³ Furthermore, the roots of Wolf's later persistent search for a middle way between feeling betrayed and of belonging to the steadfast believers are also to be found in this period.

However, the vision of a way forward through truth was, in the late 1950s, soon obscured by the profound political backlash that followed in the wake of the Hungarian

⁴³Hörnigk, p 21.

uprising. As Franz Fühmann suggested in the early 1980s, the Party's threats and scaremongering soon put a stop to the possibility of a genuine 'destalinization':

Da hatte ich die Vorstellung: Es ist eine furchtbare Wahrheit, aber nur sie bringt uns weiter. [...] Doch von Anfang an gab es Gegensteuerungen unter der Devise, daß sich die Konterrevolution formiere. So wurde die Formel durchgesetzt: Keine Rückschau, keine Darstellung des Alten, im Vormarsch das Alte überwinden. [...] 1958 fand auch die Kulturkonferenz statt, die den Schlußpunkt hinter das setzte, was man 'Entstalinisierung' nennt.⁴⁴

As was so often the case in the cultural history of the GDR, the cultural domain was once again made into the battleground for issues of a political nature,⁴⁵ with the Party insisting more relentlessly than ever that all art forms had to become the servants of ideology. By the end of the 1950s, some of the most critical voices of the first generation of intellectuals had fallen silent: Bertolt Brecht and Johannes R. Becher had died, Georg Lukács had become discredited as a result of his involvement in the Hungarian uprising⁴⁶, Ernst Bloch and Hans Mayer came under the attacks which forced them to leave a few years later, and Ulbricht's greatest opponents in the Party (Harich and Janka) were imprisoned after utterly humiliating show trials.

Although Christa Wolf was at this point not yet confident enough to follow in the footsteps of such formidable opponents of Party doctrine, there are clear indications that she had begun by the late 1950s to engage far more critically with the narrowly defined parameters of orthodox GDR literary criticism and practice. Concepts like honesty, truth and openness frequently appeared in her reviews and essays, as did questions about the importance of subjective truth in aesthetic representations of GDR reality. Her essay 'Kann

⁴⁴Franz Fühmann in a conversation with Wilfried F. Schoeller, 'Gespräch mit Wilfried F. Schoeller', in Franz Fühmann, *Den Katzenartigen wollten wir verbrennen. Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schmitt, (Hamburg, 1983), p 356-357.

⁴⁵This aspect is discussed in detail by Karin Hirdina in 'Debatten um Politik und Kunst', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), 'Literatur in der DDR. Rückblicke', *Text und Kritik*, special edition, (Munich, 1991), pp 85-92.

⁴⁶Lukács had accepted the office of Minister of Culture in the revolutionary government in Hungary and was nearly executed; although he was subsequently discredited as a public persona in the GDR, his theoretical work continued to form the basis of SED cultural policies, at least until the 1970s.

man eigentlich über alles schreiben?' (1958), for instance, signified her growing determination to seek a wider public debate about questions concerning authorial responsibility and the validity of subjective truth in socialist literature. Authors in the GDR should be allowed to decide for themselves what they wished to write about, Wolf suggested. Any restrictions would have to be self-imposed and founded on "[dem] Verantwortungsbewußtsein des Autors, der nicht in erster Linie seine Komplexe abreagieren, sondern der Gesellschaft nützen will."⁴⁷ The most significant result for Wolf, however, was her decision to embark on a career as an author and turn her back on the world of literary criticism and publishing. This decision seems highly likely to have resulted from Wolf's dissatisfaction with the persistent orthodoxy of GDR literary critics and publishers in the face of the revelations about the atrocities of the Stalinist era and the SED's reluctance to address these issues.

In the course of writing her first fictional work (she completed *Moskauer Novelle* in 1959) Wolf personally experienced the tension between a public duty to adhere to the rigours of Party discipline and a growing inner reluctance to compromise the subjective truth of her far more contradictory experiences for ideological reasons. Although Wolf was at such great pains to adhere to the prescriptive categories of Socialist Realism when she wrote *Moskauer Novelle* that she later described it as a "treatise for the propagation of pious views" (DdA I, 47), we can see the beginnings of the treatment of themes and subjects which the author explores in detail in her later, far more subjectively oriented and socially critical prose works. Towards the end of the novella, for instance, the protagonist, Vera, puts on a (metaphorical) mask of indifferent friendliness in order to hide the fact that she feels deeply alienated from her genuine feelings. Since she believes uncertainty, confusion and vulnerability to be socially unacceptable, the suppression of her emotions seems the only possibility for survival. As Helen Fehervary has suggested, it seems a likely supposition that the mask is not merely a psychological solution for the character, but also

⁴⁷Christa Wolf, 'Der Schriftsteller und unsere Zeit: Kann man eigentlich über alles schreiben?', in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* VI, 1958/6, pp 3-16, p 14. See also M. Jäger, 'Auf dem langen Weg zur Wahrheit', in his *Sozialliteraten*, pp 16-17.

an aesthetic solution for the author in attempting to create an authentic literary character.⁴⁸ With the help of the mask the author can avoid the pitfall of exposing her own naked face, which might make it impossible for her to write at all. However, the compromise which both the protagonist and the author feel compelled to make in the present is contrasted with the vision of a future society that will be based on values like equality, communality and brotherly and sisterly love. This society, Wolf suggests, will tolerate the totality of human experience, including the truth of emotional experience, to be acknowledged:

Mit offenem Visier leben können. Dem anderen nicht mißtrauen müssen. Ihm den Erfolg nicht neiden, den Mißerfolg tragen helfen. Seine Schwächen nicht verstecken müssen. Die Wahrheit sagen können. Arglosigkeit, Naivität, Weichheit sind keine Schimpfwörter mehr. Lebenstüchtigkeit heißt nicht mehr: heucheln können.
(MN, 55)

Although Wolf remained faithful to a positive assessment of socialism during the years that followed her literary debut, there were signs by the end of the decade that she was beginning to re-evaluate her relationship to the society in which she lived and worked, above all with a view to her understanding of the future relationship between politics and aesthetics. 'Dienstag, der 27. September' (a short prose narrative first written in 1960 and published in 1974), for instance, reveals a clear sense of indignation about the Party's dogmatic interpretation of great socialist classics like Lenin in order to legitimize its restrictive cultural policies. Her narrative contrasts the rigid hierarchies that governed the relationship between the Party and writers in the GDR with the spirit of tolerance, autonomy and respect that had informed Lenin's handling of the relationship between 'Geist' and 'Macht':

G. liest in Lenins Briefen an Gorki, wir kommen auf unser altes Thema: Kunst und Revolution, Politik und Kunst, Ideologie und Literatur. Über die Unmöglichkeit deckungsgleicher Gedankengänge bei - selbst marxistischen - Politikern und Künstlern. Die 'eigene' Welt, die Lenin

⁴⁸Helen Fehervary, 'Christa Wolf's Prose: A Landscape of Masks', in Sibley Fries, pp 162-185, 171-172.

Gorki zugesteht (und mehr als zugesteht: die er voraussetzt) bei aller Unversöhnlichkeit in philosophischen Fragen. Seine Rücksichtnahme, sein Takt bei aller Strenge. Zwei gleichberechtigte Partner arbeiten miteinander, nicht der alles Wissende und der in allem zu Belehrende stehen sich gegenüber. Freimütige und großmütige Anerkennung der Kompetenzen ... (GE, 22)

Wolf's rejection of a hierarchical, authoritarian relationship between aesthetics and politics that places the concerns of the state above the needs of aesthetics received strong support within the community of critical intellectuals to which she belonged. The encouragement Wolf had received in the Writers Union above all during the last half of the 1950s, together with the open-minded manner in which the debates had been carried out that she had increasingly played a role in, created a strong sense of belonging and attachment. This had allowed her to personally experience the creative impulses and the greater independence of mind which intersubjective relationships can generate if they are based on equality and solidarity rather than on authority and dependence. Wolf's relationship with Anna Seghers indisputably occupies a special position in this respect. Seghers is for Wolf representative of the experiences and the emancipatory endeavours of the first generation of critical authors throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Although she had also shared some of the compromises this generation had been persuaded to make,⁴⁹ her literary achievements under the broad framework of the Popular Front policies inspired and motivated the younger generation. But Christa Wolf did not only admire Seghers as an author whose aesthetic and political positions she closely identified with during the first decade of her own development as a writer.⁵⁰ What made the relationship with Anna Seghers particularly valuable was the fact that it was based as much on mutual

⁴⁹Her major novel *Die Entscheidung* (1959), for instance, is generally acknowledged to have been a less inspired effort than her major works of the 1930s and 1940s.

⁵⁰For a detailed discussion of the influence which Anna Seghers exerted on Wolf as an author particularly until the middle of the 1960s see Joseph Pischel, 'Gewebe von Gesittung - Gewebe des Erzählens', in Drescher (1989), pp 371-379. For a detailed discussion of Seghers' influence on Wolf as a woman writer, see Christiane Zehl Romero, "'Erinnerung an eine Zukunft". Anna Seghers, Christa Wolf und die Suche nach einer weiblichen Tradition des Schreibens in der DDR', in Inge Stephan, Sigrid Weigel, Kerstin Wilhelms (eds.), *"Wen kümmert's, wer spricht". Zur Literatur und Kulturgeschichte von Frauen aus Ost und West*, (Cologne and Vienna, 1991), pp 211-224.

respect for each other's differences as on a search for identification. It symbolizes how fruitful the interactions between successive generations could prove if they were based on mutual support and encouragement rather than on the kind of dependence created by conventional authoritarian patterns of behaviour and thought.⁵¹ In retrospect, Christa Wolf has particularly appreciated this relationship because of the specific encouragement it offered her as a woman in a male-dominated professional environment. In this relationship we can see the beginnings of what would later develop into Wolf's increasing exploration, in both her essays and her prose works, of such intersubjective relationships as a means of transcending the limitations imposed by the historical co-ordinates of time and space on the possibilities of immediate subjective experience. In particular, Wolf's relationship with Seghers has exemplified the process by which writers from different generations can support and complement each other's work. Seghers was able to help Wolf to gain confidence and to emancipate herself from official GDR criticism in the later 1950s. By the 1960s, when she was established as a prominent literary figure, Wolf in turn was able to emphasize and thereby reinstate, in her essays on Seghers,⁵² the much more critical, uncompromising and rebellious Seghers of the 1930s and 1940s that official GDR criticism was, by that time, trying to marginalize in favour of the more conformist work Seghers had produced in the 1950s.

⁵¹Hörnigk, p 25.

⁵²See Wolf's essays on Anna Seghers between 1959 and 1985, in DdA I, pp 255-377.

1.3 Redefining collective responsibility and acknowledging the importance of the self: the learning process of the 1960s

During the late 1950s and early 1960s Christa Wolf was not yet ready openly to express her growing inner tension with political authority and, particularly, with its handling of cultural policy. More than a decade later she recognized (in connection with her work on *Kindheitsmuster*) that there were both psychological and external reasons for this reluctance. The internal barriers to the process of self-assertion were, to an extent, a result of the aesthetic and ideological norm prescriptions she had absorbed in the course of her academic training. But they were also, as she observed in her essay 'Über Sinn und Unsinn von Naivität', the effect of authoritarian patterns of behaviour and thought which she had learned to comply with in childhood:

Wenn die Denk-Fehler erkannt, bereut, unter nicht geringer Anstrengung korrigiert waren, Ansichten und Meinungen, das ganze Weltbild sich radikal verändert hatten - die *Art* zu denken war nicht so schnell zu ändern, und noch weniger waren es bestimmte Reaktions- und Verhaltensweisen, die, in der Kindheit eingeschleust, die Struktur der Beziehungen eines Charakters zu seiner Umwelt weiter bestimmen: die Gewohnheit der Gläubigkeit gegen übergeordnete Instanzen, der Zwang, Personen anzubeten oder sich doch ihrer Autorität zu unterwerfen, der Hang zu Realitätsverleugnung und eifervoller Intoleranz. (DdA I, 1973, 51)⁵³

The outward reasons that discouraged Wolf and her colleagues from accepting individual responsibility independent of the prescriptions of the Party line were inextricably bound up with the political and public responsibility they had to fulfil as writers in an as yet fragile

⁵³First published in Gerhard Schneider, *Eröffnungen. Schriftsteller über ihr Erstlingswerk*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1973), pp 164-174.

politico-economic system. Since East German literature had, from the beginning, been assigned an explicitly political programme that was designed to bring about social change, the success or failure of the socialist experiment in the GDR was made dependent at least in part on literary production. As a form of accepting political responsibility as a collective, writers felt compelled to subjugate their personal aims and ambitions to the need to transform their socio-economic environment.

Surprisingly enough, it was Wolf's experience of the 'Bitterfelder Weg' which forced a critical rethinking of the assumptions on which this self-denial was based. The 'Bitterfelder Weg' was announced in 1959 as a cultural policy initiative designed to encourage the creation of a realistic worker-oriented socialist literature. It began with a conference organised in April of that year in the Bitterfeld chemical works by the Mitteldeutscher Verlag, which specialized in publishing young writers. Under the slogan: "Greif zur Feder, Kumpel! Die sozialistische Nationalkultur braucht dich!", both workers and established writers were encouraged to take part in a move that was to bring culture to the working masses. At the same time, it would engage the latter in creating a literature that would directly reflect industrial reality in the GDR. On the surface, this appeared to be a genuine step towards greater democracy, and this was the spirit in which Christa Wolf and her colleagues embraced it initially. Gradually it transpired, however, as Goodbody, Tate and Wallace have observed, that: "in the 'Bitterfelder Weg' a genuine desire to promote workers' culture was coupled awkwardly with the aims of the SED to bring the arts further into line with Party policy and to promote forms of culture which would stimulate material productivity".⁵⁴

Christa Wolf's response to 'Bitterfeld' was enthusiastic and sincere, since this initiative accorded both with her personal desire to widen the horizons of her experiences of socialist reality and with her cultural-political aims of helping to create structures in the GDR that would emphasize its qualitative superiority to capitalist society in terms of the role now being accorded to literature:

⁵⁴Goodbody et al, 'The failed socialist experiment', in Burns, p 169.

Wir sind dabei, die Mauer zwischen Kunst und Volk, welche die kapitalistische Gesellschaft aufgerichtet hat, einzureißen. Die sozialistische Massenkultur, die wir systematisch entwickeln und die jedem etwas gibt, weil jeder zu ihr beiträgt, wird uns helfen, den Kapitalismus da zu überwinden, wo er am tiefsten sitzt und sich am zähesten hält. In den persönlichen Beziehungen der Menschen zueinander, in ihren Lebensgewohnheiten und in ihrer Lebensweise.⁵⁵

However, the experiences she made both with 'Bitterfeld' and with the aesthetic transformation of this experience into a literary work were far more complex than she had anticipated. Wolf undertook to supervise one of the numerous amateur art circles that had sprung up in factories and collective farms throughout the country. She became a member of a small work team ('Brigade') in the railway carriage assembly plant at *Ammendorf* in the Halle-Leuna-Bitterfeld area, the industrial heartland of the GDR. This work acquainted her with the actual conditions of production in the GDR, which were far less ideal than those celebrated in official speeches. It was becoming ever more apparent that the creation of socialism was going to be an uphill struggle: 1960 saw the completion of the SED's programme of land collectivization as well as harsh new industrial legislation. Social instability was becoming far greater, with the numbers of citizens leaving the GDR rising to an average of 20 000 a month in the years 1960-1961. For authors like Wolf who were still evolving a fictional response to 'Bitterfeld' in the early 1960s, it was impossible to ignore these social and economic problems, which had led to the construction of the Berlin Wall.

'Bitterfeld' had lasting consequences for Christa Wolf's future development. In opposition to the picture of automatic literary production envisaged by cultural apparatchiks, Wolf's participation in the *Bitterfelder Weg* intensified doubts as to whether such a direct involvement of the artist in industry could genuinely inspire artistic creation. Wolf became increasingly conscious that life and art are fundamentally linked. An author's

⁵⁵Christa Wolf, 'Die Literatur der neuen Etappe. Gedanken zum III. Schriftstellerkongreß', in *Neues Deutschland*, (20.6.1959, supplement no. 24). Quoted here from Hörnigk, p. 73.

personal biography, temperament and character are as indispensable an aspect of artistic creation as choice of subject matter, setting, or milieu, as Wolf suggested in 'Dienstag, der 27. September':

Wir kommen auf die Rolle der Erfahrung beim Schreiben und auf die Verantwortung, die man für den *Inhalt* seiner Erfahrung hat: Ob es einem aber frei steht, beliebige, vielleicht vom sozialen Standpunkt wünschenswerte Erfahrungen zu machen, für die man durch Herkunft und Charakterstruktur ungeeignet ist? Kennenlernen kann man vieles, natürlich. Aber *erfahren*? (GE, 22)

Wolf had been a student of literature and a literary critic for most of her adult life, and consequently she considered herself to be too much of an outsider to the world of industrial production to do justice to it in her writing. Even as a child she had turned to literature for enrichment and moral guidance, suggesting that the realm of her inner experiences had from an early age been decisively shaped by the concerns expressed in a literary context. *Bitterfeld* strengthened Wolf's confidence that the creative process was distinct from other social activity. In deciding that literature should only derive from immediate personal insights, Wolf paved the way for the increasing focus on aesthetic considerations in her work, gradually coming to understand that her own intellectual concerns also had wider social significance. 'Erfahrung' was to become a key concept in Wolf's thoughts on writing and the writer as she developed them from the mid-1960s onwards.⁵⁶ This also prepared the ground for Wolf's increasing determination to oppose the crude notion that literature could serve didactic or political purposes alien to its nature and act as a mouthpiece for ideology. Reflecting on the nature of the creative process and of the creative potential of the individual, Wolf was increasingly able in her later work to oppose the '*Bitterfeld*' idea that anyone can write, provided they have competently absorbed relevant techniques, rules, and guidelines. She recognized that the development of creative potential requires both aptitude and an inner predisposition that cannot be

⁵⁶See Karin McPherson, 'Christa Wolf's Prose and Essaywork of the 1960s', in G. Bartram and A. Waine (eds.), *Culture and Society in the GDR*, (Dundee, 1984), pp 51-58.

scientifically measured or ascertained but is nevertheless an integral aspect of the self. In fact, Wolf suggests an understanding of creative potential that seeks a middle way between the traditional topos of 'creative genius' as a God-given gift and the overly rational and functional view propagated by Party apparatchiks in the GDR. In her text 'Blickwechsel' of 1970, Wolf identifies the moment when she first became aware of this part of her own personality. She describes it as the sudden perception of an inner voice that is able to look beyond the self and its immediate personal experience, to express a larger, more fundamental and lasting truth. This consciously unfathomable aspect of her personality appeared to the young girl to be a "Fremdling", an alien being, whom she instinctively feared and thus rejected:

Nie vergaß ich, wann dieser Fremdling in mich gefahren war, der mich inzwischen gepackt hatte und nach Gutdünken mit mir verfuhr [...] der Fremdling in mir fraß um sich und wuchs, und womöglich würde er an meiner Stelle bald den Gehorsam verweigern. (GE, 10).

At the same time, it is through this unconscious aspect of her personality that she knows more than the person who is caught up in the immediacy of events: "Da sagte jemand in mir langsam und deutlich: Das siehst du niemals wieder." (GE, 10). By the early 1970s, Wolf was able to ascertain that her personal creative voice could only be liberated once she had integrated this aspect of her personality into her creative writing and lost her fear of expressing an inner truth which her conscious, socially-conditioned and conformist self might wish to suppress. In retrospect, she was able to understand that "Angst vor schwer kontrollierbaren Sprengkräften" (DdA I, 47) had stifled essential creative energy when she was writing her first literary work, *Moskauer Novelle*: "Auf dem Weg über Kopf, Arm, Hand, Federhalter, Maschine auf das Papier scheint nicht nur, wie bei Literatur nötig, eine Verwandlung, sondern ein Verlust an Energie stattgefunden zu haben." (DdA I, 47). In the course of the 1970s Wolf was to intensify her exploration of the complex interrelationships between outer and inner impediments to an author's ability to express himself fully and truthfully. This involved a shift away from the social level of exploring issues of truth and

honesty characteristic of her work up to *Der geteilte Himmel*. But it took a decade before Wolf arrived at an understanding of self as a multi-stranded, ruptured and split phenomenon that needed to be understood in its complexity. Only then did she begin to appreciate the interrelationships between outer, political impediments to the creative process and the even more dangerous internal process of self-censorship:

Der Mechanismus der Selbstzensur, der dem der Zensur folgt, ist gefährlicher als dieser: Er verinnerlicht Forderungen, die das Entstehen von Literatur verhindern können, und verwickelt manchen Autor in ein unfruchtbares und aussichtsloses Gerangel mit einander ausschließenden Geboten: daß er realistisch schreiben soll zum Beispiel und zugleich auf Konflikte verzichten; daß er wahrheitsgetreu schreiben soll, aber sich selbst nicht glauben, was er sieht, weil es nicht "typisch" sei. Ein Autor, der sich dieses Vorgangs nicht schärfstens bewußt bleibt und sein eigener unerbittlichster Kontrolleur ist, wird nachgeben, ausweichen, anfangen zu "wischen" [...]. (DdA II, 334).⁵⁷

Nevertheless, by the time Wolf began to write *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), she had gained sufficient confidence and maturity to refuse to write a literary work that would amount to little more than a programmatic celebration of industrial progress in the GDR. The experience of 'Bitterfeld' had strengthened her confidence that she should now be embarking on the task of achieving a distinctive voice of her own. It had also provided a satisfactory answer to her questions as to how art could aim to be socially effective. Refusing to write the apologetic literature desired by Party functionaries, Wolf was ready to take greater risks and to explore literature's potential as a medium which is challenging and provocative.

Although Wolf still made considerable concessions to the demands of the day in the way she structured *Der geteilte Himmel*, her work is already of a different aesthetic calibre from the mere 'Brigadegeschichten' of the early 'Bitterfeld' prose.⁵⁸ 'Dienstag, der

⁵⁷See also Wolf's conversation with Konstantin Simonow of 1973 which also addresses the issue of self-censorship, in DdA I, 145-163.

⁵⁸In the cultural history of the GDR, Brigitte Reimann's *Ankunft im Alltag* and Erik Neutsch's *Bitterfelder Geschichten*, both published in 1961, were acclaimed as accomplished responses to

27. September', a short prose text in diary-like form (written in 1960 between the completion of *Moskauer Novelle* and *Der geteilte Himmel*) shows that she was not satisfied with knowing in detail the main outline of the story, but continued to search for "die Überidee" which would allow the 'banal' socio-economic events to be transformed into a fictional work that transcended their immediate context: "Ich weiß, daß die wirkliche Arbeit erst beginnen wird, wenn die Überidee gefunden ist, die den banalen Stoff erzählbar und erzählenswert macht." (GE, 33) This 'Überidee' was provided by the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, a historical event which not only determined Germany's socio-political and economic future, but which also ruptured the lives and the identity of GDR citizens, their relationships, and their family ties. In writing *Der geteilte Himmel* Wolf sought to reconcile her inner conflict between a commitment to the idea of 'Parteilichkeit' and her growing personal interest in the examination of the moral, psychological and emotional impact of a historical event of such magnitude on the individual human being. Despite the compromises she made in observing the tenets of Socialist Realism, she strikes a balance, successfully combining a realistic presentation of the tensions and conflicts of life in the GDR with a more detailed examination of the inner experiences, motivations and dilemmas of her characters and raising questions also about GDR society's capacity to accommodate the emotional and psychological needs of its citizens.

Through her choice of protagonists Wolf is able to move beyond the remit of 'Bitterfeld' to include a portrayal of the élite world of academic life.⁵⁹ Within the rigid hierarchy of the university where Manfred works and the educational college where Rita studies she exposes a degree of reactionary and authoritarian thinking which will prove as damaging to a socialist future as the ideological bigotry of Party dogmatism. This world

Bitterfeld. Both works conformed to the Party's programme of celebrating industrial progress and the achievements of socialism in the GDR.

⁵⁹The original impetus for this decision may have come from Anna Seghers who, at the Fourth Writers' Congress in 1956 had rejected the notion that socialist society could be reduced to workers and peasants. She had pointed out that there were also administrative and technical employees, shopkeepers, teachers, artists, writers and scientists, many of whom had by no means overcome deeply internalized bourgeois modes of thinking. See Anna Seghers, 'Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewußtseinsbildung des Volkes', in *Protokoll des IV. Schriftstellerkongresses*, Deutscher Schriftstellerverband, (Berlin, 1956), p 52.

poses a threat to her female protagonist's commitment which is arguably greater than the contradictions and obstacles she encounters in the world of material production.⁶⁰ While Rita manages to integrate into the 'Brigade' and deeply identifies with its everyday struggles, she instinctively chooses to keep her distance from the hypocrisy and arrogance which dominates in the élite world of scientific research. It is significant that Rita emerges from the state of enchantment created by her love for Manfred, when she sees him entangled in the struggle for power and patronage that determines a person's professional success or failure in this sphere. (GH, 112). Wolf's criticism of the bourgeois values, the authoritarian behaviour patterns and the intellectual arrogance which characterize human interaction in this domain is unambiguous. The revolution in social relations envisaged by Marx has been replaced by an obsession with the 'scientific-technological revolution', which takes no account of the legacy of the past; only the end seems to matter, not the means by which it is achieved.

Der geteilte Himmel indicates that Wolf had gained an inner independence from the ideological positions of the Party and from Stalinist thinking by the early 1960s. This involved probing more deeply into the impact of the past on the socialist present. Manfred's scepticism and his deepening disillusionment with the GDR in the course of the 1950s, for instance, is shown to have its roots in the legacy of his middle-class background in German fascism. But it was not until the late 1980s that Wolf was able to refer unambiguously to the link between the fascist past and the impact of Stalinist indoctrination in the early years of the GDR's history. This had, for a while, blinded her generation to the absurdity of the notion that the transition from one system to the other could be accomplished within a few years:

Wenn ich von der heutigen Perspektive aus auf jene Jahre blicke, die ja durchaus von einem gewissen Hochgefühl getragen waren, von dem man sich ungern trennt, dann muß ich mich natürlich fragen, wie wir, aber eben nicht nur wir, gerade als Marxisten annehmen konnten, ein Volk, das sich nicht selbst vom Faschismus hatte befreien können (um

⁶⁰See also Dennis Tate, *The East German Novel*, (Bath, 1984), pp 110ff.

das mindeste zu sagen), könne sozusagen nahtlos, jedenfalls schnell, in eine sozialistische Gesellschaftsordnung 'überführt werden'. Schon allein dieser Anspruch hat, glaube ich, damals viele Leute weggetrieben.⁶¹ (My emphasis)

Wolf also touches in *Der geteilte Himmel* on other themes that were to play a much more prominent part in her works of the 1970s and 1980s, such as questions about the importance attached to science and technology in socialism. Through her portrayal of Rita Seidel, Wolf also gives an early indication of her interest in illuminating the specific experiences of women in socialist society. Rita differs markedly from the schematic portrayal of women as 'Heldinnen der Arbeit' in literary works of the 1950s⁶², since she is an interesting individual in her own right, not because she typifies the ideal socialist personality. Of even greater importance, perhaps, is the fact that it is the female protagonist who embodies the qualities that can accommodate the emotional and psychological needs of a distressed person like Manfred, allowing him, albeit only temporarily, to open up to the possibility of change and offering a potential escape from destructive childhood patterns of behaviour and thought: "Euridike holt Orpheus aus dem Schattenreich." (GH, 64) But since society at large is shown to be lacking in this respect, Rita alone cannot prevent Manfred's descent into utter cynicism. Wolf raises important questions about society's ability to offer the emotional and psychological support that might prevent the loss of individuals like Manfred who could, potentially, make a valuable contribution to it. While Wolf's condemnation of Manfred's decision to opt for a materially more rewarding life in the West is unequivocal, he is shown to deserve the author's, and the reader's, understanding. His 'failure' to integrate into socialist society is explored in terms both of his personal failure and of society's failure to acknowledge the totality of human experience, including its emotional, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. Wolf's insistence on this totality of human experience is amplified by her endorsement of the need

⁶¹Hörnigk, p 23.

⁶²See Patricia Herminhouse, 'Wunschbild, Vorbild oder Porträt? Zur Darstellung der Frau im Roman der DDR', in Hohendahl/Herminhouse, *Literatur und Literaturtheorie in der DDR*, (Frankfurt, 1976), pp 281-334. Also, Margy Gerber, "'Wie hoch ist eigentlich der Preis der Emanzipation". Social Issues in Recent GDR women's writing', in *GDR Monitor*, (no. 16, 1986/87), pp 55-83.

to grieve over a personal loss, the pain of separation, and the failure of a loving relationship, even though society at large is faced by monumental historical tasks. Five years after Wolf wrote *Der geteilte Himmel* she had gained the confidence to describe this realm, the inner life and psychology of the individual, as the primary concern of literature.⁶³

Many of the themes and issues which Wolf addresses in *Der geteilte Himmel* were developed and explored with greater skill and accomplishment in her later works, with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* marking a decisive turning point in her aesthetic emancipation from the discourses of the state. Nevertheless, *Der geteilte Himmel* is a work which will continue to be of lasting historical value to readers in Germany and beyond. For Wolf personally, this work constituted a necessary step towards greater independence, but also towards her determination to seek an open, public debate about the issues and contradictions which her work addresses. In contradistinction to the official Party line in the early 1960s, which maintained that truth needed to be communicated to the public at large in carefully measured doses in order to safeguard socialist progress, Wolf insisted that the breakthrough to a pluralist socialist society had to be made now, in the light of the failure which had led to the construction of the Wall. Together with fellow critical intellectuals she was adamant that the imperfections of the system should now become the subject of public debate. In the narrative, this conviction is expressed by Rita's tutor Erwin Schwarzenbach, a committed socialist whose words are the antithesis of the unproductive dogmatism of Party ideologues, "Die reine nackte Wahrheit, und nur sie, ist auf die Dauer der Schlüssel zum Menschen. Warum sollen wir unseren entscheidenden Vorteil freiwillig aus der Hand legen?" (GH, 186).

The wide popular appeal of *Der geteilte Himmel* became evident when the first book edition which followed the story's serialization in the student magazine *Forum* had sold out before it reached the bookshops (in one year, a total of 160 000 copies were sold). The interest in the critical community was equally strong, but soon qualified by

⁶³See Wolf's essay on Anna Seghers, 'Glauben an Irdisches' (1968), in *Lesen und Schreiben*, pp 115-43, p 137.

serious criticism. While Wolf's literary achievement was undisputed, she was criticized for lack of ideological clarity and conviction. One early review even went so far as to accuse the author of a "dekadente Lebensauffassung".⁶⁴ Broadly speaking, the book's reception fell into rather predictable categories of appreciation of the work's modernity and expression of the needs of a younger generation on the one hand, and criticism of it for falling short of established Socialist Realist principles and ideological demands on the other.⁶⁵ Despite the dogmatic convictions of some critics, however, the debate itself proved most stimulating and encouraging to the younger intellectuals who welcomed the opportunity it provided to press for much-needed change. The debate continued into the early part of 1964 (it overlapped with the equally prominent debate over Erwin Strittmatter's *Ole Bienkopp*, which was also published in 1963) and increasingly developed in the direction of support for Wolf's approach, which was recognized as a necessary contribution to a process of open and critical 'Selbstverständigung' within GDR society at large. In 1963 Wolf was placed on the list of candidates for the Central Committee of the SED, indicating that the Party could no longer ignore the prominence she had assumed in the public arena. A year later, she was awarded the 'Nationalpreis III. Klasse' in recognition of her achievement.

The debate played a crucial role in boosting the confidence of young writers that matters were bound to change for the better, and the general consensus was that a good degree of flexibility had been established in the understanding of what Socialist Realism meant. The Party's announcement of comprehensive internal reforms at the SED's Sixth Parteitag in January 1963 in the form of the 'Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung' (NÖS), which had recognized the importance of individual initiatives in promoting social progress, had added to the new hopes of reform. For Wolf personally, the groundswell of support which her work had received signalled the beginning of a

⁶⁴Dietrich Allert and Hubert Wetzelt, in Martin Reso (ed.), *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker*, (Halle, 1965), pp 78-85, p 84.

⁶⁵A selection of the critical responses to *Der geteilte Himmel* is provided in Martin Reso, *Der geteilte Himmel und seine Kritiker*.

period of greater confidence and strengthened her resolve to stand up for her aesthetic and ideological goals.

Wolf was convinced at this point that she was not alone in her determination to liberate herself from the dogma of the Party and its loyal servants. She felt integrated into a community of like-minded intellectuals and, since Bitterfeld, she was confident that the hopes of reform extended across all sectors of GDR society:

Wir sahen verschiedene Strömungen in der Gesellschaft.
Wir hatten das Gefühl, die Realität bewege sich auf Dauer
in die gleiche Richtung wie wir, und wir könnten,
zusammen mit den Leuten aus der Wirtschaft, aus der
Wissenschaft dieser progressiven Richtung zum
Durchbruch verhelfen. [...] viele von uns [waren] in
Betrieben, [schlossen] Freundschaften mit Leuten aus
Brigaden, mit Wirtschaftsfunktionären, [bekamen] Einblick
in ökonomische Prozesse und Widersprüche.⁶⁶

Thus it was from a position of strength that Wolf addressed the Second Bitterfeld Conference in April 1964. By then, writers' initial hopes that the introduction of NÖS would lead to genuine reforms had diminished, since it was clear that the Party had effectively inhibited the emergence of a genuine proletarian literature.⁶⁷ Adopting an aggressive anti-dogmatic line, Christa Wolf reiterated her insistence on the autonomy of artistic creation and spoke out against ideological restrictions, unrealistic didactic demands and inappropriate aesthetic expectations. (DdA I, 384-394) Starting from the presupposition that GDR writers' aims were fundamentally in accord with the development of society towards socialism, Wolf was adamant that the system must now be prepared to face up to its imperfections and bring conflicts out into the open, whether they related to

⁶⁶Hörnigk, pp 30-31.

⁶⁷Wolfgang Emmerich has observed that official GDR cultural policies effectively urged the literary community to bring its aims in line with the principles of NÖS. Once again, the Party endeavoured to use literary creation to serve its goals of promoting economic and scientific progress above all else: "[...] tatsächlich erfährt der kulturelle Bereich in diesen Jahren eine noch stärkere Instrumentalisierung, ja regelrechte Ökonomisierung als vorher. Ziel ist das 'ökonomische' Kunstwerk, d.h. ein solches, dessen bewußtseinsbildende Leistung in einem adäquaten Verhältnis zu den aufgewandten Mitteln steht. Der Schriftsteller soll nicht schlechthin 'sozialistische Persönlichkeiten' im Kontext der 'sozialistischen Menschengemeinschaft' darstellen, sondern [...] vorzüglich Planer und Leiter, die den generellen Prozeß der Produktivitätssteigerung beispielhaft voranbringen." Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, revised edition, (Leipzig, 1996), p 187.

society at large or the individual. Wolf stressed that an author's sense of public responsibility could not derive from an external authority, but must invariably be the result of personal moral convictions.

Wolf's speech received the enthusiastic support of her audience. Franz Fühmann's open letter to the Minister of Culture which was published in an edited version in March of that year in the Party organ *Neues Deutschland* certainly confirms that Wolf's views were shared by her colleagues in the intellectual community. Fühmann's linking of writers' individuality to the quality of the literature they produce would certainly have found favour with Wolf:

In den letzten Jahren wurde Großartiges getan, die schöpferischen Kräfte aller Schichten unserer Bevölkerung zu entwickeln und unserm Kulturleben eine breite Basis zu geben. Nun scheint mir, ohne diese Bemühungen aufzugeben, die Zeit gekommen, entschieden auf die Hebung der Qualität in Literatur und Kunst, auf eine Erhöhung des Kulturniveaus, auf international nicht zu übersehende Spitzenleistungen hinzuwirken.

Ich glaube an eine bestimmte Qualität der Form-Inhalt-Verbindung, die Geschriebenes erst zur Literatur macht, und an objektive, im gesamten Literaturschaffen der Menschheit verbindliche und nicht allein auf Themenwahl oder Massenwirksamkeit beruhende Kriterien dieser Qualität. Um diese Qualität mache ich mir Sorgen.⁶⁸

The issue of quality had also preoccupied Anna Seghers during the early 1960s, as her speech at the Fifth Writers' Congress in May 1961, entitled 'Die Tiefe und Breite in der Literatur', confirms. Seghers had established that in order to attain both depth and quality, socialist writers needed to be given the freedom to make full use of their observations and of their experiences, whether these were aspects of their conscious or subconscious mind. Wolf later recapitulated these ideas in the first comprehensive statement of her prose theory in her 1968 essay *Lesen und Schreiben*.

⁶⁸Franz Fühmann, 'Brief an den Minister für Kultur', first published in abridged form in *Neues Deutschland*, 24 March 1964 and in full in *In eigener Sache. Briefe von Künstlern und Schriftstellern*, (Halle/Saale, 1964). Quoted here from Franz Fühmann, *Wandlung. Wahrheit. Würde. Aufsätze und Gespräche, 1964-1981*, edited by Klaus Siblewski, (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1985), pp 7-16, p 7.

Throughout the first half of this decade, Christa Wolf experimented with new ways of writing in a determined endeavour to promote the development of forms of artistic expression which encouraged subjectivity and an independent personal perspective without losing sight of the artist's public responsibility. Only as autonomous individuals would writers be able to "[...] der Literatur geben, was der Literatur ist [...] und den Raum, der ihr gebührt, der Literatur in der Gesellschaft erkämpfen."⁶⁹ Moreover, the literature which she envisaged would encourage her readers to discover and acknowledge their individuality:

[...] ich wünsche mir oft, die Literatur wäre etwas wie ein Zauberstab, ihn [den Menschen, RR], sie alle zu erlösen: Die toten Seelen zum Leben zu erwecken, ihnen Mut zu sich selbst zu machen, zu ihren oft unbewußten Träumen, Sehnsüchten und Fähigkeiten ...(DdA I, 12)

As a result of Wolf's success with *Der geteilte Himmel*, which established her as an author not only in the communist East but also in the capitalist West, she was able to travel more widely from the early 1960s, permitting her to form friendships with West German authors and to become more familiar with literary trends and theories in the West. This will have had some bearing on her growing interest in more unorthodox, modernist forms of writing, such as fragmentary narrative forms and open endings, as alternatives to the Socialist Realist adherence to a story (*Fabel*) which can be told in straightforward chronological third-person narrative. Instead of the Socialist Realist insistence on the typical, Wolf advocates that literature should be concerned with the individual human being and with the atypical, the "Abweichende" (DdA I, 1964, 392). In terms of character depiction, she begins, with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968), to focus on the portrayal of restless and sensitive individuals who are neither content nor, indeed, capable of moving with monotonous predictability within pre-determined social orbits:

Es ist ein großer Gedanke, daß der Mensch nicht zur Ruhe kommt, ehe er zu sich selber gefunden hat. Die tiefe Wurzel der Übereinstimmung zwischen echter Literatur

⁶⁹Hörnigk, p 30.

und der sozialistischen Gesellschaft sehe ich eben darin:
Beide haben das Ziel, dem Menschen zu seiner
Selbstverwirklichung zu verhelfen. Die Literatur nimmt
sich, wie unsere Gesellschaft, gerade der Unruhigen an.
Menschen darzustellen, denen diese Unruhe fremd ist:
Selbstzufriedene, Platte, allzu Anpassungsfähige - das
erscheint mir langweiliger und unergiebig.
(‘Selbstinterview’, DdA I, 1966, 33)

As her statements at the Second Bitterfeld Conference indicated, Wolf was conscious that the literature she envisaged would make new demands on the writer:

Ich bin der Meinung, daß man zum Beispiel als
Trapezkünstler unbedingt mit Seil, Schutzgürtel und Netz
arbeiten muß. Aber wenn man schreibt - auf welchem
Gebiet auch immer -, kann man nicht mit Netz arbeiten; da
muß man schon ein kleines Risiko eingehen, das aber mit
Verantwortung verbunden sein soll. (DdA I, 1964, 394).

The risks which Wolf had in mind will undoubtedly have included the potential political repercussions of straying from the officially sanctioned path of Socialist Realist doctrine, such as censorship, delays or complete bans on publication, and even intimidation and imprisonment. Despite the greater room for manoeuvre which writers and artists above all of the younger generations had experienced since 1961⁷⁰, there were clear signs that the Party had no real intention of slackening the reins. The delays in the publication of Heiner Müller's works and the bans imposed on the performance of his plays, Peter Huchel's dismissal as editor of *Sinn und Form* in 1962 and Walter Ulbricht's renewed attacks on so-called 'modernist tendencies' in GDR literature in the aftermath of the 1963 Kafka conference, may serve as examples to illustrate this point. Wolf personally became the target of official restraints soon after the debates about *Der geteilte Himmel* had subsided. Her successful collaboration with Konrad Wolf in the production of a film version of this text (produced by DEFA, scripted by Christa, Gerhard und Konrad Wolf, W. Brückner, and Kurt Barthel) inspired her to embark on further joint ventures with the Moscow-born

⁷⁰Goodbody et al, 'The failed socialist experiment', in Burns, pp 167 ff.

film director. However, her next project in 1964 had to be abandoned in view of increasing indications of a swing back towards greater ideological control after Khrushchev's fall from power. A later attempt to continue their partnership with a film entitled 'Fräulein Schmetterling' was foiled by the ban imposed in the wake of the Eleventh Plenum in 1965.

This should not tempt us to view the emergence of a subjectively oriented literature in the GDR during this period merely in terms of a reaction against an authoritarian and highly functionalist cultural policy. On the contrary, it is important to bear in mind that the relatively public debates of the early 1960s had resulted in a feeling of movement, of greater confidence and openness among writers which encouraged aesthetic and poetological experimentation and personal independence. According to Christa Wolf's retrospective assessment, writers had the sense of being swept along on a wave of optimism and confidence that they could and indeed already were making a difference. The mutual support, the encouragement and the solidarity which characterized relationships within the critical intellectual community helped individual artists to cope with the outer restrictions which still prevailed: "Die meiste Zeit hatten wir ja doch das Gefühl eines Rückenwindes, wenn der manchmal auch ganz schwach erschien."⁷¹ The mere fact that Christa Wolf had the confidence to branch out into experimenting with film as a medium which could effectively complement literature is an indication that, on the whole, artists of her generation were determined to demonstrate their talent and their commitment in as many different fields as they could. I would suggest, furthermore, that Wolf's interest in film during this period sprang from her desire to unburden literature of some of its more conventional functions, pointing already towards the argument she put forward in *Lesen und Schreiben* (1968) that prose should be exclusively concerned with the more reflective, moral and psychological dimension of individual experience and should "[...] danach streben, unverfilmbar zu sein." (DdA II, 25)

When Wolf had suggested at the Second Bitterfeld Conference that the writer must be prepared to work without a safety net, she was indicating that the literature she was

⁷¹Hörnigk, p 30.

interested in developing would make fundamentally new and challenging demands on the writer. These ideas in fact already anticipated her definition of the principle of 'subjective authenticity' in literature which she first outlined in a conversation with Hans Kaufmann in 1973:

Allerdings setzt sie [die durchaus 'eingreifende Schreibweise', RR] ein hohes Maß an Subjektivität voraus, ein Subjekt, das bereit ist, sich seinem Stoff rückhaltlos [...] zu stellen, das Spannungsverhältnis auf sich zu nehmen, das dann unvermeidlich wird, auf die Verwandlungen neugierig zu sein, die Stoff und Autor dann erfahren. (DdA II, 324)

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, the lasting impact of discovering the truth about Stalinism played a far greater role in encouraging Wolf's determination to remain true to her personal experience in her writing than changes in cultural policy in the GDR of the 1960s did: "Ich wollte wissen, wo ich lebe."⁷² In their search for authenticity and truth beyond the limitations of officially controlled public discourses, Wolf and her colleagues made personal headway by exploring the potential of private forms of communication, particularly the diary: "Wir lesen Akten, Briefsammlungen, Memoiren, Biographien. Und: Tagebücher. Wir wollen Authentizität. Nicht belehrt - unterrichtet wünscht man zu sein." (DdA I, 1964, 14). Both as a reader and as a writer she was interested, from the early 1960s onwards, in developing the diary's potential as a hitherto insufficiently tapped source of creative inspiration. Through establishing a close interconnection between the diary as an expression of authentic, subjective experience and her own writing, Wolf intended to ensure that her work would derive from genuine "Lebensstoff" (DdA I, 1964, 20). This method would permit her to come closer to bridging the gap between art and life, between 'Leben' and 'Schreiben'. Wolf's essay 'Tagebuch - Arbeitsmittel und Gedächtnis' (1964) is a first public statement of her preoccupation with the diary and also with diary-like, autobiographical forms of expression which later developed into a major strand of her writing.

⁷²Hörnigk, p 29.

Wolf deployed a slightly different line of argument in her essay in order to show that the authentic, unmediated experiences of individual human beings expressed in their diaries are as worthy of public reflection as the ideas expressed in more accomplished literary works: "Wir sind mißtrauisch geworden gegen Erfindungen über das Innenleben unserer Mitmenschen. Außerdem: die Wirklichkeit hat sich als unübertrefflich gezeigt. Wenn auch nicht als unübertrefflich schön." (DdA I, 1964, 14). There were times, she argued, such as in the case of David Rabinowicz, a young Polish Jew murdered by the Nazis, when no other form of expression can be as truthful and incorruptible a witness to a "[...] heillose Epoche und ihre verheerendsten Untaten" (DdA I, 1964, 16) as the diary form. Furthermore, Wolf argues, the "Banalität des Bösen", of the fascist past, can only be adequately countered with the historicisation of the most minute details of the "Banalität des Guten", of seemingly mundane, banal experiences and moral conflicts experienced every day in the socialist present. (DdA I, 1964, 20).

However, the ultimate purpose of Wolf's essay is to make a case for literature in the GDR to become closely entwined with authentic subjective experience. Pointing to the direction which her own aesthetic interests were taking, she particularly emphasized the diary's special capacity to reflect the experiences of creative individuals. The diaries of colleagues or forebears, for instance, allow the reader who is also a writer access to information about particular tensions, moral dilemmas and contradictions which the person concerned, for a combination of personal and public reasons, probably did not express as frankly and spontaneously in other areas of their work. In the light of this information, the reader can view her own experiences from a wider historical perspective and thus gain greater insights into them. But it not only encourages empathy: it also allows the reader to gain an objective understanding, in the light of her own particular circumstances, of the experiences of fellow creative individuals, creating a dialectical relationship based both on proximity and distance. These ideas were clearly relevant to Wolf's work on *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (They became even more important again during the late 1970s when the experiences of particular forebears helped her to overcome a period of extreme crisis). But they also point beyond this work towards a more fundamentally significant aim in all of

Christa Wolf's writing, namely her determination to make a personal contribution to the transformation (in the manner in which Marx had envisaged it) of human relationships in a socialist context. In the context of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and in her later works (particularly in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Kassandra*) as well as in Wolf's reception of other writers in general, this has taken the form of the author's determined effort to avoid the pitfalls of an authoritarian perspective which would inevitably fail to do justice to his/her individuality.

Wolf's reflections on the diary as an essential aid for the writer are closely related to this aim. Over and above the more obvious uses of the diary as a reservoir which can store all manner of observations and thoughts, including the most intimate and private reflections, she stresses its particular value as a vehicle for promoting greater self-knowledge, counteracting socially and culturally-reinforced processes of self-alienation. Viewed in conjunction with Wolf's increasingly critical scrutiny of the workings of self-censorship in the course of the 1970s, her reflections here already anticipate the diary's uses as a means of preserving her unpremeditated, uncensored thoughts which might otherwise disappear and thus play no part in the creative process:

Beim Übergang vom laienhaften zum berufsmäßigen Schreiben gehen in dem schreibenden Subjekt, während es zum Autor wird, Veränderungen vor (nennen wir nur den Verlust von Naivität im Sinne von Unschuld), die um so gefährlicher werden, je später man sie bemerkt, und denen nur durch energische und schonungslose Gegensteuerung einigermaßen zu begegnen ist (DdA I, 1973, 44-45)

Despite her extensive engagement with the diary as both an aid for the writer and as a literary form during this period, Wolf does not go beyond brief, diary-like sketches in her own writing at this point,⁷³ viewing the diary specifically as "Vorfabrikat, Halbfabrikat [...] Nie aber ist an Veröffentlichung gedacht, nie wäre daran zu denken [...]." (DdA I,

⁷³For an extensive and revealing discussion of Wolf's engagement with the diary form during the 1960s, see Karin McPherson, ' "Der Himmel teilt sich zuallererst" - Weltanschauliche Wandlungen bei Christa Wolf von den fünfziger zu den sechziger Jahren', in *German Monitor*, (no. 29, 1992) pp 46-57.

1964, 21) This is particularly interesting, since, only a year later, she explicitly encourages Gerti Tetzner, a burgeoning author four years her junior, to put the diary-form to more extensive use:

Beim Lesen Ihrer Tagebuchauszüge habe ich oft gedacht, daß diese Tagebuchform vielleicht am geeignetsten ist, unmittelbar und ohne den Verlust an Direktheit, der bei einer literarischen Umformung fast unvermeidlich ist, Ihr Anliegen auszudrücken.⁷⁴

One of the many possible explanations for Wolf's lack of interest at this stage in the diary as a basis for her own work is the fact that she had only recently fully abandoned Socialist Realist norms and was interested in exploring a whole host of different literary forms which had potential value in helping her to develop an authentic subjective form of writing. Given that she had now begun work on *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, she was clearly not yet ready to commit herself more exclusively to the diary form. This seems to be borne out by the fact that Wolf begins, in conjunction with *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, to focus specifically on the possibilities of the essay as a way of complementing and supplementing a particular work of fiction ('Selbstinterview' was the first of many later essays written in conjunction with a particular prose work). Wolf continued to explore, along with other literary forms, the possibilities of the essay as a more restrained and more widely established genre that, like the prose work itself, could express *Erfahrung*:

Insofern unterscheiden sich bei mir die einander ablösenden (oder einander durchdringenden) prosaistischen und essayistischen Äußerungen nicht grundsätzlich voneinander. Ihre gemeinsame Wurzel ist Erfahrung, die zu bewältigen ist: Erfahrung mit dem "Leben" [...] Prosa und Essay sind unterschiedliche Instrumente, um unterschiedlichem Material beizukommen, zu verschiedenen, doch nicht einander entgegengesetzten oder einander ausschließenden Zwecken. (DdA II, 1973, 318-319)

⁷⁴Werner Lirsch (ed.), *Was zählt, ist die Wahrheit. Briefe von Schriftstellern in der DDR*, (Halle/Saale, 1975), letter of 23 August 1965, pp 14-18. p 15. See also DdA I, pp 111-132, p 115

The diary form assumes renewed importance in Wolf's work during the late 1970s, particularly in the context of her more exclusive focus on specifically feminine forms of writing. In her exploration of a variety of literary forms during the early 1960s we see an early indication of the author's fundamentally open and flexible attitude towards conventional genre delineations as she endeavours to develop new ways of writing.

Wolf's short prose text 'Juninachmittag' (1965), which is written in a diary-like form, must count as the most extensive and accomplished of her shorter prose texts of the 1960s. The opening lines of the narrative immediately signal to the reader that this text will not satisfy conventional expectations: "Eine Geschichte? Etwas Festes, Greifbares, wie ein Topf mit zwei Henkeln, zum Anfassen und zum Daraus-Trinken? / Eine Vision vielleicht [...]." (GE, 34) The material is organized around the reflections, thought-fragments and idle musings of a central figure who is soon identified as a woman, a knowledgeable reader, a mother and a wife. The reader is granted access to the intimate personal sphere of the central character, viewing her light-hearted and playful engagement with members of her family. He/she is also permitted to become a witness to the central character's superficial as well as her more philosophical deliberations. There is hardly any story-line or action, the narrative is dominated by her reflections and pervaded by her distinctive narrative voice. The outside world of political and social reality has receded into the background, literally fenced out by the garden walls. When it does intrude upon the lives of the characters, it is shown to do so in a threatening, unwelcome manner which disturbs an otherwise almost idyllic existence. There are glimpses of the wider political context in which the story is set, but the author relies entirely on the reader to make the relevant connections between the private and the public world.

'Juninachmittag' heralded an aesthetic turning point in Christa Wolf's work. Its modern, open-ended narrative structure and its intimate, subjective tone signalled unmistakably that Wolf had left behind the narrow constraints of orthodox GDR literature and had found her personal, independent way forward. Within a few years, between 1963 and 1965, Christa Wolf had undergone a rapid learning process in the

course of which she was able to extensively explore her personal creative potential in a variety of different ways. In later years she returned to some of these options, expressing herself in the literary form most suited to her particular purpose at a given moment. It is against this background of Wolf's predominantly positive experiences within the cultural environment of the GDR up to the middle of the 1960s that we must view both her aesthetic triumphs and her personal disappointments during the years which followed. These experiences go a considerable way towards explaining Wolf's lasting commitment to GDR society, particularly in view of the fact that, until the middle of the 1960s, she was able both to satisfy her desire for aesthetic emancipation and to fulfil her public and moral responsibilities as a writer.

In the mid-1960s, matters in the cultural sphere took a considerable turn for the worse. The Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in December 1965 abruptly terminated the tentative reforms of the previous years and reinstated the Party's strict adherence to bureaucratic centralism. The previous month, Wolf had been among a group of artists and writers who had been summoned by Walter Ulbricht to an informal gathering between Party functionaries and artists which presaged the attacks and accusations which followed at the Plenum itself. The latter was without doubt a carefully planned comprehensive attack by the Party on the cultural sphere, designed to put a stop to all the democratic endeavours which writers, film directors, publishers, and cultural officials had initiated. The cultural policy of Party functionaries was now even more explicitly and dogmatically stated than in the early years of the Republic: only literature which supported the wider political and economic goals of the SED would be considered acceptable. In order to achieve its goals, the Party was prepared, it seemed, to scapegoat the cultural domain to deflect attention from its own failings. In Christa Wolf's personal assessment, the Plenum also served the specific purpose of isolating the arts from other sectors of society, particularly from the world of material production and economic decision-making. The Plenum dealt a serious blow to Wolf and her colleagues whose understanding hitherto had been that they could directly influence social developments in the GDR through an open reflection of existing tensions and contradictions:

[...] als klar wurde, daß die Verbindung der Künstler mit den Betrieben dazu führte, daß sie realistisch sahen, was dort los war, daß sie Freundschaften mit Arbeitern, mit Betriebsleitern und mit Leuten anderer Berufe knüpften und daß sie Bescheid zu wissen begannen auch über die ökonomische Realität in diesem Land: Da, genau an diesem Punkt, wurde die Bitterfelder Konferenz, wurden die Möglichkeiten, die sie uns eröffnet hatte, ganz rigoros beschnitten. Es gibt auf dem 11. Plenum dazu immer wieder Hinweise [...] Damit wurde die Möglichkeit zur Einmischung durch Kunst, die wir vehement ergriffen hatten und die wir gar nicht so schlecht fanden, gekippt.⁷⁵

At the Plenum, Christa Wolf was practically the only person who spoke out against the Party's defamatory statements which asserted, amongst other things, that the Writers' Union had acted as a GDR version of the 'Petöfi Club' (the forum of Hungarian intellectuals whose debates had helped prepare the ground for the October uprising in 1956). Wolf expressed genuine concern for the future credibility of GDR literature, pleading for the clock not to be turned back on the achievements of recent years. These, Wolf reminded her audience, had, after all, been the result of a more liberal climate which had raised the profile of GDR literature and film both at home and abroad :

Die Erfahrung zeigt: Welche Bücher, Stücke und Filme haben in den letzten Jahren im Westen - als Sammelbegriff - gewirkt? Die Bücher und Filme und die Stücke, die unser Gesicht zeigen. [...] Ich bitte [...] darum, daß versucht wird, die Errungenschaften, die wirklich da sind, daß die auch gesehen werden und daß man sie aufrechterhält. Ich finde, unsere einzige Aufgabe ist in der nächsten Zeit, daß wir durch gute Bücher zeigen, durch Filme usw., daß unsere Gesellschaftsordnung, unsere Weltanschauung es ist, die den Schriftstellern die größten, die tiefsten Einblicke in die Gesellschaft gibt.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Christa Wolf, 'Erinnerungsbericht', in Günter Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965*, (Berlin, 1991), pp 263-272, p 269. See also Therese Hörnigk's seminal essay, '... aber schreiben kann man dann nicht'. Über die Auswirkungen politischer Eingriffe in künstlerische Prozesse', in *ibid.*, pp 231-240.

⁷⁶Christa Wolf, 'Diskussionsbeitrag', in Agde, *Kahlschlag*, pp 334-344, p 337.

Wolf spoke on behalf of GDR writers and film-makers, finding an inner strength which, in retrospect, she has attributed to the shock of realizing that the Party would stop at nothing in order to subject artists and writers in the GDR fully to its control, even if this amounted to an attack on their personal integrity and the destruction of their ability to work in the GDR: "Aber es mußte passieren, daß ich so von innen her sehen konnte, wie der Mechanismus funktioniert.[...]. Als ich dort rauskam - ich weiß noch ganz genau, was ich dachte, als ich die Treppe runterging: die Hände weggeschlagen."⁷⁷

Wolf's personal courage in taking a stand indicates that she had found the inner freedom and strength to accept the repercussions which her opposition was likely to incur. In fact, she demonstrated that particular kind of resilience and determination which, over the years, made her into a formidable internal opponent of the Party leadership. The subsequent difficulties which Wolf experienced with the publication of her prose work *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, and her rejection as a candidate for the Central Committee in 1967 gave her a first taste of the manner in which the Party penalized dissident voices.⁷⁸ Both the Plenum and its consequences were traumatic experiences for Wolf: "Meine Existenz in diesem Land als gesellschaftliches Wesen wurde in Frage gestellt, ich habe danach längere Zeit gebraucht, um wieder schreibfähig zu werden."⁷⁹ In spite of this, however, their ultimate impact on Wolf's development was liberating. The bitter struggle to get *Nachdenken über Christa T.* published provided further clarity about the gulf which separated Wolf's position from that of Party functionaries:

[...] in diesen Auseinandersetzungen, in denen ich mich lange abmühte, meine Angreifer davon zu überzeugen, daß ich doch dasselbe wollte wie sie, wuchs mir eine hilfreiche Einsicht: Ich begriff auf einmal, daß ich *nicht* dasselbe wollte wie sie, daß sie sich durch mein Buch bedroht

⁷⁷Christa Wolf, 'Auf mir bestehen', in Vinke, p 249.

⁷⁸For a very detailed documentation and discussion of the problems which Christa Wolf experienced with the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* between March 1967 and 1972, see Angela Drescher (ed.), *Dokumentation zu Christa Wolf "Nachdenken über Christa T."*, (Hamburg and Zurich, 1991).

⁷⁹Hörnigk, p 32.

fühlten und darum so heftig reagierten. Danach ging es mir besser.⁸⁰

This realization that her own ideological perspective was clearly not in accordance with the political programme of Party functionaries cleared up a fundamental misconception which Wolf and many of her colleagues had hitherto entertained. Once she had become conscious of the rift which actually separated her personal political aims from those of Party functionaries, she was able to let go of the self-imposed burden that she had to fulfil a political role in the system. While this in no way affected her sense of responsibility as a socialist and a Marxist, it created a new sense of inner freedom to pursue her task as a writer more openly: "Ich brauchte anscheinend ziemlich scharfe, schwere Geschütze, damit Verdrängtes in einer heftigen Eruption hervorkommen konnte. Danach war ich offener und hab mit einer neuen Unbefangenheit schreiben können, über die ich mich heute fast wundere."⁸¹ Ultimately, therefore, the new perspective Wolf had gained on matters released fresh creative energy: "Das Bedürfnis, auf eine neue Art zu schreiben, folgt, wenn auch mit Abstand, einer neuen Art, in der Welt zu sein." (DdA II, 1968, 7)

With *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, which was written in the aftermath of the Plenum, Wolf struck a new, confident and unmistakably sharp tone. It is a book about self-assertion and subjectivity which insists on the possibility of reconciling the realization of socialism with that of the individual. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is the first of Wolf's narratives which explicitly treats the theme of the self-realization of the individual from Wolf's perspective as a writer striving for the same goal through her writing. Wolf's narrative openly poses the question about the extent to which a socialist intellectual who lives and writes in an as yet imperfect socialist society can achieve personal happiness without either neglecting or betraying her socialist principles and her moral responsibilities. The narrative presents biographical and autobiographical elements in a complex, non-linear narrative structure based entirely on reflection. Through an

⁸⁰Loc cit.

⁸¹Quoted from the introduction to Drescher, *Dokumentation*, p 9.

exploration of the tensions and confrontations, the affinities and the discrepancies in the complex relationship between the narrator and the central character of the book, the author is able to achieve greater self-knowledge:

[ich merkte], daß das Objekt meiner Erzählung gar nicht so eindeutig sie, Christa T., war oder blieb. Ich stand auf einmal mir selbst gegenüber, das hatte ich nicht vorhergesehen. Die Beziehungen zwischen "uns" - der Christa T. und dem Ich-Erzähler - rückten ganz von selbst in den Mittelpunkt: die Verschiedenheit der Charaktere und ihre Berührungspunkte, die Spannungen zwischen "uns" und ihre Auflösung, oder das Ausbleiben der Auflösung. (DdA I, 1966, 32)

The self-questioning and self-exploratory tone of the narrative is designed to break down internal barriers which hinder the individual from gaining self-knowledge: "Ich schreibe, suchend." (DdA I, 1966, 31) The latter, according to Christa Wolf, is a necessary precondition for self-realization which, in turn, has been a fundamental aim of Wolf's writing: "Eine der wichtigsten Voraussetzungen für das Entstehen von Literatur ist [...] Sehnsucht nach Selbstverwirklichung: daher der Zwang des Aufschreibens, als vielleicht einzige Möglichkeit des Autors, sich nicht zu verfehlen [...]." (DdA II, 1968, 42)

Since both the narrator and the central character of the book are women, Wolf's narrative examines the problems of being a writer also from the perspective of the conditions under which women write. Although the text does not explicitly thematize the issue of feminism, there are clear indications that Wolf was at this stage already well aware of the issues which were brought to public attention in the West through the women's movement during the 1960s. Thus the problems which Christa T. experiences in her search for self-realization are inseparably linked to the fact that she is a woman whose choices and opportunities in society are limited through the existence of conventional gender role expectations and definitions.

As in 'Juninachmittag', the guiding structural principle of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is the process of reflection conducted by a central figure, the narrator. The text

recapitulates themes and issues of Wolf's earlier prose works, such as the impact of the past on present social reality and key experiences of her generation in the more immediate history of the GDR. On the basis of her personal, authentic experiences, the author fundamentally questions the assumptions she had made hitherto about her generation's responses to social history. In contrast to *Der geteilte Himmel*, where the issue of the past and its impact on present social reality was treated in simplified categories, viewing it as a problem of those who had actively supported fascism, the perspective in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* has shifted to focus explicitly on the contradictions which this past had given rise to for Wolf's generation. Although Wolf does not yet explicitly look at points of continuity between the fascist past and the years of Stalinization in the GDR, this issue is already looming in the background, pointing to the more intensive treatment it was to receive in years to come. Through writing Wolf gradually, but persistently, approached this issue as an aspect of her treatment of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', helping to explain the contradictions in her generation's development and probing the blind spots which the system had failed to address from the very outset.

With *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Wolf shifted her focus far more exclusively than before to an examination of the inner, emotional and psychological, experience of the individual. *Der geteilte Himmel* had concentrated largely on an examination of the 'Spaltungen' in society at large which keep the experiences of individuals apart, such as the widening rift between the worlds of industry, science and creativity as well as the division between different generations in GDR society. With *Nachdenken über Christa T.* the author specifically focuses on an examination of the psychological 'Abspaltungen' and the rupture of their identity which have been the result of her generation's particular biography. Through the process of remembering and mourning, the author gradually transforms the sadness about the loss of a close personal friend into a productive psychological process which ultimately enables her to rediscover forgotten and buried aspects of her 'self'.

The narrative technique of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is complex and provocatively modernist, and thus perfectly in accordance with the treatment of Wolf's

subject matter. The style of the narrative is much more personal, fragmented and idiosyncratic than that of *Der geteilte Himmel*. There is no omniscient narrator, rather one who is searching and questioning, attempting to piece together the life of a close friend from the incomplete evidence available. In fact Wolf's narrator assumes the role of a mediator between the central character and the reader, continually questioning her own competence and perspective in relation to her character. But the narrator also mediates between the author of the text and the central character, establishing a dialectical relationship which ensures close personal proximity and authenticity of subjective experience on the one hand and historical truth and objectivity on the other. Thus the narrative strategy reflects the mystery and opacity of human nature as well as the complexity of human emotional and psychological experience which cannot be adequately expressed or reflected in simple, conventional structures and fixed formulae. At the end of Wolf's *Selbstinterview*, the question, "So haben Sie also bei dieser Arbeit herausgefunden, wie Sie in Zukunft zu schreiben haben?" is answered: "Im Gegenteil. Ich habe einen Weg probiert, den ich so nicht noch einmal gehen kann . [...] Aber ich habe herausgefunden, daß man um jeden Preis versuchen muß, den Kreis dessen, was wir über uns selbst wissen oder zu wissen glauben, zu durchbrechen und zu überschreiten." (DdA I, 1966, 34/35)

Wolf's text *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was a first decisive step in this direction which the author continued to pursue during the years to come.

Nachdenken über Christa T. played an important role for both Wolf's personal development and for the development of prose in the GDR of the mid- to late-1960s. Her treatment of a subjectively motivated, yet socially and politically extremely relevant subject matter in a text of such great stylistic and technical distinction demonstrated that an author's political and aesthetic aims can be synthesized in a work of literature which retains a very distinct GDR perspective and literary identity. As Wolf states in *Selbstinterview*, artistic creation in the GDR of the mid-1960s could no longer afford to close its eyes to the complexity of human experience in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic social reality by continuing to adhere to the narrow norm prescriptions and aesthetic categories that had been established during the early years of the Republic:

Die Jahre, da wir die realen Grundlagen für die Selbstverwirklichung des Individuums legten, sozialistische Produktionsverhältnisse schufen, liegen hinter uns. Unsere Gesellschaft wird immer differenzierter. Differenzierter werden auch die Fragen, die ihre Mitglieder ihr stellen - auch in Form der Kunst. Entwickelter wird die Aufnahmebereitschaft vieler Menschen für differenzierte Antworten. Das Subjekt lebt immer souveräner in seiner Gesellschaft, die es als sein Werk empfindet. (DdA I, 1966, 34-35)

Without doubt the process of writing *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was also Wolf's personal way of coming to terms with the severe setbacks and disillusionments of the period after the Eleventh Plenum. Writing, she discovered, could provide the means of surmounting both inner inhibitions and outer obstacles to the realization of her aesthetic goals: "Ich hatte [...] erfahren - ich kann wohl sagen: überraschend und gegen meinen eigenen beträchtlichen Widerstand -, was es bedeutet, erzählen zu müssen, um zu überwinden [...]." (DdA II, 1973, 322) Viewing it as a process which promotes self-knowledge through self-questioning and critical self-reflection, writing ensures continuous movement and development, safeguarding against stagnation, cynicism, apathy or resignation which might otherwise be the result of such setbacks. The experiences of the Eleventh Plenum and the holding up of the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* first acquainted Wolf with what she later called the 'Verlierergefühl'⁸². In my analysis of the 'Faust' theme in Wolf's writing (in section 2.2 in this thesis) I shall argue that Wolf's understanding of this kind of defeat was by no means entirely negative. If we read between the lines of Wolf's essay on Vera Inber, 'Der Sinn einer neuen Sache' (initially a radio broadcast transmitted in November 1967), for instance, it becomes apparent that Wolf was increasingly able to rise above the punitive attacks of Party functionaries and to assert herself within the tensions and contradictions within which she lived and worked. In line with official Party policy and established censorship practices, two reports had been submitted in June 1967 on *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, ostensibly designed to establish

⁸²Christa Wolf, 'Ein Deutscher auf Widerspruch. Rede für Hans Mayer', in *Tabou*, pp 23-32, p 27.

whether Wolf's prose work met the orthodox criteria of GDR cultural policy. In reality, however, one of these quite clearly aimed at ruining Wolf's future prospects as a GDR author, concluding:

Die berechtigten Einwände würden sehr leicht zu wenig wünschenswerten Verallgemeinerungen führen, ohne daß man ihnen von gefestigten Positionen aus begegnen könnte. Obwohl die Autorin wahrscheinlich nach dem Scheitern ihres dritten Werkes kaum wieder produktiv sein wird, können wir das Manuskript nicht akzeptieren.⁸³

In recent years critics have benefited from Angela Drescher's very detailed illumination of the long and arduous battle Christa Wolf had to fight in order to get *Nachdenken über Christa T.* published in the GDR. But those who were aware of these events at the time will hardly have failed to notice the defiant undertone in Wolf's broadcast on Vera Inber. Reasserting her commitment to an autonomous literature rooted in subjective experience and founded on the personal integrity of the author, Wolf here challenged any notion of resignation or defeat:

Ich liebe Bücher, deren Inhalt man nicht erzählen kann, die sich nicht auf die simple Mitteilung von Vorgängen und Ereignissen reduzieren lassen, die sich überhaupt auf nichts reduzieren lassen als auf sich selbst. Was Vera Inber mitzuteilen hat, kann auf keine andere Weise mitgeteilt werden als auf diese, kein anderer hätte es erzählen können als sie - obwohl, natürlich, ihre Erfahrung nicht einzigartig ist. (DdA I, 1967, 107)

In fact, this broadcast is a good illustration of the strategies which Wolf and her colleagues developed in finding ways of communicating in the public domain without attracting the attention of the censor. When Wolf said about Vera Inber that the adverse social conditions within which Inber had lived and worked had merely strengthened her commitment to the revolutionary struggle as one which comprised both "Innen" and "Außen" (DdA I, 1967, 108), she was quite clearly also alluding to the struggle which she

⁸³Christa Wolf, 'Brief anlässlich der Ausstellung "Zensur in der DDR"', reproduced in Drescher (ed.), *Dokumentation*, p 26.

and her colleagues were involved in at the time. This, according to her own later assessment, also aimed at profound change:

Wir mußten den Mut zu uns selber finden, der Literatur geben, was der Literatur ist, was hieß, uns als Subjekte ausbilden, was damals sehr schwer war [...], und den Raum, der ihr gebührt, der Literatur in der Gesellschaft erkämpfen. Darin haben wir uns gegenseitig unterstützt [...]⁸⁴

And when Wolf stated that the embracing of harsher truths and realities had, in the case of Vera Inber, ultimately released fresh creative energies and generated greater productivity, she is clearly referring to her own position as well:

[...] Was sie erzählt, ist ja gerade - zwischen den Zeilen allerdings -, wie ihre Begabung herausgefordert wird durch den Einbruch von Wirklichkeit, wie sie produktiv wird durch den jähen Abbruch des sanften, wahrscheinlich mühelosen Lebens. Es ist nicht wahr, daß rauhe Verhältnisse immer im Gegensatz zur Poesie stünden, weil Rauheit nicht Roheit bedeutet und, wie sich zeigt, Zartheit nicht ausschließt. So geht, scheinbar merkwürdig, in ungünstigen, turbulenten Zeiten in der tiefsten Schicht der Menschen, im innersten Innern, der schwierige Prozeß einer Geburt vor: alte Häute werden abgestoßen, oder abgerissen, neue müssen wachsen, der Zwang, das nackte Leben zu sichern, bringt den Zwang mit sich, sich diesem Leben zu verbinden (DdA I, 1967, 108).

The fact that Christa Wolf focused on the problems of writing and the writer in both her prose work *Nachdenken* and also in her essays of the late 1960s indicates how urgent a public debate about these issues had become. This was all the more important since the sphere of literary criticism and of literary theory had become bastions of orthodoxy which were unlikely to challenge the Party's policies. It was therefore left to the initiatives of committed writers to keep alive the public's awareness of the issues and contradictions which arose in the literary field. These, Wolf and her colleagues believed,

⁸⁴Hörnigk, p 30.

were of social significance, crystallizing, as they did, the tensions and contradictions which characterized GDR society in general. The gulf that separated artists and intellectuals from Party functionaries was only one way in which the growing tendency towards polarization and segregation in GDR society manifested itself. This phenomenon strained the credibility of the idea of the *Literaturgesellschaft* to breaking point. In the cultural domain there were first indications that the growing pressure on individual artists either unequivocally to declare their loyalties to the Party or to become marginalized threatened to drive a wedge between members of the Writers' Union. There was increasing evidence that the Party's 'carrot-and-stick' tactics of rewarding conformity and penalizing dissent seriously called into question previous assumptions about GDR authors working as a collective. Although Christa Wolf succeeded in getting *Nachdenken* published, her experience proved the exception rather than the rule, with the works of many talented colleagues failing to get past the censor or not even being submitted.⁸⁵ Max Walter Schulz's personal attack on Wolf at the Sixth Writers' Conference in May 1969 is a good illustration of the kind of simplistic and intimidating tactics which the Party employed: "Besinn dich auf dein Herkommen, besinn dich auf unser Fortkommen, wenn du mit deiner klugen Feder der deutschen Arbeiterklasse, ihrer Partei und der Sache des Sozialismus dienen willst!"⁸⁶

These developments created an acute need for committed writers like Wolf to evolve strategies which would initiate and keep alive a public debate about the genuine and complex issues which writers needed to address. This included a discussion about the position of writers in GDR society and about the specific role and function of literature in socialism. Wolf's *Nachdenken* made a significant contribution to this process of 'Selbstverständigung' and 'Standortbestimmung' which Karl Robert Mandelkow, writing in the mid-1970s, considered to be the genuinely new and revolutionary element of her prose work:

⁸⁵Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, Volker Braun's *Das ungezwungene Leben Kasts* and Stefan Heym's *Der Tag X*, for example.

⁸⁶Manfred Jäger (ed.), *Kultur und Politik in der DDR. Ein historischer Abriß*, (Cologne, 1982), p 134.

Damit hat Christa Wolf den dogmatischen Vorlauf wissenschaftlicher Welterkenntnis in die poetische Reflexion zurückgenommen und die nur attributive Wahrhaftigkeit ihres Erzählerstandorts in die konstitutive der Wahrheitsstiftung verwandelt.⁸⁷

Wolf's essays of the late 1960s, particularly 'Lesen und Schreiben' (written in 1968, but not published until 1972), must also be placed within this context. Alongside this public and socially significant process of definition, re-definition and self-definition, writers communicated more intensively through an exchange of personal correspondence. The publication of Wolf's correspondence with Gerti Tetzner, Brigitte Reimann and Franz Fühmann⁸⁸ has opened up this dimension of literary life to the reader. These letters were important for a variety of complex reasons, among them the growing need for authors to offer encouragement, solidarity and personal support to each other and to help them cope with the isolation and loneliness which the system forced upon those not willing or not able to conform. In general, then, Wolf and her colleagues responded to the pressures imposed on writers in the GDR during the late 1960s by exploiting the communicative means available to them as creative individuals and as public figures. In doing so, they refused to settle for the official role-definitions imposed on them, remaining committed instead to the creation of fundamentally democratic structures and the realization of new possibilities of writing in socialism along the lines of the more radical concepts which had been debated by Brecht, Seghers, and their colleagues during the 1930s. As I shall demonstrate in my analysis of Wolf's extended engagement with Bertolt Brecht (in section 2.1 of this thesis), such ideas continued to form a crucial formative background against which Wolf's generation of writers and intellectuals developed their own poetological concepts.

⁸⁷See Karl Robert Mandelkow, 'Neuer und sozialistischer Realismus. Zu Fragen der Rezeption von DDR-Literatur in der Bundesrepublik', in *Kontext*, (1/1976), pp 175-198, p 193.

⁸⁸See Lirsch (ed.), *Was zählt, ist die Wahrheit*. Wolf's correspondence with Brigitte Reimann was not published until 1993. See Angela Drescher (ed.), *Sei begrüßt und lebe. Brigitte Reimann, Christa Wolf. Eine Freundschaft in Briefen*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1993). Wolf's correspondence with Franz Fühmann has recently appeared under the title *Monsieur - wir finden uns wieder. Briefe 1968 - 1984*, edited by Angela Drescher, (Berlin, 1995).

However, as Dieter Schlenstedt has emphasised, the process of public self-definition among authors of Wolf's generation, which had begun in the early 1960s but did not really gain momentum until the middle of the decade, differed significantly from the theoretical essays of the previous generation of authors:

Die Veränderungen, die sich in der Literatur unseres Landes seit Beginn der sechziger Jahre abzeichnen, sind nicht nur Wandlungen in ihren stofflichen Grundlagen, in den von ihr gebildeten Gegenständen, in ihren Schreibweisen, speziell in den sprachlichen und kompositorischen Verfahren, den Formen des Motiv- und Sujetaufbaus. Sie umgreifen vielmehr weiter den ganzen Komplex der Einbettung von Literatur in das Gesamte der gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen und Prozesse. Damit wesentlich auch beschäftigt sich die ästhetisch-theoretische Reflexion der Schriftsteller. Für ihre neuere Phase ist kennzeichnend [...], daß nicht die abstraktere Frage nach den Gegenständen, Verfahren, Formen der Literatur den Ausgangspunkt der Überlegungen bildet, sondern die Frage nach ihrer Funktion, nach ihrem Platz in der Gesellschaft, nach ihren allgemeinen und spezifischen Leistungen.⁸⁹

Without doubt Wolf's essay 'Lesen und Schreiben' occupies a central role in this new and necessary debate about the specific role and function of literature in 'really existing socialism'. In this essay, Wolf both recapitulates and develops her aesthetic and poetological awareness and offers a new theoretical foundation for prose writing in the GDR of the late 1960s. Rejecting the notion of a collective production of literature driven by official theory which continued to flourish in official literary discourse, Wolf reinstates the individual author as moral authority and emphasises his/her personal integrity and responsibility. Literature is viewed expressly as a process between the individual reader and the individual writer as intellectually competent, morally responsible, equal partners, not as a didactic exercise between a superior intellect and an inferior pupil in need of enlightenment. By adopting this position, Wolf has, as Dieter Schlenstedt has argued, avoided: " eine Haltung bloß kritischer Destruktion ebenso [...] wie ein Selbstverständnis,

⁸⁹Dieter Schlenstedt, 'Prozeß der Selbstverständigung. Aspekte der Funktionsbestimmung in unserer neueren Literatur', in *Weimarer Beiträge*, (12/1976), pp 5-37, pp 7-8.

in dem der Autor sich als Werkzeug in der Hand anderer versteht. Und dies ist ein entscheidendes Moment."⁹⁰ Although this is only implicitly stated in 'Lesen und Schreiben', Wolf categorically opposes the notion - and the very real danger by the late 1960s - that the writer in a socialist society might be relegated to the role of outsider and eccentric in the way he/she tended to be in bourgeois-capitalist society, as a contradiction in terms. As Schlenstedt has argued, the concept of the responsible writer as Wolf and her colleagues had developed it, by contrast, implies that:

[...] der Autor seine Arbeit als integriertes und integrierendes Moment sozialistischer Gesellschaft versteht und aus der so übertragenen und übernommenen Aufgabe seine Verantwortung ableitet: Literatur wird als gesellschaftliche Institution verstanden. Betont wird daher auch der Platz dieser Arbeit und der Platz des Schriftstellers nicht außerhalb, sondern innerhalb der Gesellschaft bestimmt, wird angestrebt, die Rolle des Schriftstellers nicht nur als Wegbegleiter, sondern als Mitgestalter [des] Lebens zu begreifen.⁹¹

With her insistence on the central role of literature in socialism and through her emphasis of the reader and the writer as morally and intellectually equal individuals, Wolf's 'Lesen und Schreiben' essay both anticipated and helped to bring about critical developments towards the creation of a democratic socialist literature which occurred in GDR literary theory during the mid- to late-1970s. When Dieter Schlenstedt furnished the theoretical foundations for a progressive, communicative and democratic GDR literature, he was in many respects elaborating ideas which authors like Wolf had already advocated and put into practice during the late 1960s.⁹²

In a substrand of 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf signalled a further issue to which she would devote herself more exclusively during the 1970s, namely her aim of defining an

⁹⁰Schlenstedt, 'Prozeß der Selbstverständigung', p 8.

⁹¹Schlenstedt, 'Prozeß der Selbstverständigung', p 8.

⁹²See Dieter Schlenstedt, *Wirkungsästhetische Analysen. Poetologie und Prosa in der neueren DDR-Literatur*, (Berlin, 1979). Wolf's emphasis in 'Lesen und Schreiben' on the importance of the reader already anticipated the developments towards reception-theory in the GDR during the mid-1970s. See Naumann (ed.) et al, *Gesellschaft. Literatur. Lesen*.

alternative line of tradition for GDR literature. In my analysis of the 'Faust' theme in Wolf's writing (in section 2.2 of this thesis), I shall show that Wolf's work from the mid-1960s consciously and consistently links with literary traditions which were the antithesis of the dominant culture and ideology in the GDR. In contrast to the unidimensional image of man propagated by SED cultural functionaries through their interpretation of the classical heritage, with its idealization of qualities such as action, thirst for knowledge, and industriousness, Wolf's work offers a necessary dialectical alternative by highlighting the equally important role of emotion, experience, imagination and reflection. In doing so, she also re-emphasized the much more differentiated understanding of how society could and should progress towards socialism held by Brecht, Seghers and other committed socialists of their generation. Wolf's essays on Bert Brecht and Ingeborg Bachmann ('Brecht und andere', 1966; 'Die zumutbare Wahrheit. Prosa der Ingeborg Bachmann', 1966) represent two fundamental poles of Wolf's interest in literary traditions which conform neither to the crass oversimplifications of official GDR cultural doctrine and its selective propagation of the works of Goethe and Schiller, nor to mainstream literary strands in contemporary Western culture. Wolf's essay on Brecht may be understood as an aspect of her personal re-appraisal and revision of official GDR culture during this period, a process in which Brecht, but to a far greater extent Anna Seghers, played a crucial role. I shall later expand on this point in my examination of Wolf's engagement with Bertolt Brecht's ideas (in section 2.1 of this thesis). Furthermore, Wolf's interest in the Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann indicates that Wolf was also looking beyond cultural traditions in the socialist East towards the West. Bachmann's experimentation with personal forms of writing traditionally associated with women's literature clearly appealed to Wolf's own aesthetic interests. This reflective and self-reflective literature offered, as Wolf increasingly discovered in the course of the 1970s, the potential for breaking with literary conventions which promote alienation and self-alienation, offering new and exciting potential for Wolf's development of new prose forms. Although Wolf did not elaborate on Bachmann in 'Lesen und Schreiben', her exposition of Georg Büchner's aesthetics (an indication of her indebtedness to Anna Seghers) point in a similar direction. Büchner's method of creating

literature which permits the articulation of the subjective, authentic experience of the author, the dimension of authorship, bears some affinity to Bachmann's reflections on writing and the writer as she had developed them during the late 1950s.⁹³ In 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf expressed her belief that the development of new prose forms in a socialist Germany might begin by combining Brecht's ideas as applied in his epic theatre with Georg Büchner's aesthetics. Büchner, Wolf suggested, had understood that writing demanded the "volle[n] Einsatz der eigenen moralischen Existenz [...] jedesmal neu." (DdA II, 1968, 32) Wolf admired Büchner's work for offering what she herself was interested in developing: "[...] die Prosa des Alltags: Situation, Umstände, Psychologie, Analyse - und er verwandelt es, indem er die Vision dazutut, von der er lebt und unter der er leidet." (DdA II, 1968, 32) Büchner's aesthetics fully concurred with Wolf's own aesthetic aim of focusing on the inner life and the psychological reality of the individual. A synthesis between Brecht's rational, materialist, approach with its focus on the outer, socio-political nexus which influences human action, and Büchner's equally rational and political, yet essentially emotionally motivated and psychologically orientated aesthetics, Wolf believed, could pave the way for a genuinely progressive, revolutionary, yet fundamentally humanitarian and ethical prose:

eine Gattung, die den Mut hat, sich selbst als Instrument zu verstehen - scharf, genau, zupackend, veränderlich -, und die sich als Mittel nimmt, nicht als Selbstzweck. Als ein Mittel, Zukunft in die Gegenwart hinein vorzuschieben, und zwar im einzelnen; denn Prosa wird vom einzelnen Leser gelesen, der sich, alle Verführungen der modernen Technik außer acht lassend, mit einem Buch allein zurückzieht. [...] Die epische Prosa sollte eine Gattung sein, die es unternimmt, auf noch ungebahnten Wegen in das Innere dieses Menschen da, des Prosaesers, einzudringen. In das innerste Innere, dorthin, wo der Kern der Persönlichkeit sich bildet und festigt. (DdA II, 34)

⁹³See Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar. Rede zur Verleihung des Hörspielpreises der Kriegsblinden', in Ingeborg Bachmann, *Ausgewählte Werke in 3 Bänden*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1987), volume 1, p 564.

In the course of the 1960s, then, Wolf had undergone a fundamental and thorough process of emancipation and development which liberated her aesthetically, poetologically and ideologically.⁹⁴ Her self-understanding as a woman writing in the GDR had changed profoundly and she was now formulating new questions about the nature and role of literature in a developing socialist society. The personal disillusionments and professional setbacks which this process of emancipation had involved had neither affected her commitment to socialist principles nor to aesthetic experimentation. While she abandoned the notion that authors could accept moral responsibility as a collective, she remained deeply committed to GDR society in general and had developed a deep attachment in particular to the spirit of cooperation, solidarity and mutual support which characterized the relationships within the intellectual community to which she belonged. However, despite the inner freedom and aesthetic independence which Wolf had found by the end of the 1960s, there was a serious question mark about the actual social significance and impact she would be able to have in the years to come. Wolf's refusal to come out in support of the GDR's participation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 gave rise to further suspicion on the part of the Party about her loyalty. As we now know, Wolf had been recruited in March 1959 by the *Stasi* and had (largely unwittingly) irregularly supplied them with information over the next three and a half years. Once it had become clear that she was not prepared to denounce colleagues, she had been dropped. From the Eleventh Plenum on she was herself regarded by the *Stasi* with increasing suspicion, and in 1968 she and her husband Gerhard became the focus of an intensive observation operation.⁹⁵ In contrast to *Nachdenken*, she could not yet publish 'Lesen und Schreiben', an indication that even a writer of her international status and wide popular appeal could by no means rely on having a future in her own country. Despite the significance of her theoretical ideas, the actual position of writers in GDR society by the end of the 1960s had taken a turn for the worse compared to the beginning of the decade. Given that 'Bitterfeld'

⁹⁴Nevertheless, at this stage, Wolf was still prone to thinking of East-West relations in terms of 'Feindbilder'.

⁹⁵See Vinke (ed.), *Akteneinsicht Christa Wolf*.

had failed and that the system was now ruthlessly marginalizing and ostracizing non-orthodoxy and non-conformity, there were serious doubts about the extent to which Wolf and others would be able in future to have a voice in the public domain of the GDR.

1.4 'Hierbleiben oder Weggehen?' The failure of Honecker's cultural liberalization and its implications for Wolf's sense of responsibility

In spite of the deepening gloom in the cultural sphere of the GDR in the late 1960s, authors such as Franz Fühmann, Günter Kunert, Günter de Bruyn, Stefan Hermlin and Christa Wolf had by no means become resigned to the status quo. In the course of the 1960s, they had emancipated themselves from the official discourses of the state, leaving behind the provincial aesthetic and ideological outlook of the 1950s and the early 1960s.⁹⁶ Wolf's experience of having to open up new literary horizons, in spite of the narrowly defined parameters within which she had to operate, exemplifies that of her generation of authors as a whole. As Wolf has emphasized in 'Lesen und Schreiben', the experiences of her generation had been exceptionally difficult from the start. During the Third Reich, Wolf and her contemporaries had been totally isolated from "aller Literatur der Zeit", a factor to which she attributes the "auffällig verzögerte Reife meiner Generation". (DdA II, 1968, 18) By the early 1970s, however, her generation of authors had achieved that maturity, with their self-confidence boosted by the insights they had gained from their reading of "bourgeois" modernists and the creative avantgarde of Eastern Europe. On the basis of their particular struggle to express their experiences authentically, they had moved a long way away from the grandiose utopian ideas which had dominated their literary beginnings. Although they continued to believe that literature could play a role in bringing about change, they had become far more realistic in their assessment of how much it could

⁹⁶ In a conversation with Aafke Steenhuis, Christa Wolf stated that the ideological outlook and literary horizons of East German authors in the early 1960s had still been focused almost entirely on the GDR: "Ich muß zugeben, daß wir damals alle noch ziemlich provinziell waren, auch in unseren Kenntnissen der Weltliteratur." In 'Schreiben im Zeitbezug. Gespräch mit Aafke Steenhuis', 1989, in *Im Dialog*, pp 131-157, p 140.

achieve, as well as becoming more diverse in their narrative methods, and far more open and challenging in the way they communicated their ideas to the reader.

Wolf's writing from the mid-1960s onwards indicates that East German writers were no longer unaware of Western philosophical, psychoanalytical and socially critical thought either.⁹⁷ In the course of the 1970s, moreover, the profile as well as the presence of East German literature in the West increased considerably, so that the former neat distinction between 'East' and 'West' German literature became blurred, even though East German authors continued to provide a distinct GDR perspective on the events they described. In their writing of the 1970s (much of which had been produced during the late 1960s when it could not be published), Wolf and some of her colleagues were actively disassociating themselves from affirmative notions about life in 'really existing socialism'. Addressing themselves specifically to the individual reader, authors like Christa Wolf now combined a critical scrutiny of GDR society, of its institutions and socio-political structures and processes, with a sympathetic and sensitive portrayal of the experiences of its citizens within a broader historical context. But GDR writers also began to look beyond East Germany to subject modern industrial society in general to critical scrutiny. Here it was most notably the arrival of women writers such as Brigitte Reimann, Sarah Kirsch, Gerti Tetzner, Irmtraud Morgner, as well as Wolf, on the cultural scene of the GDR which opened literary horizons and provided a fresh viewpoint. Experimenting with decidedly bold approaches to established literary norms and conventions, East German women writers formulated new, fundamentally challenging questions about the position of women

⁹⁷ In a letter to Jürgen Habermas of December 1991 Christa Wolf stressed this point when she stated: "Die Weite Ihres geistigen Horizonts schon in frühen Jahren sei Ihnen neidlos [...] anerkannt. Wir, ich jedenfalls, haben manches von dem später nachholen müssen, auch können, weil wir/ich Zugang zu westlicher Literatur hatten: Ohne diese Möglichkeit hätte ich hier sicher nicht weiterleben können. [...] Früh habe ich mich vor allem mit Psychologie beschäftigt, Freud, Mitscherlich, Reich waren wichtige Orientierungspunkte. Nein - von einer bestimmten Phase an habe ich mich vom westlichen Denken auch nicht abgekoppelt gefühlt, anders wären meine Bücher auch nicht erklärbar. Allerdings war ich auch sehr offen für die Literatur des Ostens, für das, was russische Autoren besonders des vorigen Jahrhunderts geschrieben haben, dann für die sowjetische Literatur und von einem bestimmten Punkt an besonders für ihren dissidentischen Teil. 'Christa Wolf an Jürgen Habermas', in Tabou, pp 150-155, p 153.

in patriarchal societies, expressing a specifically feminist consciousness that had hitherto been excluded from public life in the GDR.

It is quite inconceivable that the restrictions imposed on culture at the Eleventh Plenum could have been kept in place, or that GDR authors' demands for a public voice could have gone unheeded for much longer. If it had not been for Erich Honecker's appointment as First Secretary of the SED at the Eighth Party Conference in June 1971, matters would certainly have reached crisis-proportions. The beginning of the Honecker era, however, marked a turning point, initiating large-scale social reforms and a literary 'thaw' which, at least temporarily, relieved some of the cultural pressure.

For a time, it appeared as though East German writers would at last enjoy the freedom openly to address the system's contradictions and to put forth their own, independent views about how GDR society could and should progress along socialist principles. Erich Honecker's inaugural speech at the Eighth Party Conference signalled that he intended significantly to change the emphasis in the literary sphere. Despite an overall adherence to established conventions and the assumption that the Party was to retain its position of control over all cultural matters, Honecker quite clearly placed a fresh accent on decentralization and on greater variety of cultural production, stressing that authors should capture the "ganze Breite und Vielfalt der neuen Lebensäußerungen" by applying the "ganzen Reichtum ihrer Handschriften und Ausdrucksweisen."⁹⁸ Honecker now also officially endorsed the view that the aesthetic categories of Socialist Realism should comprise the "kritische[...] Darstellung [...] zu überwindende[r] Widersprüche" as well as the "schöpferische [...] Suche nach neuen Formen".⁹⁹ In fact, the new head of state increasingly refrained from applying the term "sozialistischer Realismus", preferring instead to refer to "sozialistische Literatur und Kunst".¹⁰⁰ Honecker's famous 'no taboos' speech at the Fourth Central Committee Plenum in December 1971 suggested even more

⁹⁸Wirklichkeitsnähe, Volksverbundenheit und Parteilichkeit. [Erich Honecker: Bericht des ZK an den VIII. Parteitag, 15. Juni 1971], in Gisela Rüb (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, (Stuttgart, 1976), p 180 ff.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰See Hans-Dietrich Sander, *Geschichte der Schönen Literatur in der DDR*, (Freiburg, 1972), p 267, quoted here from Werner Krogmann, *Christa Wolf. Konturen*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1989), p 110-111.

decisively that the Party intended to exercise restraint in literary matters. Provided that authors started out from the "feste[n] Position des Sozialismus"¹⁰¹, Honecker stated, there should no longer be taboo subjects or restrictions on form or style of literary expression in future. Writers who were committed socialists were thus apparently being given official permission to answer only to their conscience when it came to choosing their subject matter and narrative method, not to some higher authority such as the Party.

In effect, Erich Honecker was now sanctioning retrospectively what authors like Christa Wolf had been passionately defending and putting into literary practice since the mid-1960s. Given that this was the case, it was particularly interesting that Honecker omitted the names of precisely those authors who had spearheaded the most significant changes in GDR literature during the late 1960s when he paid tribute, on the occasion of the Fourth Plenum, to the GDR's most representative authors: Christa Wolf, Günter de Bruyn, and Stefan Hermlin were amongst those who were not included, while conformists like Hermann Kant, Helmut Sakowski, and Bruno Wogatzki were. The battle lines which had become established between the SED and the GDR's literary avantgarde had clearly remained in place. Honecker's decision to omit the names of leading authors like Wolf signalled from the outset that, while he was prepared to show goodwill to the arts, he was by no means ready to acknowledge writers who had exceeded the role expected of them by the Party; 'no taboos' clearly did not encompass writers' autonomy.¹⁰² Particularly in view of the events in Prague in 1968, Honecker stood firm in signalling that any developments that could potentially undermine the SED's hegemonial power would continue to be punished. At the time, however, his speech was received with relief and enthusiasm in the literary community. Works which had been suppressed in the second half of the 1960s, such as Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* and Volker

¹⁰¹ 'Hauptaufgabe umfaßt auch weitere Erhöhung des kulturellen Niveaus. [Schlußwort Erich Honeckers auf der 4. Tagung des ZK der SED Dezember 1971]', in Rüß, (ed.), p 287.

¹⁰² The same message had already been communicated in January 1971 when the same authors had been excluded from an "Ideenberatung" in the *Staatsrat* to which, officially, all leading artists and writers of the GDR had been invited. Werner Krogmann has pointed out that, in fact, none of the authors who were later to be in the forefront of opposition against the expatriation of Wolf Biermann were asked to attend on this occasion. See Werner Krogmann, 'Moralischer Realismus', in *Amsterdamer Beiträge*, (7/78), pp 233-261, p 239. See also Krogmann, (1989), p 161.

Braun's *Das ungezwungene Leben Kasts* could now be published, and plays by Heiner Müller and Volker Braun which had hitherto been banned could be staged.

In the early 1970s, matters also took a considerable turn for the better for Christa Wolf. A reissue of *Nachdenken* in a substantial new edition in 1972 (which was backdated to 1968) finally made her prose text available to a large GDR readership. After the isolation she had suffered during the late 1960s, Wolf now moved back into the focus of public attention. The enthusiasm with which readers responded to her prose text¹⁰³ left no doubt about the fact that she was needed and that her ideas were of considerable consequence to fellow citizens. In addressing issues such as sickness, death, loss, and social alienation, Wolf had clearly struck a chord with people of all age groups and social categories, initiating necessary discussions about vital matters of concern. Angela Drescher's recollection of reading *Nachdenken* may serve as an example here to illustrate how deeply stimulating Wolf's text was to readers in the GDR who felt that the burning issues of the time had at last been articulated by a contemporary voice:

Seitdem [wir *Nachdenken* gelesen hatten, RR] waren die Briefe, die wir uns schrieben, obwohl wir uns täglich an der Universität sahen, gespickt mit Zitaten aus *Christa T.* Wir hatten eine zeitgenössische Stimme gefunden, die uns zu bestätigen schien, worüber wir im Seminar und im Café stritten: daß es einen Sozialismus geben müßte, der dem Vergleich mit seinen Utopien nicht auszuweichen brauchte; in dem Selbstverwirklichung des einzelnen notwendige Bedingung und nicht unliebsamer Störfaktor der Gesellschaft wäre. Wo die nach uns kommende Generation von Intellektuellen nur noch eine unbegreifliche Illusion erkennen konnte, begannen wir mit Büchern wie *Nachdenken über Christa T.* unsere Vision auszubauen, lernten wir, die Spannungen, in die wir natürlich hineingewachsen waren, zu akzeptieren, indem wir uns an ihnen rieben.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³By the time the GDR celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1974, some 80 000 copies of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* had been sold.

¹⁰⁴Drescher (ed.), (1991), pp 7-8.

Under the impact of détente, and particularly the *Ostpolitik* (launched in the Federal Republic of Germany by the Brandt coalition in 1969 and paving the way for the Basic Treaty between the two German states in 1972), the pressure on official GDR literary criticism to put up a united, harmonious front towards the capitalist West diminished. In the more open-minded climate which was allowed to develop in the aftermath of Erich Honecker's assumption of office, Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken* finally received a more sensitive and balanced treatment, with some critics, like Horst Haase, now publicly revising their earlier, damning reviews. The publication of prose works by Günter de Bruyn (*Preisverleihung*, 1972) and Jurek Becker (*Irreführung der Behörden*, 1973) who, like Christa Wolf, thematized the role of the intellectual, provided further ammunition for a public debate about the moral responsibility of the writer in a developing socialist society. Despite some reluctance among politicians and the old school of literary critics, there was a discernible shift in the early 1970s in critical and academic circles towards embracing such a debate from more open-minded and liberal perspectives.¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, the process of poetological *Selbstverständigung* which authors such as Anna Seghers, Volker Braun, Günter de Bruyn, Franz Fühmann, Stephan Hermlin, Rainer Kirsch, Günter Kunert, and, of course, Christa Wolf, had managed to promote through their literary essays since the late 1960s, could now continue in public.¹⁰⁶

Christa Wolf was thus able to get *Lesen und Schreiben*, which made a seminal contribution to this dynamic ideological and literary discussion, published by Aufbau in 1972.¹⁰⁷ The conversations with Joachim Walther and Hans Kaufmann,¹⁰⁸ which took

¹⁰⁵The fact that the emphasis in GDR criticism was beginning to shift in favour of the more liberal-minded, progressive forces during the early 1970s became clear in the course of two major literary debates which erupted in *Sinn und Form* at that time. Wilhelm Girnus, the editor in chief of the Academy of the Arts' literary journal, was clearly no longer intimidated by the Party's scaremongering tactics which had effectively squashed similar initiatives in what became known as the *Lyrikdebatten* of the middle 1960s. The fact that Ulrich Plenzdorf's *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.*, which caused by far the biggest stir in GDR culture during the early 1970s, was not banned in spite of considerable opposition was equally encouraging.

¹⁰⁶See Joseph Pischel, 'Welt und Kunstanschauung im Essay', in Siegfried Rönisch (ed.), *DDR-Literatur '83 im Gespräch*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1984), pp 7-32.

¹⁰⁷Wolf decided to leave the 'Mitteldeutscher Verlag' whose managing director, Heinz Sachs, had publicly distanced himself from *Nachdenken über Christa T.* once the work had come under fire from official GDR sources. Angela Drescher has revealed that Sachs was also personally responsible for

place soon after her volume of essays had appeared, provided the first public opportunities for Wolf to talk at length in the GDR about the years when she had not been able to publish. Since *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Wolf had not written a major literary work which incorporated and thus put into aesthetic practice the theoretical ideas she had introduced in her 1968 essay. However, she had pursued further the "Bedürfnis, auf eine neue Art zu schreiben" (DdA II, 1968, 7) both on the level of theoretical reflection and through the creation of fiction. In concrete literary terms, this had resulted in the production of significant "Teilergebnisse [...], die man drucken kann." (DdA II, 1973, 324). In her conversation with Hans Kaufmann, Wolf was able to introduce the short pieces of prose which she had written between 1969 and 1972 as well as a film project she had embarked on during this period in collaboration with her husband Gerhard Wolf. The three short prose narratives *Unter den Linden: Drei unwahrscheinliche Geschichten* were subsequently published (in 1974); however, a further narrative, 'Kleiner Ausflug nach H.', was considered too critical for publication in the GDR and was in fact never published there. These works mark not so much the beginning of a new phase of literary development for Christa Wolf as a period of transition, in the course of which she worked through the personal disappointments of the late 1960s and simultaneously experimented with new aesthetic possibilities and narrative methods.

By the time the conversations with Walther and Kaufmann took place, Wolf had clearly achieved the inner independence she needed to write authentically. The overall tone of both conversations is optimistic and forward-looking, with Wolf referring only briefly to the bitter experience of "Wirkenwollen, aber nicht Wirkenkönnen" in the years after 1965. (DdA II, 1972, 307) Nevertheless, there is a critical and self-critical tone which shows how painful the process of re-definition and re-evaluation during the preceding years had

withdrawing the application to receive permission to print *Lesen und Schreiben*. See Drescher (ed.), (1991), p 17.

¹⁰⁸The publication of Joachim Walther's collection of interviews entitled *Meinetwegen Schmetterlinge. Gespräche mit Schriftstellern* (Berlin, 1973) was deemed an important breakthrough since readers had never before been offered such intimate and detailed insights into the creative process. Wolf's conversation with Hans Kaufmann was first published under the title 'Gespräch mit Christa Wolf', in *Weimarer Beiträge*, 6/1974.

been. A key part of this process was the redefinition of the ideological, philosophical and poetological frame of reference which had hitherto informed her writing.

In her essay on Anna Seghers, 'Glauben an Irdisches' (1968), Wolf had already emphasized that writing authentically presupposes the writer's willingness to persistently subject herself to an intensive process of reflection and *Selbstverständigung*: "Es wird nicht behauptet, sondern nachgedacht. Ehe sie [Anna Seghers, RR] andere zu überzeugen sucht, verständigt sie sich mit sich selbst." (DdA I, 1968, 295) Following the personal disappointments Wolf had experienced in the late 1960s, this approach was a necessary presupposition for re-establishing the 'inner authenticity' or "Echtheit, Glaubwürdigkeit" (DdA II, 1973, 323) so central to her prose writing. With *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Wolf had begun to confront previously unacknowledged aspects of her 'self', and she had discovered that expressing herself truthfully and authentically acted as a defence against self-alienation. While official GDR literary criticism misconstrued her work as 'subjectivist' or 'defeatist', Wolf believed the expression of pain, of sadness, of loss, and of inner conflict in writing to be the obverse of resignation. In concurrence with psychological and psychotherapeutic frameworks of analysis, such as those developed by the Mitscherlichs in the Federal Republic,¹⁰⁹ Wolf had experienced the way in which the conscious exploration of emotions branded as 'negative' or 'undesirable' within the discourses of performance-oriented modern societies, in fact constitutes a necessary step towards the psychological recovery and healing of the individual concerned. Writing, according to Christa Wolf, can promote self-awareness and self-knowledge, and it can furnish insights which ultimately allow the individual to assert him- or herself more confidently through the acknowledgement of existing tensions and contradictions. In her essay on Ingeborg Bachmann of 1966 (first published in the GDR as an afterword to Bachmann's *Undine geht* in 1973) Wolf had already made this point, stressing that the expression of pain and suffering by authors who wrote authentically, as Ingeborg Bachmann had done, must be

¹⁰⁹See for instance, Alexander und Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, (Munich, 1967). For an extensive discussion of the links between Wolf and the Mitscherlichs, see Uwe Wittstock, *Über die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Das Bild der Wandlung im Prosawerk von Christa Wolf und Franz Fühmann*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1987).

understood as an act of self-assertion and as evidence of the author taking responsibility rather than refusing to do so. Bachmann, like Wolf and her GDR colleagues, had known what it means to be deeply at odds as a writer with the direction in which the society in which she lived and worked was developing. But this had not stopped her from expressing in her writing the personal pain and suffering she experienced as a result of feeling herself to be an outsider in society. Resisting the false alternatives open to her of either plunging into despair or of conforming to mainstream thinking, Bachmann had managed, at great personal cost, to remain true to her subjective experience and had offered resistance:

Sie begreift die Schuldgefühle, die Selbstanklagen, diese "Stürze ins Schweigen" und sogar in den Tod bei vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Dichtern, sie weiß um den Schmerz, wenn die Welt nicht auf denselben Ton gestimmt ist wie man selbst. Sie nimmt diese Erfahrungen an, ohne mit ihnen einverstanden zu sein: weder Dünkel noch Snobismus, noch die gängige formale Scheinrevolte kommen für sie in Frage. Die Zerstörung des Glaubens bis auf den Grund, der Zynismus heißt, finden nicht statt. In ihren Essays, stärker als in ihrer Prosa, fixiert sie ihre Widerstandsposition: "Wenn wir es dulden, dieses 'Kunst ist Kunst', den Hohn hier hin nehmen, stellvertretend für das Ganze - und wenn die Dichter es dulden und befördern durch Unernst und die bewußte Auflösung der stets gefährdeten Kommunikation mit der Gesellschaft - und wenn die Gesellschaft sich der Dichtung entzieht, wo ein ernster und unbequemer, verändernwollender Geist in ihr ist, so käme das der Bankrotterklärung gleich." (DdA I, 1966, 94-95)

The isolation Wolf experienced in the late 1960s had plunged her into a similar personal crisis, since, as she later described it, her "Existenz in diesem Land als gesellschaftliches Wesen"¹¹⁰ had been called into question. The extreme vulnerability and the loss of confidence which resulted from the attacks on her work and on her person temporarily posed a serious threat to her writing, since the "Schutzhaut, unter der ich unbefangen, fast naiv arbeiten konnte, [...] war dann natürlich weg."¹¹¹ However, there is

¹¹⁰Hörnigk, p 32.

¹¹¹Loc cit.

no doubt that Wolf emerged from this crisis with greater maturity and inner independence. The short prose texts which came into existence between 1969 and 1972 portray different aspects of the process of self-confrontation and self-questioning to which Wolf subjected herself in order to overcome her deep-seated inner dependence on public acknowledgement and official approval. Wolf pointed out in a letter to Brigitte Reimann how liberating this process had turned out to be, not merely for her personal growth, but also for the maturity of her prose work:

Nun ist ja, wenn wir überraschend gekränkt, enttäuscht, betrogen werden, immer auch Realitätsverkennung von unserer Seite daran schuld: mag sie noch so sympathisch, verständlich, liebenswert, vielleicht sogar edel gewesen sein - jedenfalls geht jeder Täuschung (fast) eine Selbsttäuschung voraus. Und selbst täuschen wir uns ja mit Vorliebe in Dingen des Gefühls, die uns am nächsten gehen; wir täuschen uns da manchmal fast mit Absicht, nicht? Wie man da herauskommt, ist das Wesentliche: Ob verbittert, knitterig, todtraurig, mißtrauisch - oder ob einfach ein bißchen nüchterner und reifer. Was allerdings eine schwere innere Arbeit ist. Wenn Du's schaffst, wirst Du es auch bei Deiner Schreiberei merken.¹¹²

The 'Ent-täuschungen' (in the double sense of the word: of being disappointed, but also of no longer being deceived or deceiving oneself) Wolf had to come to terms with in the late 1960s were, beyond doubt, profound, but they were by no means entirely negative. Quite the reverse, the experience of having been defeated in this manner led to a pronounced change of perspective which liberated her to pursue with greater determination her personal aesthetic and literary aims: "Aber jedenfalls war ich nun nicht mehr abzudrängen von dem, was ich machen mußte."¹¹³

Wolf's conversations with Walther and Kaufmann indicate beyond doubt that the release of cultural-political pressure in the early 1970s was not going to tempt authors like her to slide back into the easy optimism of the 1950s and the early 1960s; nor would she

¹¹²Christa Wolf in a letter to Brigitte Reimann of 11 September 1969, in Christa Wolf and Brigitte Reimann, *Sei begrüßt und lebe*, p. 59.

¹¹³Hörnigk, p 32.

be willing to compromise her aesthetic and poetological aims for the sake of enjoying a fresh period of harmonious collaboration with the SED. Identifying with a "stabilen Bestand an Autoren [...], die unbeirrt immer besser werden" (DdA II, 1972, 307-308), Wolf was noticeably concerned to emphasize that the tensions, contradictions and moral dilemmas specific to authors' experiences in the GDR should now be addressed and openly discussed. In Wolf's view these could only be fully understood in the light of a fresh scrutiny of past experiences, particularly of the complex interrelationship between the subjective perspective of the individual writer and the outer, socio-political and cultural reality in which the creative process occurs. Wolf took a personal step in this direction by critically re-evaluating the didactic positions she had adopted in her reviews and essays during the 1950s. The fact that she reiterated her self-criticism with even greater rigour and candour in her essay 'Über Sinn und Unsinn von Naivität' (1973) is a further indication that Wolf was not looking for easy answers in her comprehensive examination of the conditions under which a literature that is subjectively motivated, yet morally and socially responsible, could be developed. In the interviews with Walther and Kaufmann she underlined her view that open self-criticism as an ongoing process must be an intrinsic aspect of morally and socially aware writing. She knew from her own experience how difficult it was to achieve that balance. The factors which caused loss of self-awareness and self-understanding and ultimately frustrated the author's desire for self-realization were manifold and complex, ranging from a desire for public approval and social status on one end of the scale, to loss of confidence, self-censorship, despair, and cynicism or apathy on the other¹¹⁴. The pressures brought to bear on East German writers, furthermore, were not restricted to the impact of the SED's *Kulturpolitik*. On the basis of the particular role

¹¹⁴For a more extensive discussion of the mechanism and impact of state censorship in the GDR see Ernst Wichner and Herbert Wiesner (eds.), *Literaturentwicklungsprozesse. Die Zensur in der DDR*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1993); Andrea Jäger, 'Schriftsteller-Identität und Zensur. Über die Bedingungen des Schreibens im "realen Sozialismus"', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold und Frauke Meyer-Gosau (eds.), *Text und Kritik*, special edition, (Munich, 1991), pp 137-148; Richard Zipser, 'The Many Faces of Censorship in the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1989', in *The Germanic Review*, special issue (No.3, 1990), pp 111-131.

which literature had come to assume in the socio-political framework of the GDR¹¹⁵, writers also needed to assert their need for autonomy in relation to their readers. Increasingly, readers expected writers to fulfil certain 'compensatory functions' that placed additional burdens on them. The large number of letters Wolf had received in response to *Nachdenken über Christa T.* had highlighted the fact that readers looked towards authors like her for emotional and psychological support ('Lebenshilfe') as well as for moral guidance.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in view of the failure of GDR journalism and the media to investigate social problems, readers in both East and West expected critical East German authors to provide 'Ersatzöffentlichkeit' in a double sense: by articulating taboos affecting the society as a whole, and by critical reflection on the situation of individuals in society. In view of the "schwierige[n] Balanceakt" (DdA II, 1972, 297) which writers of Wolf's generation had to perform as a result of this complex situation, she emphatically rejected any return to the idea that writers could ever be the "Mundstück für 'irgend etwas'." (DdA II, 1972, 299) Re-emphasizing the role of subjective individual experience as the central tenet of her narrative method, Wolf stressed that the experiences articulated in a socialist literature would invariably spring from the author's moral and social commitment, since "der erste Einfall [...] wird allein dadurch provoziert, daß man engagiert lebt." (DdA II, 1972, 299) Following Ingeborg Bachmann's ideas, Wolf considered the creative impulse to be subjectively motivated, yet socially significant, since the author "[hängt] am Starkstrom Gegenwart. Man hängt an einer Sache, die einen nicht mehr losläßt, die man machen muß, die aber gleichzeitig, wie man hofft in diesem Moment, von allgemeinem Interesse ist." (DdA II, 1972, 299) In this respect, the process of working through the personal disappointments of the late 1960s through writing had ultimately sharpened and deepened her framework of social analysis:

¹¹⁵For a detailed discussion of the implications which the lack of 'Öffentlichkeit' had for the role of literature in GDR society, see David Bathrick, 'Kultur und Öffentlichkeit in der DDR', in Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Patricia Herminhouse (eds.), *Literatur der DDR in den siebziger Jahren*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1983), pp 53-81.

¹¹⁶See Therese Hörnigk, 'Ein Buch des Erinnerns, das zum Nachdenken anregte. Christa Wolfs "Nachdenken über Christa T."', in Inge Münz-Koenen (ed.), *Werke und Wirkungen*, (Leipzig, 1987), p 208.

Nur ist es eine Erfahrung, die ja aus der Gesellschaft kommt, in der einer lebt, die ihn also, wenn er sie richtig verarbeitet, an bestimmte Gründe und Hintergründe seiner Gesellschaft führt, die er auf Erfolgsschwingen schwebend gar nicht erfahren hätte. (DdA II, 1972, 307)

In 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf had established that the narrative method she was interested in pursuing would have an emancipatory impact both on the individual who writes and on the reader. Although she had abandoned the notion that literature could or should directly influence human behaviour, she believed that writing which promoted the emancipation of the individual would ultimately also provoke change on the level of social development. In the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s she had become increasingly aware that the contradictions she experienced as a writer in the GDR were, to a considerable extent, the result of processes of alienation and self-alienation.

The particular personal dependencies, inhibitions, and fears that Wolf had become aware of through writing, were, she believed, not unique to her personal experience, but were shared as key formative experiences by many members of her generation. These took the form of a fear of authority, of nonconformity, and a shying away from conflict and the expression of opposition to dominant social norms. On the basis of having confronted these issues in the process of writing, Wolf was certain that the origins of her generation's lack of inner maturity and personal independence of thought were to be found in their childhood socialization and in the particular upheavals which this generation had experienced during the crucial years of identity formation from youth into adulthood. It was therefore the further pursuit of questions which would illuminate the nature of this specific personality structure in the specific historical context of German fascism which was emerging as the central creative issue for Wolf in the 1970s: "Für einen bestimmten Autor gibt es in einem bestimmten Augenblick nur einen einzigen Stoff." (DdA II, 1968, 40) This line of inquiry, Wolf believed, would provide insights of fundamental significance for the development of the society in which she lived and for the evolution of an ethical and humane form of socialism. In doing so it would stimulate a debate about the extent to

which the individual in any given society could and should take personal responsibility for the creation of a more humane society. Johannes Bobrowski's key question - "Wie muß die Welt für ein moralisches Wesen beschaffen sein?" (DdA II, 1972, 309) - , as Wolf stressed in her interview with Kaufmann, "ist und bleibt stimulierend, weil sie hilft, die Welt einer menschenwürdigen Moral und nicht die Moral der Menschen einer noch wenig menschenwürdigen Welt anzupassen." (DdA II, 1973, 349)

At the time when Wolf made this statement, she was already working on her next major prose work *Kindheitsmuster*. However, she was still experimenting with and searching for the aesthetic means which would allow the interrelationships between contemporary issues and key formative experiences of the past to be transformed into a work of literature that would also incorporate the theoretical principles of 'subjective authenticity' and 'phantastische Genauigkeit' as she had developed them in 'Lesen und Schreiben'. The complexity of the subjectively-motivated and authentically-based material which Wolf was committed to developing by the early 1970s exposed the limitations not only of the narrowly defined genre categories officially sanctioned under the SED's cultural policies, but also of conventional bourgeois notions of what constitutes 'realism' in art and literature. Now that a more liberal climate had begun to develop in the cultural sphere of the GDR, Wolf and her colleagues were urging that the entire question of realism should be re-addressed in the light of their contemporary experience. This, as Wolf had pointed out in 'Glauben an Irdisches', was a task which each generation of authors had to face afresh. It had also been the basis on which "die größten Schriftsteller der Generation, der Anna Seghers angehört" had succeeded in expressing "gültige[], bleibende[] Formulierungen ihrer Grunderlebnisse [...]". (DdA I, 1968, 302) As a result of their particular biographies, Wolf had explained three years earlier, the transformation into literature of the major formative experiences of her own generation had been considerably delayed:

Für unsere Generation war es schwer, frühzeitig eine gültige literarische Aussage über ihr Grunderlebnis zu formulieren. Zuerst mußte dem Grunderlebnis unserer

Jugend ein neues, nicht weniger intensives Erlebnis hinzugefügt werden - eines, das uns nicht zufiel oder aufgedrängt wurde wie das erste; das wir selber uns schaffen mußten. (DdA I, 1965, 8-9)

Now that they had developed a distinct sense of identity, Wolf inferred, her generation of writers should embrace what had once also been the motto of Anna Seghers: "Die Gestaltung der neuen Grunderlebnisse müsse beginnen: *die Kunst unserer Epoche*." (DdA I, 1968, 304)

In conversation with Hans Kaufmann, Wolf explained that the formative experiences shared by her generation of writers, in conjunction with their later experience of state socialism created the need to develop new aesthetic models which could explore this unprecedentedly complex transition. In pursuing this goal, they would also be uniquely well placed to investigate, and contribute to the resolution of, central contradictions of contemporary society:

Was unsere Generation erlebt hat, wird nie wieder eine Generation erleben: in der einen Gesellschaft aufzuwachsen, erzogen, geprägt zu werden und in der anderen - in unserer - die Möglichkeit zu einer an die gesellschaftlichen Wurzeln gehenden Kritik und Selbstkritik zu haben, zum Denken, Verstehen, Handeln zu kommen, dabei in neue, gewiß nicht einfache Widersprüche und Konflikte gestellt zu sein, mehr: diese Widersprüche selbst mit herzustellen und an ihrer Überwindung mitzuarbeiten, und dabei doch Verhaltensmuster nicht verleugnen zu können, die Kindheit und Jugend bestimmen. (DdA II, 1973, 336)

The generation of writers and intellectuals to which Anna Seghers and Bertolt Brecht belonged, Wolf believed, had laid foundations on which her generation of East German authors could build. Wolf's essays of the late 1960s show that her search for new prose forms involved a personal re-appraisal of the 'Kulturerbe' of great contemporaries like Seghers and Brecht. What she shared with them above all was a commitment to socialist principles and to the development of a credible socialist culture rooted in ethical, humanitarian considerations. Employing different aesthetic means, both Seghers and

Brecht had developed art forms that aimed at promoting emancipatory processes on the level of individual as well as social experience. Both had been unrelenting in their endeavours to undermine a deeply ingrained "Unglaube an die Veränderbarkeit der Welt", which Wolf had identified in her essay of 1964 'Tagebuch - Arbeitsmittel und Gedächtnis' (DdA I, 1964, 22) as one of the root-causes of the cynical, politically apathetic attitudes and behaviour patterns of people in modern society. Brecht's epic theatre and particularly his principle of 'Verfremdung' could empower the individual by making transparent through rational understanding the wider social and political determinants which impinge on his or her ability to act responsibly. Seghers, as Wolf emphasized in her essay of 1968, had placed her fundamental trust in the existence and transformative power of a "Glauben an Irdisches", which Wolf interpreted as "irdische Vernunft, denkende, mitfühlende, verstehende und handelnde Vernunft" (DdA I, 1968, 317) against a society whose citizens appeared to have abdicated their personal responsibility in the face of "'teuflische[] Mächte', die nichts anderes sind als höchst irdische Usurpatoren der Macht." (DdA I, 1968, 316) In Wolf's view, the commitment to socialist principles, the emancipatory potential, and the moral guidance which the works of these predecessors offered, had clearly not lost any of their relevance to authors and readers in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹¹⁷ To her generation of writers, the ideas and aesthetic models of the earlier generation offered inspiration and "Ermunterung zu eigenen Entdeckungen." (DdA I, 1966, 85)

But by the late 1960s Wolf had become increasingly disturbed by the treatment which artists and intellectuals like Seghers and Brecht had received within the official cultural sphere of the GDR. On the one hand, their work had been supported as a distinctive feature of 'socialist national culture' and had thus been used to serve the cultural aims of the SED. On the other hand, however, the more rebellious and challenging aspects of their work and in particular their disagreements with Georg Lukács about realism in art

¹¹⁷Wolf's essays on Anna Seghers of the late 1960s and early 1970s indicate that she was primarily interested in Seghers' work of the exile years, not in her aesthetically and politically disappointing works of the 1950s and 1960s, such as *Die Entscheidung* and *Das Vertrauen*.

in the 1930s had continuously been ignored or played down by official GDR criticism, as they were considered too threatening to the ideological programme and hegemony of the SED. The affirmative role and function imposed on the works of Brecht and other members of his generation of artists and intellectuals by the GDR cultural apparatus - the "erbarmungsloses Scheinwerferlicht der offiziellen Glorifizierung", as Wolf has described it¹¹⁸ - delayed a process of critical appraisal of their ideas by her generation of writers. Brecht, in fact, had always been at odds with the prevailing official, affirmative notion of culture. He had defined the role of art as active and critical appropriation of reality, with the artist confronting, exposing and acting upon existing societal contradictions. Thus, he had continuously aimed at challenging, undermining and transforming contemporary culture. Brecht aimed in his aesthetics to create genuinely democratic and emancipatory art forms and rejected hierarchical concepts of social, political or artistic production. As I shall discuss at greater length in my examination of Wolf's engagement with the legacy of Bertolt Brecht later in this thesis (in section 2.1), Wolf had, however, rejected Brecht by the early 1980s when she had come to consider his aesthetics to be part of a patriarchal cultural tradition which promoted alienation.

One aspect which made Brecht interesting for Wolf in the later 1960s was the fact that, like Anna Seghers, Brecht had been particularly opposed to the prominence given in the GDR's official 'Kulturerbe' to the literature of Weimar classicism as well as to the unidimensional manner in which the works of Goethe and Schiller were being proposed as models for contemporary authors. Both Seghers and Brecht believed that a socialist culture and literature should be inspired by alternative traditions and employ much wider, less rigidly defined notions of realism. Brecht had been more radical than Seghers in his blanket rejection of Lukács's idea that a socialist culture could evolve from bourgeois aesthetic models. Seghers, for her part, respected the Goethe of Weimar classicism, but was far more interested in the biographies and literary works of the generation which succeeded him:

¹¹⁸Hörnigk, p 19.

Gegen den großen, "klassischen" Namen Goethes, respektvoll, kaum mit Wärme genannt, setzt sie wieder den Namen jener unglücklichen Generation, die ihm folgte und der die Synthese, die auch ein Georg Lukács von den zeitgenössischen Künstlern fordert, nicht möglich war: Kleist [...], Lenz, Hölderlin, Bürger, die Günderrode. Denen allen mißlang die Anlehnung an die bestehende Gesellschaft, die Goethe, um sein Werk zu retten, vollzog [...]. (DdA I, 1968, 301)

Any contemporary debate about realism in the GDR had, in Wolf's view, to address the issues which authors like Brecht and Seghers had raised many years earlier, but which the SED's *Kulturpolitik* had consistently suppressed. In certain respects, Wolf's experiences within the cultural sphere of the GDR were now repeating the pattern of conflict with ideological authority experienced by Seghers and Brecht a generation earlier. The tremendous success of *Der geteilte Himmel* in the GDR and beyond, and the way it was acclaimed by SED functionaries as an achievement of 'socialist national culture', had heightened Wolf's awareness of the specific responsibility which such a position entailed. Like her forebears, she had realized that there is a fine line between opposition to the hegemony of the Party on the one hand, and commitment to both the future of socialist society and the development of a socialist culture on the other. By the late 1960s, Wolf had convinced herself that her prose-writing needed to articulate the contradictions she experienced as a writer. For her, as for Brecht before her, writing has little to do with a desire for spreading comfortable truths and harmony in the manner in which Socialist Realist dogma would have it, but springs from the "anstrengende[n], schmerzhaft[e] Versuch, nicht zu Vereinbarendes miteinander zu vereinbaren." It is precisely this contradictory nature of the process of writing, Wolf explained later, which has been

eine Wurzel für den Zwang zum Schreiben [...]. So entsteht - entstand - bei mir Bindung, als ein widersprüchlicher Prozeß; so - aus Übereinstimmung und Reibung, aus Hoffnung und Konflikt - entstanden die Bücher, die ich bisher geschrieben habe. ('Auskunft', DdA I, 1979, 65)

Out of a deep commitment to the causes of antifascism and of socialism, Anna Seghers had once abandoned the "Spiel mit der Möglichkeit künstlerischen Scheiterns" and had embraced the "Verpflichtung zur künstlerischen Synthese" (DdA I, 1968, 309). Believing that "Was erzählbar geworden ist, ist überwunden" (DdA I, 1968, 307), Seghers had refrained from expressing her personal experiences in her literary work. Only in *Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen* (first published in the United States in 1946 and two years later in the GDR) did Seghers reveal more about herself. Wolf was particularly interested in developing the approach Seghers had adopted in this, her most autobiographical work, since, by allowing the reader to 'see' the author with all her personal dilemmas and contradictions in the work of fiction, the author takes responsibility: "Der Erzähler überwindet kaum Überwindbares, erzählend. Er nimmt sich, schreibend, zusammen. Das Leiden an Deutschland voll auskostend, übernimmt er Verantwortung für Deutschland." (DdA I, 1968, 309) The responsibilities which Wolf and her contemporaries needed to take no longer arose out of the 'great' causes defended by the previous generation. The contradictions her generation experienced as writers and as citizens in the GDR of the late 1960s, moreover, had become so unfathomable as to render their expression in a single, unified, work of art that affirmed established truths or moral certainties, impossible. The experience of marginalization and the loss of the feeling that they were needed, led Wolf and her colleagues (de Bruyn, Braun, Fühmann, Hermlin, Kunert, and Czechowski) to identify and engage with literary outsiders who were also the writers with whom Seghers had empathized: Kleist, Günderrode, Büchner, and the Romantics. The experiences of these non-conformists who retained their integrity and managed to hold on to their vision that a society without alienation might at some stage be created again seemed of considerable relevance. Their open-ended narrative forms and their flexible interpretations of genre categories and established literary norms offered considerable inspiration to Wolf in the pursuit of her aims. These aesthetic models could accommodate the complexity of issues and the contradictory nature of subjective experience (such as dreams, phantasies, emotions and psychological processes) that Wolf was interested in transforming into literature. The narrative method she had in mind, she explained in conversation with Hans

Kaufmann, would ultimately produce greater realism than conventional models of either 'bourgeois' or 'socialist' realism had achieved:

Wieder geht es darum, eine Schreibweise zu finden, die den höchsten Grad an Realismus für diese spezielle Unternehmung ermöglicht, am besten erzwingt: daß Gegenwart und Vergangenheit - wie sie es in uns Menschen ja andauernd tun - auch auf dem Papier sich nicht nur "treffen", sondern aufeinander einwirken, in ihrer Bewegung aneinander gezeigt werden können. Man muß also Schreibtechniken finden (und zu erkennen geben, daß und warum man sie sucht), die es fertigbringen, die fast unauflösbaren Verschränkungen, Verbindungen und Verfestigungen, die verschiedenste Elemente unserer Entwicklung miteinander eingegangen sind, doch noch einmal zu lösen, um Verhaltensweisen, auf die wir festgelegt zu sein scheinen, zu erklären und womöglich (und wo nötig) doch noch zu ändern. (DdA II, 1973, 330)

Wolf's engagement with literary traditions that highlighted the roles of emotion, experience, imagination, and reflection offered a necessary dialectical alternative to the idealization of qualities such as action, thirst for knowledge, and industriousness in the dominant culture and ideology of the GDR.¹¹⁹ Her reception of literary traditions which had been excluded by the dogmatic, narrowly-defined parameters established by Party functionaries, furthermore, re-emphasised the much more differentiated understanding of culture and of history proposed by Marxists like Brecht, the Seghers of the 1930s, and Ernst Bloch. The latter had become firmly allied with the forces of democratic and libertarian socialism which he, in spite of his complex, often tortuous political development, never abandoned or compromised.¹²⁰ In contrast to Lukács, Bloch had been deeply involved with avant-garde art and had become a staunch defender of Expressionist

¹¹⁹In the second part of this thesis I have argued that this was particularly apparent in the extremely narrow interpretations offered by SED functionaries like Alexander Abusch of Goethe's *Faust*. More so than any other work of the classical bourgeois tradition, as Wolfgang Emmerich has argued, Goethe's great drama was hailed by the cultural functionaries of the SED as the prototype of the "gesellschaftlich und tätig [sich] bewährenden Menschen". Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1989), p 102. To apparatchiks like Abusch Goethe's character seemed to embody all those ideals which they considered worthy of emulation by the positive heroes of socialist realist literature: action, thirst for knowledge, and industriousness.

¹²⁰See Douglas Kellner and Harry O'Hara, 'Utopia and Marxism in Ernst Bloch', in *New German Critique*, 9/1976, pp 11-33, p 14.

art in the so-called Expressionism-Realism debate with Lukács in the 1930s. Bloch believed that the definition of cultural heritage should not derive exclusively from the ideas and visions of the victorious classes to the exclusion of those of equally important, yet historically less dominant and neglected, strands in culture and society. He argued the case for a flexible, dialectical interpretation of the question of heritage which, in his view, should ultimately be decided by the "lebendige Beziehung des heute lebenden und progressiven Menschen zur Vergangenheit."¹²¹ Cultural heritage and tradition, according to Bloch, contains untapped emancipatory potential which can be made productive again in the present. In humanity's records of its hopes, dreams and struggles, as incarnated in its artworks, philosophies, religions, and mythologies, Bloch found prefigurations of a liberated and non-alienated condition. The revelations of unrealized dreams, lost possibilities, and abortive hopes articulated in neglected cultural traditions could, Bloch believed, be resurrected and realized in the present.

Bloch was opposed to any schematic definitions of history as a given, assumed totality. He offered a dialectical analysis of the past which illuminates the present and can direct humanity to a better future. For Bloch, the past contains both the sufferings, tragedies and failures of humanity and its unrealized hopes and potential. Believing that what could have been can still happen, he viewed history as a repository of possibilities that are living options for future action. In contrast to the mechanistic, non-dialectical and linear views on history which were propagated by Party functionaries in the GDR in the early 1950s, Bloch had been convinced that humanity could shape a genuinely socialist future only by engaging in a creative revolutionary practice that would project the future in the light of what is, what has been, and what could be.

It was the emancipatory message and the dialectical understanding of history in Bloch's thinking which encouraged Wolf at this time to make connections between him and Brecht, as she evolved her new aesthetics. A key concern for Brecht had been the lack of emphasis which politicians and functionaries in the Soviet Zone of Occupation had

¹²¹Hanns Eisler, Ernst Bloch, 'Die Kunst zu erben', in *Materialien zu einer Dialektik der Musik*, (Leipzig, 1976), p 149.

placed on a thorough reappraisal of Germany's most recent history. The trend towards exoneration of GDR citizens from responsibility for their role in the Third Reich, the general spirit of optimism and belief in progress and, above all, the assumption that the creation of the GDR was, in itself, the culmination of progress out of the 'deutsche Misere', were all, in Brecht's view, fundamentally misconceived. He was at pains to point out that socialism had not been brought to Germany by way of a popular revolution and that progress which failed to seek fully to understand the past could never be sustained. In Brecht's view, the break with the past had to be the outcome of a dialectical process in which patterns of thought and behaviour which prevailed during the Third Reich were constantly and systematically challenged:

Es ist ein großes Unglück unserer Geschichte, daß wir den Aufbau des Neuen leisten müssen, ohne die Niederreißung des Alten geleistet zu haben. Das haben, indem sie den Faschismus besiegten, die Sowjetrussen für uns getan. Wahrscheinlich sehen wir jetzt den Aufbau so undialektisch an. Und daß wir ihn so ansehen, hat wiederum den Nachteil, daß wir dem täglichen Kampf gegen das Alte, den wir doch zu leisten haben, keinen genügenden Ausdruck verleihen.¹²²

It is clear that Wolf's redefinition of her poetological, ideological and philosophical frame of reference for a credible socialist literature was comprehensive and detailed. She needed to show great determination and inner maturity in order to overcome the significant obstructions put in the way of this process by Party dogmatism and an undialectical interpretation of Marxist cultural theory. But she was sustained by the awareness that many of her contemporaries were engaged in the same process. In redefining themselves within the context of European Marxism, Wolf and her colleagues found themselves unmasking the compromises which forebears like Brecht and Seghers had been persuaded to make, as well as uncovering the silences imposed on them by the

¹²²Bertolt Brecht, on 'Die Verurteilung des Lukullus', in Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, 17, (Frankfurt/Main, 1967), p 1154.

dominant culture and ideology in the GDR. In addition, they had to rediscover the work of Marxists like Bloch who, in contrast to Lukács and Becher, had never compromised his libertarian socialist principles and who had become excluded by orthodox GDR culture and ideology as a result. As I shall show later in this chapter, Wolf continuously replenished and revised her personal interpretation of these democratic, emancipatory strands in European Marxism in the pursuit of her aesthetic and ideological aims, and soon went on to link them with alternative, Western frameworks of analysis such as psychoanalysis (Reich, Freud, Mitscherlich) and feminist thought.

The issue of redefining realism in art through the formulation of concepts which acknowledge the totality and contradictory nature of individual experience, formed a focal point of debate at the Seventh Writers' Congress of the GDR which was held in Berlin on 14 - 16 November 1973. The authors' determination that literature would now be freed from the ideological constraints of *Kulturpolitik* made this the most dynamic of the GDR's formal literary gatherings since the Fourth Congress in 1956. The 'Bitterfeld' movement and the notion of a homogeneous 'socialist community' was officially abandoned. In its stead, writers insisted on the diversity of their aesthetic aims and their right to employ a plurality of narrative methods and poetological concepts. For Wolf, the congress was an important breakthrough, since her status was now emphatically confirmed and the ideas she had developed in 'Lesen und Schreiben' and reiterated in conversation with Walther and Kaufmann were enthusiastically supported. Anna Seghers, for instance, now putting her Socialist Realist aberrations of the 1950s and 1960s behind her, endorsed Wolf's insistence that writing must be the result of a personal need for poetic expression which springs from the deeply felt desire "sich selbst und seinen Mitmenschen etwas klarzumachen, wovon er [der Autor, RR] zutiefst überzeugt ist."¹²³ Franz Fühmann, who gave one of the main speeches, reiterated that literature must be judged according to its own qualitative criteria and that each writer can only contribute the fruits of his or her

¹²³Anna Seghers, 'Der sozialistische Standpunkt läßt am weitesten blicken', speech at the Seventh Writers' Congress of the GDR, in *VII. Schriftstellerkongreß der DDR. Protokoll*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1974), p 16.

distinctive experience. In "diese[r] von Widersprüchen bewegte[n] Welt", he emphasized, the exclusion of any aspect of human experience from literary treatment is indefensible.¹²⁴ 'Widersprüche' also emerged as a key concept in Wolf's speech. Uncovering and defining the contradictions characteristic of her generation's experience, Wolf believed, would tap "Reserven an Realismus" which contemporary literature could explore, "indem sie konsequent diese Widersprüche formuliert und sie durch fruchtbare Fragestellungen produktiv zu machen sucht." (DdA I, 1973, 433) Her generation of writers, Wolf stressed, now had to contribute to the development of a critical awareness of history in the GDR which relinquished the comfortable notion that the "Bewältigung" of German fascism was a task only for capitalist Western Germany, whilst the GDR, as the morally superior society, could consider this issue to have been "erledigt". The stimulation of a debate about "Unerledigtes" from her generation's past under Hitler, Wolf inferred, might, in due course, also pave the way for a discussion "darüber, wo diese unerledigten Punkte in unserer Gegenwart liegen." (DdA I, 1973, 435)

Kindheitsmuster, like other major prose works of Christa Wolf, was written after a period of transition during which the author gradually approached her central material by writing shorter, experimental pieces of prose. With 'Unter den Linden' (1969), 'Neue Lebensansichten eines Katers' (1970), and 'Selbstversuch' (1972), Wolf continued her exploration of narrative means which radically break with established literary conventions and the narrowly defined parameters of Socialist Realism. As in *Nachdenken* and 'Juninachmittag', she was motivated above all by a personal desire to gain greater self-understanding and to demolish internal barriers to self-knowledge through writing truthfully and authentically about her experiences. Aesthetically as well as thematically, Wolf was now embarking on the narrative 'adventures' which, as she had explained in 'Lesen und Schreiben', would pave the way for the development of a prose appropriate for a "wissenschaftliche[s] Zeitalter." (DdA II, 1968, 35) Like Anna Seghers and Johannes Bobrowski before her, Wolf found fresh inspiration in the late 1960s in the literary works

¹²⁴Franz Fühmann, *Essays, Gespräche, Aufsätze 1964-1981*, (Rostock, 1983), pp 67-81, p 75.

of German Romanticism and particularly in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose *Ritter Gluck* (1809), *Undine* (1819), and *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kappellmeisters Johann Kreisler* (1820/22) formed important points of orientation.¹²⁵ The narrative methods and stylistic techniques which Romantic literature had used to convey its perception of a world governed by the unreal, the irrational, the phantastic and the grotesque, now permitted Wolf to combine her personal interest in exploring those aspects of human existence which are beyond the grasp of scientific knowledge and rational understanding with her aesthetic aim of extending the limits of what constitutes realism in literature. Although the shorter prose narratives are at first glance thematically and aesthetically different, they all illuminate real, everyday problems, conflicts, attitudes and values from a satirical, ironic and grotesque perspective: the relationship between human action and ideological conviction, the gulf that separates technological and scientific progress from moral development and ethical awareness, and the differences between the ideological claims that gender equality had already been achieved and the actual persistence of a conventional, gender-based division of labour in socialist society. The fact that Wolf referred to these short pieces of prose as "Kleine Proben auf anderen Instrumenten" (DdA II, 1973, 346), is in itself an indication that we may regard them as variants on the same central theme.

Like 'Juninachmittag' and *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Wolf's short prose narratives are structured around the free play of associations, reflections, thought fragments and memories of a central narrating figure. But more radically than in her previous works, Wolf employs a narrative technique which makes the familiar strange, mixing the real and the unreal, the rational with the irrational, and historical, socio-political and geographic facts with elements of the phantastic and the dream-like. In 'Unter den Linden', for instance, the most complex and multi-layered prose narrative of this group, the borderlines between outer and inner reality, between public and private self, between physical and psychological existence, between body, mind, and spirit, are unavoidably

¹²⁵ See also Hörnigk, p 151.

blurred. The conscious mind of the narratorial self becomes receptive to the images, thought fragments and messages of the unconscious mind; the notion of a unified, known or knowable self has been replaced by the understanding that fragmentary, contradictory and conflicting aspects of the self reside side by side within the same person. In the fictional realm of the individual stories, the author plays out different aspects of this self, allowing it to float freely through the dimensions of time and space, between the real and manifest and between the phantastic and unreal. In this way, reality can be perceived in an unfamiliar light, opening up new perspectives and expanding the bounds of what can be known and experienced. As Bernd Melzer has argued, 'Unter den Linden' may on one level be regarded as an "Angebot[, sich nicht zu finden oder auf die Selbstfindung zu verzichten, sich Normen zu unterwerfen oder auf Normen überhaupt zu verzichten, den Versuchungen zu unterliegen oder sie nicht zur Kenntnis zu nehmen."¹²⁶ The aesthetic means employed by the author in these short prose narratives are designed to allow the conscious mind to relinquish control in order to permit deeper levels of the self, of the subconscious mind, to emerge, enticing both buried memories and abandoned hopes to rise to the surface within the safety of the fictional realm. As in *Nachdenken*, this process provokes unexpected insights which the author records and observes, allowing her conscious mind neither to dismiss nor to be overwhelmed by the experience.

In contrast to their counterparts in Romantic literature, Wolf's narrators are never at risk of becoming fully or permanently submerged in the realm of the dream-like or the phantastic. They remain fully rooted in the conscious and the real and return from their journey into the unknown enriched by new experiences and with greater confidence in their personal potential as committed citizens of the society in which they live. Through their journey into the unknown, Wolf's narrators become reacquainted with forgotten, buried and wounded aspects of their self, and by reintegrating these into her present consciousness, the author can gain a sense of the richness of her future potential. In fact,

¹²⁶Bernd Melzer, 'Zu Christa Wolfs Prosaarbeiten der siebziger Jahre', in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Wilhelm-Pieck-Universität Rostock*, (31. Jahrgang 1982, Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Reihe, Heft 8), pp 9-21, p 10.

Wolf's narratives successfully integrate where others have excluded. Whereas Brecht and Bloch, for instance, had rejected an exploration of the unconscious mind as a means to understanding reality, Wolf's work provides a synthesis, incorporating elements of Brecht's critical illumination of socio-political structures and of Bloch's emphasis on the utopian potential of the 'daydream' with a Freudian examination of the insights to be gained from our 'nightdreams' and from our darker, largely repressed, phantasies and desires. And while the Romantic poets had neglected an examination of the socio-political and economic necessities which impinge on an individual's ability to act, the message of Wolf's work has been consistently political. Wolf's short prose narratives set out to shock and to disturb, but they also allow her readers to perceive (in the sense of 'erahnen') an alternative reality in which their emotional and spiritual needs are catered for just as fully as their material and physical needs. By exploring the totality of human experience, Wolf's work has aimed to enable her readers to perceive more clearly their individual potential for change and action.

Wolf's engagement with Romantic literature in no way constituted an escape into Romantic phantasies; it was fully consistent, in terms of the development of her subject matter and her experimentation with literary form, with her work of the mid- to late 1960s. As she explained in conversation with Hans Kaufmann, her exploration of elements of Romantic literature and her experimentation with genre categories she had hitherto not tapped (such as political satire and science fiction) were part of a battle for the development of realism. This, she pointed out two years later in a discussion about *Kindheitsmuster*, she considered to be an ongoing task that would never become easier: "[...] man soll dazu kein larmoyantes Verhältnis haben und sich vorstellen, daß der Kampf um den Realismus in der Kunst irgendwann aufhören oder leicht sein wird." (DdA II, 1975, 385). Her narratives demonstrate that a 'realistic' socialist literature can successfully combine a social, moral and political appeal with aesthetic originality and narrative methods which engage not only the rational mind of the reader, but which also stimulate the imagination and promote sensual, emotional and psychological awareness. Employing her personal resources and her creative capacities to the full, Wolf managed not only to

write her way out of a personal crisis, but also to achieve greater self-knowledge. With heightened self-confidence, Wolf had now renewed her deep commitment to GDR society and to the future of humankind, seeking to keep alive "die Bindung der Menschheit an ihre Wurzeln" and to provide "Hoffnung auf eine Zukunft." (DdA II, 1968, 46) Her constructive social criticism provides insights which help her readers to 'see' that they are not at the mercy of forces outside themselves, but that the "schmale Weg der Vernunft, des Erwachsenwerdens, der Reife des menschlichen Bewußtseins, der bewußte Schritt aus der Vorgeschichte in die Geschichte" and the "Entschluß, mündig zu werden" (DdA II, 1968, 46) are important steps they are all capable of taking.

Against the background of her renewed self-confidence and commitment to her social role as a writer, it was possible for Wolf, after completing these short prose narratives, to embark on the task of analysing her lifetime and that of her generation with a more rigorous authenticity than the conditions of insecurity and vulnerability in the late 1960s had permitted: "Als schreibendes Subjekt kann man überhaupt nur versuchen, diesem Stoff näherzutreten, wenn man sich eines gesellschaftlichen Standorts sicher ist, der einem eine radikale Kritik auch an sich selbst, der man einmal war, ermöglicht." (DdA I, 1973, 434) *Kindheitsmuster* was part of the second wave of GDR literature dealing with the war and the Nazi past that appeared in the mid-seventies. In contrast to the works of the previous wave in the 1960s, authors now concentrated on identifying the traces of fascist mentality and behaviour still manifest in everyday life in the GDR: authoritarianism, moral cowardice, conformity - as well as their widespread self-deception in refusing to admit to the connections between these attitudes and their upbringing in the Third Reich. Wolf's treatment of this subject matter is distinctive in that she offers not so much an analysis of the socio-political and economic conditions which led to the atrocities and horrors of the Nazi period, but rather places the question "Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir sind?" (DdA II, 1975, 370) at the heart of her prose work. As I have explained in the above exposition, Wolf approached the task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* gradually, carefully preparing the ground through her prose writing and through her essays ('Deutschsprechen', 1966; 'Blickwechsel', 1970; 'Zu einem Datum', 1971). The fact that she

is reported to have spent over a year experimenting with alternative beginnings to *Kindheitsmuster* gives an indication of how problematic a treatment of this subject matter from the perspective of subjective authenticity proved to be.

Wolf has described *Kindheitsmuster* as a "Gegenwartsbuch", in which she endeavours "mitzubeschreiben, was vorher war, ehe die Leute sich so verhielten, wie sie sich heute verhalten." (DdA II, 1975, 363) "Gegenwart", in Wolf's understanding, is far more than everyday occurrences in the present, but is taken to mean "alles, was uns treibt, zum Beispiel heute so zu handeln oder nicht zu handeln, wie wir es tun oder lassen." (DdA II, 1975, 352) As in *Nachdenken*, the relationship between author and narrator is intimate and personal: the two are strikingly similar without being identical. A primary purpose of the narrative is again self-exploration in order to gain greater self-knowledge. As in *Unter den Linden*, Wolf chooses to conduct her self-questioning in the form of self-dissolution, creating distance between the narrator and the central character in order to 'see' her more clearly. But now the self-protective shield of the phantastic and dream-like has been dropped, and the author has found the courage to write about her own past, probing the depths of her memory and recreating her past from the perspective of authentic subjective experience. As in previous works, Wolf is supported in her quest by the insights of psychoanalysts such as the Mitscherlichs, but draws also on the ideas of Sigmund Freud and her GDR contemporary Jens Reich. Her interest in patterns of behaviour and patterns of experience are testimony to the similarity of concerns between the writer and the psychologist, adding substance to her suggestion in conversation with Joachim Walther that writing can be a form of therapy. The thoughts of Ernst Bloch, particularly his location of hope in the not-yet-conscious, the anticipatory dreams of a future state of being, also re-emerge here. The exploration of semi-conscious and dream experiences with which Wolf had experimented in 'Unter den Linden', 'Selbstversuch', and 'Neue Lebensansichten eines Katers', allows her to transcend the conventional boundaries of the self. As in the short pieces of prose, *Kindheitsmuster* experiments with memory, blurring the boundaries and chronology of events as they have become committed to memory.

Freeing fragments of memory and juxtaposing them in free association again creates new perspectives and experiences.

In keeping with her other prose works, however, *Kindheitsmuster* serves a purpose far beyond the personal and specific. Whilst its subject matter is not fascism as such, Wolf pursues a line of questioning which is designed to illuminate in particular "die Struktur der Vergangenheitsbeziehungen meiner Generation, das heißt: Bewältigung der Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart." (DdA II, 1973, 335) *Kindheitsmuster* specifically inquires into the psychological problems encountered by Wolf's generation in developing a sense of identity. The difficulty of saying "I", which had already been a motif in *Nachdenken*, is a problem thematized again in *Kindheitsmuster*. For her generation, Wolf stated in an interview with Karin McPherson at the University of Edinburgh in 1979, the process of individuation and self-definition was delayed, because:

Our generation was from its infancy imprisoned [...] in mass processes [...]. First of all, as children in the days of fascism, we found ourselves fitting into a historical movement which was wrong, and afterwards, when a strong movement, this socialist one, gave us something new to hold on to and identify with, and a new orientation, we felt liberated. It is not that I want to change any of this, but at the same time this identifying with a historical situation is in a way a temptation to surrender one's own identity.¹²⁷

Particularly for those whose sense of identification with the historical movements had been or still was very strong, Wolf explained, the process of self-definition and an insistence upon self-realisation had been difficult. *Kindheitsmuster* problematises the deep psychological split of this generation and its deep desire to find their own identity. Formally and externally, this is expressed in the narrative through the narrator referring to herself through the use of both pronouns, the 'you' and the 'she'.

Wolf's treatment of the past in *Kindheitsmuster* is based on concrete historical fact: on a meticulous collection and careful study of documents and eye-witness reports, of

¹²⁷Karin Mc Pherson, 'Christa Wolf in Edinburgh.', pp 6-7.

historical, psychological and biographical data. In working through, seeking to understand and accepting her own past on the basis of both documentary evidence and personal memory, Wolf has provided a powerful social analysis as well as performing a 'Trauerarbeit' (in the sense the Mitscherlichs had suggested) that is of fundamental social relevance and significance to her generation.

Wolf was able to accomplish this task in a socio-political climate which, she believed, had altered considerably since Honecker's assumption of office. During a public discussion in the East Berlin Academy of the Arts at the end of 1975, for instance, (while she was in the process of completing *Kindheitsmuster*), Wolf expressed the view that the official cultural policy in the GDR no longer operated directly against the wishes of the literary community since: "gerade in den letzten vier Jahren [...], sich doch ein größerer Freiraum eröffnete - [...] [daß jetzt, RR] mehr Möglichkeiten gegeben sind, Probleme aufzugreifen, Konflikte zu gestalten, die wir vorher nicht ausdrücken konnten oder nicht so ausdrücken konnten." (DdA II, 1975, 383) This makes it seem even more ironic that at the very moment when Wolf expressed these optimistic sentiments, an insidious new clamp-down on GDR culture had already begun. Even before the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 shook the literary community of the GDR and shocked the world, there were indications that tensions were building up in the GDR's cultural sphere and that the period of calm would be succeeded by the - inevitable - storm. The limited scope of the new opportunities for the arts signalled by Honecker's 'no taboos' speech had already been apparent in the continued exclusion of literary works and of artists considered too threatening to the cultural hegemony of the SED. Stefan Heym's *Der Tag X*, for instance, could not appear in 1973, and Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* was withdrawn after it had briefly appeared in *Sinn und Form* in 1975. In October 1976 the Party expelled Reiner Kunze from the Writers' Union because he published a collection of short prose texts, *Die wunderbaren Jahre*, which were highly critical of everyday life in the GDR in the West.

Christa Wolf, like almost all respected GDR authors, was painfully aware that the expatriation of Wolf Biermann threatened to do lasting damage to the literary community,

seriously undermining the spirit of mutual support and collaboration which had become established by the mid-1970s. Christa Wolf, her husband Gerhard and Volker Braun were among the twelve leading writers of the GDR who urged Erich Honecker in a letter of protest to reconsider his decision not to allow Biermann back into the GDR at the end of his concert tour of the Federal Republic. In the event, however, far from weakening the ties between members of the literary community, the Party's ruthless action provoked a strong show of solidarity. This was demonstrated firstly by the letter of protest to Erich Honecker which was signed by no fewer than twelve leading writers of the GDR (among them Christa Wolf, her husband Gerhard and Volker Braun) and subsequently by support for this protest from numerous other GDR intellectuals. The publication of the letter of protest in the Western press put the Politbüro under considerable additional pressure to review its decision. However, by challenging the authority of the Party, and especially by seeking support from the 'class enemy', Wolf and the other writers had made themselves vulnerable to retaliation by the Party's hardliners. The Party responded to the challenge writers had issued to its authority with predictable vehemence: those who were Party members were severely reprimanded or even expelled. Among those whose Party membership was rescinded was Christa Wolf's husband Gerhard. Disciplinary proceedings against Christa Wolf herself had to be postponed, because she suffered a heart attack at the time the Party's inquiry into these events was at its most intense. In January 1977, shortly after the publication of *Kindheitsmuster*, the Party's proceedings against Christa Wolf continued and she received a severe reprimand.¹²⁸ In the face of further pressure from the Politbüro, the Writers' Union executive committee issued a resolution on 11 March 1977 which condemned the action of those colleagues who were thought to have advantaged opponents of socialism by raising GDR problems in the Western media. Archive material studied by Ian Wallace has revealed that Christa Wolf was among those who were pressurized by the Party publicly to support the Union's resolution.¹²⁹ Wolf, like

¹²⁸For further details see Wilfried Werth, 'Die Alternative. Zur Kulturpolitik der DDR. Eine Chronik', in *Tintenfisch*, 14, (Berlin, 1978), pp 92-100.

¹²⁹Ian Wallace, 'The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences', in *German Monitor*, (No. 29, 1992), pp 68-80, p 70.

Sarah Kirsch, remained firm in her refusal to make such a statement, insisting that what she had done had served a vital purpose in drawing attention to issues which threatened the GDR's cultural development. Faced with the prospect of a split with the Politbüro through supporting its 'rebellious' members, the executive of the East Berlin branch of the Writers' Union sided with the Party and expelled, amongst others, Christa Wolf's husband Gerhard. On 20 December 1976 Jurek Becker, Günter de Bruyn, Sarah Kirsch, Ulrich Plenzdorf, Volker Braun, and Christa Wolf were also expelled. In protest, Christa Wolf subsequently resigned voluntarily from the executive committee of the GDR's central Writers' Union.

The Party's tactics threatened to destroy completely authors' hopes that Honecker's rise to power could facilitate a productive relationship between 'Geist' and 'Macht' in the GDR. Those writers who had supported Biermann's cause now found themselves completely isolated, with the Party showing no intention whatsoever to enter into any kind of constructive debate. For Christa Wolf, this reactionary climate rekindled the disillusionment she had felt after the Eleventh Plenum in 1965, now with even greater intensity. As a member of a literary community which had consistently devoted its energies to the development of an anti-authoritarian, self-critical and democratic socialism in the GDR, Wolf was aware that these events had particularly sinister consequences. The literary programme she had presented in 'Lesen und Schreiben' was based on the assumption that critical, experimental and utopian literature was integral to socialist society: "ich sehe eine tiefe Übereinstimmung zwischen dieser Art zu schreiben und der sozialistischen Gesellschaft" (DdA II, 1968, 35), Wolf had written in 1968, and further:

Warum sollte [der Autor] sich fahrlässig des Vorteils begeben, der darin liegt, daß seine Gesellschaft die Selbstverwirklichung ihrer Mitglieder anstrebt? Eine der wichtigsten Voraussetzungen für das Entstehen von Literatur ist aber Sehnsucht nach Selbstverwirklichung [...]. [Der Autor] soll den Vorteil des geographischen und historischen Orts bis auf den Grund ausschöpfen und sich, als Person, jeder Empfindung stellen, die ein tief beteiligtes Leben mit sich bringt. (DdA II, 1968, 42)

When Wolf had developed her principle of 'subjective authenticity', she had based this on the assumption that authors like her would make a contribution to the formation of a genuinely socialist society through their productive criticism and personal commitment. The Party's handling of the Biermann affair now indicated beyond doubt that the whole idea of productive criticism and personal contribution had been made redundant: "Eine Gruppe von Autoren", Wolf reflected later, "wurde sich darüber klar, daß ihre direkte Mitarbeit in dem Sinne, wie sie sie selbst verantworten konnte und für richtig hielt, nicht mehr gebraucht wurde." (DdA II, 1982, 422) Perceiving herself to have been stripped permanently of any prospect of fulfilling a social role in the GDR, Wolf experienced another existential crisis:

Ich hab damals stark mit dem Gefühl gelebt, mit dem Rücken an der Wand zu stehn und keinen richtigen Schritt tun zu können. Ich mußte über eine gewisse Zeit hinwegkommen, in der es absolut keine Wirkungsmöglichkeit mehr zu geben schien. (DdA II, 1982, 422)

On the occasion of receiving the (West German) Kleist prize¹³⁰, Christa Wolf remembered the precise moment shortly after the Biermann affair which had brought her to a turning point:

Thomas Brasch sagte, er wolle weggehen. Er war nicht der erste, der da saß, aber er war der erste, dem ich nicht mehr abraten konnte. Insofern war sein Weggehen, das weiß er nicht, auch für mich ein Einschnitt, plötzlich gab es eine neue Frage, die hieß: Warum bleiben?¹³¹

In conversation with Aafke Steenhuis in 1989 Christa Wolf made no secret of the fact that she and her husband seriously considered leaving the GDR during this period and that the personal costs of the dilemma they faced were far greater than critics have been able to

¹³⁰Christa Wolf, 'Laudatio auf Thomas Brasch', in Christa Wolf, *Ansprachen*, (Darmstadt, 1988), pp 55-69.

¹³¹Christa Wolf, 'Laudatio auf Thomas Brasch', in *Ansprachen*, pp 55-56.

appreciate.¹³² But Wolf knew that the capitalist West could offer no viable alternative to a writer whose very creativity has been rooted in the specific contradictions of GDR society: "Die scharfe Reibung, die zu produktiven Funken führt, fühlte ich nur hier mit aller Verzweiflung, dem Kaltgestelltsein, den Selbstzweifeln, die das Leben hier mit sich bringt. Das war mein Schreibgrund." (ID, 1989, 148) Ultimately, therefore, Wolf had to find the answer to the question why she should remain in the GDR through the process of writing itself, since, as she later stated, "nur die Produktion kann jene innere Freiheit hervorbringen, die den Zweifel über die Wahl des Lebens- und Arbeitsortes aufhebt."¹³³

¹³²Wolf insinuated in conversation with Steenhuis that this crisis had been life-threatening: "Ich glaube, daß ich ohne diese nahen Menschen (her family and friends, RR) heute nicht mehr am Leben wäre. Es gab da kritische Zeiten" (ID, 1989, 156)

¹³³Ibid., p 56.

1.5 The perspective of the outsider: radicalization and reorientation (1976-1989)

The Biermann affair plunged the cultural community of the GDR headlong into a profound crisis. By the late 1970s, well over fifty of the GDR's writers had become so disaffected that they preferred to leave the country, as the Party was cynically encouraging them to do. In fact, as Goodbody, Tate and Wallace have pointed out, by issuing extended exit visas, the Party's strategy may well have been to diffuse the immediate crisis, while leaving open the possibility that those writers who had decided to leave might eventually choose to return. In the event, however, none of those who left ever returned. Their loss was a serious drain on the cultural resources of the GDR.¹³⁴ The society which had once defined itself as a 'Literaturgesellschaft' had become irreversibly split, with no hope remaining that the Party and cultural practitioners could ever be equal partners in pursuit of shared goals. For those members of the literary community who remained in the GDR the loss of so many valued colleagues to the West was exacerbated by the split within their community between those who gave in to Party pressure, supporting the line taken by the Writers' Union, and the remainder, who continued to stand up for the cultural values Biermann had defended. The pressure brought to bear on an increasingly fragmented group of critical intellectuals created an atmosphere of uncertainty, mistrust and pessimism which subjected both professional and personal relationships to considerable strain. In this situation it became particularly evident how crucial a counterforce to alienation, cynicism, and despair was the spirit of solidarity which had become established among this group. Even though writers individually had to resolve the question of whether to leave or whether to remain, on the basis of their particular circumstances, a change of geographical location from East to West by no means

¹³⁴See Goodbody et al, 'The failed socialist experiment', in Burns, p 191.

automatically entailed the loss of attachment to fellow citizens and colleagues in the GDR or the end of close friendships and mutual support. In fact, the key experiences of writers and intellectuals during the late 1970s call to mind the central motif of Wolf's narrative *Der geteilte Himmel*. Here, Wolf had already suggested that individuals faced with such vital questions ultimately have to find the strength to act on their personal convictions. But she had also asserted that ideological differences do not preclude the preservation of empathy and of solidarity. Literature, in Wolf's view, can transcend time and space, promoting a sense of common purpose between kindred spirits regardless of their geographical location. In view of the fact that radical authors were now unquestionably isolated and marginalized on either side of the ideological divide, it was clearly more important than ever to keep this awareness alive.

One corollary of the exile of so many East German writers was the increasing difficulty of ascribing a clear meaning to the phrase 'literature of the GDR'. This was because many GDR writers now living in the Federal Republic of Germany continued to write from a perspective which remained firmly East German in character. Furthermore, the open-minded authors who remained in the GDR became increasingly sensitized to the problems and tensions they shared with their colleagues in the West. The irrevocable loss of so many talented and committed colleagues in combination with the polarization of intellectual life in the GDR left little occasion for optimism: it was clear that those who contributed to GDR literature would not be able to recapture the collective spirit which had, particularly during the more optimistic periods of the early 1960s and the early 1970s, encouraged them to believe that they were a social force to be reckoned with. One consequence of this was that authors like Wolf increasingly defined themselves as members of a European community of critical intellectuals who continued to provide a distinctive GDR perspective on the events they described.

This led Christa Wolf to explore the extent to which the isolation and marginalization of creative individuals was a phenomenon of all modern industrialized, technological societies. As a writer who had persistently explored the problem of self-realization she now regarded an analysis of the historical roots of such polarizing trends as

both urgent and socially significant. Wolf's engagement with the lives and works of the early Romantic poets, which began during the late 1970s, made her acutely aware of the fact that Western industrialized societies had become established at the cost of marginalizing literature, a development which had gone hand in hand with the persistent exclusion of women and of feminine values from society. In the lives and works of forebears who, under similar historical circumstances, had demonstrated the personal courage to insist on their hopes and dreams and on the values they defended, Wolf found both intellectual sustenance and inspiration. The early Romantic poets had pioneered narrative methods which allowed them to express their individuality and subjectivity as fully as possible in their works, pushing to the limits literature's potential for exploring their own and their society's contradictions. In a historical situation which denied them their proper place as autonomous individuals, these writers had been among the first in German history to find a 'Heimat' in literature as a place where their utopian longing could be preserved, in the hope that future generations would appreciate it better than their contemporaries had done.

Kein Ort. Nirgends (written in 1977-78) is the first work produced by Wolf in the aftermath of the Biermann affair to be published (1979). Later on came *Sommerstück* (1987) and *Was bleibt* (1990), texts which were begun under the direct impact of the same crisis but revised and updated for publication only years afterwards. The reason for this postponement is certainly not, as malicious critics like Ulrich Greiner or Frank Schirrmacher would have it, that Wolf shied away from self-confrontation and conflict or acted opportunistically. It obviously took time and distance before she could write about these experiences in the highly autobiographical literary form she eventually decided upon. *Kein Ort. Nirgends* is Christa Wolf's literary response to deep-seated doubts about her role as a writer, which simultaneously enabled her to reassert herself with the help of a historical model. Even though the Biermann affair provided the immediate stimulus which led to the creation of this work, Wolf was already extremely well placed to explore this historical subject-matter on the basis of the literary interests she had been pursuing since the late 1960s. In her collection of short prose narratives she had, as we have seen, drawn

on and developed the narrative methods of the early Romantic writers, since she considered these to be appropriate for the expression of the more elusive aspects of individual contemporary experience. Furthermore, as the first GDR author to have suggested that Büchner's *Lenz* (as I have already indicated in my analysis of 'Lesen und Schreiben'), could serve as an apposite historical model of 'epic prose', Wolf had not yet developed the *Lenz* theme in her fictional works. At the end of the 1970s this theme clearly took on a new and decidedly grim topicality. Deeply isolated as a result of their fundamental conflict with an intolerant orthodoxy, Wolf and her colleagues were inspired to consider the extent to which the desperate human crisis portrayed by Büchner was of lasting relevance. As Dennis Tate has shown in his detailed analysis, Büchner's *Lenz* was, for GDR authors such as Christa and Gerhard Wolf, Stephan Hermlin, Franz Fühmann, and Volker Braun, not merely one neglected work among many, not just an example of narrative technique capable of being adapted to contemporary subject-matter. In the light of their deep sense of alienation and disillusionment, *Lenz* "virtually acquired the status of the fundamental model of human experience previously enjoyed in the GDR by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*."¹³⁵ Indeed, it seemed to Wolf circumstances were very similar to those described by Anna Seghers in the late 1930s who had observed that the radical artist who works under "kunstfeindlichen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen" (DdA I, 1968, 301) still had to choose between the false alternatives of personal integrity and social responsibility. Seghers had understood that this dilemma had claimed numerous heroic victims among generations of radical German artists who had been inspired by revolutionary ideals, but found themselves deeply frustrated in the reactionary climate of "eine unerbittlich auf Effizienz eingeschworene Gesellschaft." (DdA I, 1977, 202) It had been their deep attachment to their country, Seghers had stressed, which had inspired "die

¹³⁵See Dennis Tate, "'Ewige deutsche Misere'?" - GDR Authors and Büchner's *Lenz*', in G. Bartram and A. Waine (eds.), *Culture and Society in the GDR*, (Dundee, 1984), pp 85-99, p 85. Tate considers the real importance of Wolf's espousal of Büchner's *Lenz* in 'Lesen und Schreiben' as a literary model of 'epische Prosa' to lie in the crucial bearing it had on five examples of epic prose developed in the GDR: Johannes Bobrowski's *Boehlendorff* (1964), Gerhard Wolf's *Der arme Hölderlin* (1972), Volker Braun's *Unvollendete Geschichte* (1975), Christa Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979), and Erik Neutsch's *Forster in Paris* (1981). Tate, "'Ewig deutsche Misere'?" p 90.

Besten [deutschen Schriftsteller, RR]", against all the odds, to write "Hymnen auf ihr Land, an dessen gesellschaftlicher Mauer sie ihre Stirnen wund rieben." (DdA I, 1963, 274)¹³⁶ And in a short pamphlet of 1938, 'Illegales legal', Seghers had asked those who remained in the fatherland to read "alle, die jung starben zur Zeit Goethes, die Lenz und Bürger und Hölderlin und Büchner," and to understand " was den Dichter jenseits der Grenzen gejagt hat, ihres Landes und ihrer Zeit."¹³⁷ With *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, Wolf picked up this challenge in order to submit to fresh scrutiny "die Voraussetzungen von Scheitern" (DdA II, 1982, 422) as an aspect of "Selbstverständigung" and "eine Art von Selbstrettung, als mir der Boden unter den Füßen weggezogen war." (DdA II, 1982, 423). By declaring that the biographies of the artistic victims of the 'Goethe era' were appropriate "Muster, [die] wenn auch vielfältig modifiziert, bis in unsere Tage wirken" (DdA I, 1972, 202), Wolf was able not only to undermine the optimism of the GDR's official views on cultural heritage, but also to challenge the basis of the GDR's ideological claim that it had already put a definitive end to the 'deutsche Misere'.

For Christa Wolf as both a reader and a writer, the engagement with pioneers like Georg Büchner at a time of deep personal crisis reaffirmed the fact that literature has a transformative and regenerative power: "Die Beschäftigung mit Büchner hat mir damals über die schlimmsten Jahre hinweggeholfen." (ID, 1989, 142) Just as Büchner was considered by Wolf to have played through the "Variante Wahnsinn - Lenz [...], um ihr zu entrinnen" (DdA II, 1968, 31), Wolf now chose her protagonists "um ihre Problematik für mich durchzuspielen." (DdA II, 1982, 423) In 'Selbstversuch', Wolf had first addressed the issue of self-realization in an overtly feminist way. She had consolidated this feminist consciousness in her foreword to Maxie Wander's collection of documentary interviews with women, *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1978). In this essay, 'Berührung', Wolf had explored the wider issue of "Subjektwerdung" in a patriarchal society by analysing

¹³⁶Quoted by Christa Wolf from Anna Seghers' essay of 1935, 'Vaterlandsliebe', in Anna Seghers, *Glauben an Irdisches: Essays aus vier Jahrzehnten* (ed. Christa Wolf, Leipzig, 1974), pp 9-13, p 12.

¹³⁷Quoted from Ulrich Kaufmann, 'Ein Vormärzsdichter als Medium. Büchner bei DDR-Schriftstellern', in Hans Richter, (ed.), *Generationen, Temperamente, Schreibweisen. DDR-Literatur in neuer Sicht*, (Halle, Leipzig, 1986), pp 149-174, p 153.

specifically the continued exclusion of women and of the 'feminine' from dominant culture and society. As the most suppressed group among the oppressed and the underprivileged and as the 'Entmündigten' among the more privileged classes, women, Wolf established, have consistently been denied subjectivity and a voice, thus allowing the masculine principles of rationality and an obsessive preoccupation with technological progress to shape both society's socio-political structures and its values and beliefs. In the real, the imaginary and in the symbolic order of Western patriarchal societies, the perspective of woman in its sexual and cultural distinctiveness has consistently been played down or ignored altogether. In the entire history of Western culture and civilization, the period leading up to the French Revolution and the century which followed it saw this traditional pattern challenged for the first time. It was also around 1800 that a few courageous women, among them Karoline von Günderrode (the only female author mentioned by Anna Seghers), had taken up the struggle for equality in cultural matters. They did so with little outward success, since they opted for highly personal forms of literary expression such as diaries, letters, and poems - "Formen, in denen die Schreibende sich ungezwungener, auch geselliger bewegen kann als in den Strukturen von Roman und Drama" (DdA I, 1977, 202). The established cultural élite of the time, however, dismissed these works as inferior and inappropriate. The denial of access to the edifice of institutionalized literature left most women little choice but to secure their material means of survival in the only alternative institution offered them - that of marriage and motherhood. Joined by male writers who were equally opposed to the ruthless utilitarianism of early nineteenth century society, these determined pioneers found emotional and spiritual comfort in "Außenseiterbündnisse[n], zusammengehalten durch den Druck der Isolation." Wolf's engagement with the biographies of these writers led her to catalogue their painful experiences: "Einsamkeit, Esoterik, Selbstzweifel, Wahnsinn, Selbstmord." (DdA I, 1977, 202) In the light of the wider GDR debate on cultural heritage in the second half of the 1970s¹³⁸ and in view of Wolf's feminist consciousness, it is thus

¹³⁸As Dennis Tate has pointed out, the publication of a commemorative volume of essays on Heinrich von Kleist in the mid-1970s caused a considerable controversy. Above all Günter Kunert and Gerhard

hardly surprising that Wolf selected Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806) and Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) as historical models of a group of intellectuals who continued to strive for self-emancipation and social recognition against all the odds.

The isolation and loneliness suffered by the literary and intellectual avant-garde of Germany's early Romantic period was, in Wolf's view, a manifestation of a more fundamental and lasting split characterizing modern society as a whole. It seemed to her that connections could be established between the marginalization of feminine and of creative principles in industrial societies, the impact of which Wolf regarded as disconcerting. Wolf's central purpose in writing *Kein Ort. Nirgends* was, according to her own analysis, to examine these interconnections:

wo hat sie eigentlich angefangen, diese entsetzliche
Gespaltenheit der Menschen und der Gesellschaft? Wo hat die
Arbeitsteilung so in die Menschen eingegriffen, daß die
Literatur immer mehr herausgedrückt wurde aus dem Bereich,
den die Gesellschaft in ihrem Selbstverständnis für wichtig,
wesentlich, ja! überhaupt für vorhanden erklärte? Gleichzeitig
damit wird auch das weibliche Element aus der Gesellschaft
herausgedrängt; das ist ein Prozeß, der aber schon viel früher
angefangen hat. Das 'weibliche Element' ist in den
Industriegesellschaften sowenig vorhanden wie das 'geistige
Element': auf die lebenswichtigen Prozesse haben weder
Frauen noch Intellektuelle Einfluß. Dieses ins Extrem
getriebene Zum-Außenseiter-gemacht-Werden, das, was ich
an mir existenziell erfuhr: das wollte ich befragen, natürlich
auch, um mich davon distanzieren zu können. (DdA II, 1982,
423/24)

Both Günderrode and Kleist embody the central conflicts of their age - conflicts which have remained unresolved in Western culture and society, but equally in the system of state socialism created in Eastern Germany. The figure of Kleist furnished an outstanding

Wolf were completely at odds with the official tendency to claim Kleist as part of the heritage of bourgeois classicism, obscuring, as Tate has observed "the basic incompatibility of Kleist's writing with the traditional, Goethe-oriented view of classicism." See Tate, (1984), p 215. See also P. Goldammer (ed.), *Schriftsteller über Kleist*, (Berlin, 1976) and Kunert's "Pamphlet für K.", which appeared with a postscript in *Sinn und Form* (5/1975), pp 1091-7. The context is explained in detail by Helmut Küntzel, 'Der andere Kleist: Wirkungsgeschichte und Wiederkehr Kleists in der DDR', in P.G. Klussmann und H. Mohr (eds.), *Jahrbuch zur Literatur in der DDR*, Vol. 1, (Bonn, 1980), pp 105-39.

example for Wolf of a writer on the threshold not only of the industrial, but also of the scientific age. Accepting the need for scientific progress on the one hand and demanding subjective experience on the other, Kleist is torn apart by this deep psychological split. Wolf saw in him one of the first writers to experience with great intensity the internal conflicts generated by the dawning of the industrial and scientific era which remain unresolved today. All the problems which the first reactions to the industrial age (among them Kant's subjective idealism) created, Wolf believed, had come to a head in this one life, making Kleist a figure in whom "all these problems are concentrated for the first time."¹³⁹ It is not hard to identify the personal points of reference for Wolf as she explored this dilemma: she, too, clearly felt torn between her keen interest in scientific matters and her knowledge that a morally responsible technological progress provided one route to the alleviation of humankind's sufferings (her essay 'Ein Besuch' of 1969 testifies to this) on the one hand, and an insistence upon self-realization and subjective experience as a writer on the other. In a similar way, the figure of Günderrode represents a whole host of conflicts which Wolf and her fellow women writers in the GDR were acutely aware of. Günderrode is deeply frustrated by the limited possibilities for self-realization open to her in a male-dominated cultural environment. Like Kleist, she profoundly experiences an inner conflict between aspiring to receive recognition as a woman writer by a social and cultural élite whose value system and literary norms she is at the same time deeply at odds with. What both characters have in common is that their reactions to the times they live in are absolute and unconditional. They are not simply unwilling, they are incapable of making the kinds of compromise that their times require of them. The reasons for this were both external (since, in a purely material respect, neither of them had any real freedom of action) and internal. What Wolf wished to portray in her narrative was: "the dialectics of internal and external circumstances and the effect of these conflicts on one another."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹McPherson, 'Christa Wolf in Edinburgh', p 10.

¹⁴⁰Loc cit.

A significant contributory factor to the emotional and psychological suffering of Günderrode and Kleist is their deep sense of unease with the rigid gender roles that a patriarchal social order has imposed on them. Both experience the world as androgynous beings: "Er nicht ganz Mann, sie nicht ganz Frau" (KON, 95) At the same time, however, both have deeply internalized conventional, bipolar notions of femininity and masculinity. Kleist cannot resolve the contradiction he experiences between his personal sense of alienation caused by a socially determined division of human beings into man and woman, and his personal preference for women who "im Rahmen bleiben." (KON, 18) Günderrode, on the other hand, has understood this conflict to be an inner struggle rooted in self-alienation: "Das meinen Sie nicht, Kleist. Sie meinen, daß in Ihnen selbst Mann und Frau einander feindlich gegenüberstehen. Wie auch in mir." (KON, 105) Isolated among their peers and deeply split within themselves, Kleist and Günderrode turn their conflicts inwards, further eroding their weakened sense of self and depleting their energies. While portraying her protagonists as victims of their age, Wolf also clearly wishes her readers to appreciate the self-destructive elements in their own personality structures, the "Mächte, die keinen Zweifel daran lassen, daß sie uns vernichten können, weil in uns selber etwas, das wir nicht kennen wollen, ihnen entgegenkommt." (KON, 12) But Wolf resists the idea that there is no way of overcoming such potentially destructive internal forces: empathy, understanding, sisterly or brotherly love and, above all, self-knowledge, are shown to be qualities which can counteract such destructive tendencies. This is portrayed in the narrative when the two protagonists find recognition and understanding in a fleeting, vision-like moment of complete empathy. As they each recognize their own predicament in the other's, Wolf's protagonists momentarily overcome their alienation and gain understanding both of themselves and of the other as individual human beings whose lives are separate, but at the same time interwoven.

In the 'real' world, the two historical figures never met. Their loneliness and isolation in the social circles in which they moved is powerfully conveyed in Wolf's narrative through spacial arrangement as well as through the use of metaphoric language and interior monologue which portray an inner perspective of pain and suffering. Within the

confines of the fictional space in Wolf's narrative, their isolation and alienation is, at least for a moment, overcome. In effect, it is 'aufgehoben' in the double sense of the word: it is emphasized and made evident on the one hand, and it is shown to be transformed and thus at least partially redeemed on the other. But recognition and understanding is shown to be possible not only between the two historical figures in the text. The reflections of the narrator and her frequent use of the pronoun 'wir' establish a direct link between the experiences of the protagonists and those of kindred spirits in the contemporary context. What Wolf has created is a network in which fibres that imperceptively link the lives of the historical figures are shown to be intertwined also with the lives of contemporary individuals. Through writing Wolf establishes intersubjectivity as a perspective from which subjectivity can be both explored and constituted. Blurring the boundaries between 'self' and 'other' from a narrative perspective in which "Subjekt und Objekt [sind] einander nicht gewiß [...]" (DdA I, 1978, 56), makes alliances between kindred spirits across time and space based on empathy, recognition and understanding, appear a possibility. The active emotional engagement of the reader with Wolf's text creates an opportunity for the isolation and alienation of creative individuals to become transformed and resolved in the moment of reading and reflection in the contemporary context.

In *Kein Ort. Nirgends* Wolf has continued her exploration of the poetological problem she had described in conversation with Joachim Walther as the

Verbindung von Authentischem - den gegebenen Fixpunkten einer Figur - mit dem, was ich an Freiheit dazugewinne, indem ich über sie schreibe, also die Möglichkeiten zur Veränderung in die Räume zwischen jene Fixpunkte lege. Das kommt mir produktiv vor und ist realistisch. (DdA II, 1972, 301)

Therese Hörnigk has rightly pointed out that Wolf's treatment of the 'Künstlerproblematik' as a historical problem in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* also marks a caesura in her poetological development. Günderrode and Kleist are authentic historical figures as well as fictional characters who carry symbolic meaning. In *Nachdenken* and *Kindheitsmuster* the narrator's emotional proximity to the protagonists was established through the reactivation

of personal memories, while documentary historical evidence created critical distance from the experiences portrayed. In *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, the relationship between the narrator and the protagonists is characterized by empathy and understanding which is based on affinity of authentic experience on the one hand, and on a process of 'Anverwandlung' and 'Wahrheitssuche' of the historical subject-matter through the medium of literature on the other. Wolf's volume of essays and interviews, *Ins Ungebundene geht eine Sehnsucht. Gesprächsraum Romantik. Prosa und Essays*, which was published under joint editorship with her husband Gerhard in 1985, is evidence of her extensive engagement with this subject-matter throughout the late 1970s and beyond. The concept of 'Romantik', for Wolf, assumed a significance beyond that of a particular literary genre. Faced with the prospect of being forced into the position of a literary outsider, Wolf was particularly interested in the writers of the early Romantic period because they had tried to live in accordance with their ideals. As she explained:

Es ging nicht mehr um Literatur allein, nicht mal mehr in erster Linie, sondern darum, was diese damals jungen Leute versucht haben: in Gruppen lebend, da es in der Gesellschaft nicht ging, am Rande der Gesellschaft, aber, literarisch gesehen, in ihrem Zentrum. Das ist merkwürdig; sie konnten als Literaten zentral wirksam sein, während sie doch zugleich am Rande der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft lebten mit ihren verschiedenen Experimenten. Wie sie das gemacht haben, wie sie das durchgestanden haben, wie die Frauen gerade in diesen Gruppen das initiiert haben, da sie es mit am meisten brauchten - wie sie das durchgehalten haben auch über die ungeheuren gesellschaftlichen und persönlichen Konflikte hin und alle möglichen Arten von materiellen Schwierigkeiten -, das hat mich brennend interessiert. (DdA II, 1982, 426)

In terms of narrative approach, Sarah Kirsch's and Maxie Wander's volumes of documentary interviews, *Die Pantherfrau* (1973) and *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1978), respectively, will almost certainly have provided some inspiration for Wolf. She clearly admired them for pioneering literary forms which lift the burden of omniscient authority in the text from the author, while retaining her significance as the person who has

ausgewählt, gekürzt, zusammengefaßt, umgestellt, hinzugeschrieben, Akzente gesetzt, komponiert, geordnet - niemals aber verfälscht. (Ein Vergleich der beiden in ihrem Charakter so unterschiedlichen Bücher belegt: Der Autor solch scheinbar autorloser Bücher ist in ihnen die unentbehrlichste Person). (DdA I, 1977, 200)

Wolf's approach in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* shares such anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical qualities in that the author is dethroned as an authority in the text, yet retains her essential role in providing the 'vierte Dimension' of the narrative. Her text has an open structure, making extensive use of inner monologue, change of narrative perspective, flashbacks and conversational exchanges. The author does not talk 'about' her protagonists, but allows them to speak for themselves, having carefully selected, modified and re-worded authentic statements from their literary works as well as from their letters and diaries: "Ich hab es historisch sehr genau gemacht, weil es so gut nicht zu erfinden gewesen wäre, wie es wirklich war, und weil ich die beiden historischen Figuren nicht beschädigen wollte." (DdA II, 1982, 423) Wolf's montage blends authentic and imaginative material, weaving together the language and discourse of two generations of writers who are separated by 150 years of history.¹⁴¹ Since the elements of Wolf's montage cannot be identified without extensive research into the historical source materials, the reader automatically engages with the linguistic conventions of both periods. Wolf has created an intertext in which conventional boundaries of genre (her text defies clear categorizations into biography, autobiography or novel), of style (quotations from written sources appear in the text in conversations and inner monologue, making it impossible to distinguish between 'Schriftlichkeit' and

¹⁴¹Marion Stock has traced back over 130 statements in the text to their original historical sources. She distinguishes between three ways in which Wolf uses quotations from other texts ('B'texts) in her own ('A') text: i) elements are taken over directly, but are syntactically modified to suit the narrative purpose of the 'A' text; ii) "geklitterte Stellen", in which an original statement is compressed in order to intensify its impact; and iii) "Zitatsplitter" and "markante einzelne Worte" from the 'B' source are placed into the 'A' text. Whilst the degree of modification and adaptation varies, in all three categories the 'A' text is given prominence over the 'B' texts: "die Veränderung richtet sich immer nach den Bedürfnissen des A-Textes. Der Erzähler ist diejenige Instanz, die entscheidet, welchem Grad von Veränderung das jeweilige Montageelement unterworfen wird, um ihren Intentionen zu entsprechen." See Stock, 1991, p 30. See also Ute Brandes, 'Das Zitat als Beleg. Christa Wolf. *Kein Ort. Nirgends*', in her *Zitat und Montage in der neueren DDR-Prosa*, Forschungen zur Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte, vol. 3, (Frankfurt/Main, 1984), pp 61-100.

'Mündlichkeit' - a technique employed above all by the women writers of the Romantic period themselves), and of authorship (the relationship between the author, the narrator, and the protagonists is anti-hierarchical and intersubjective rather than one between subject and object) have become blurred. Meaning is no longer produced between the author as omniscient, single subject, and the reader, but between the author (whose relationship to the central characters is not fixed, but constituted as a process characterized by both affinity and difference), the historical figures (whose inner contradictions and psychological suffering establish them as complex beings who cannot be easily categorized) and the active reception by the reader. Wolf's method thus fundamentally challenges 'dualist' notions which have influenced the dominant discourses of Western culture and society since Aristotle. Wolf's writing creates a tapestry in which boundaries are blurred in order to make productive the spaces in between fixed borderline delineations.

Kein Ort. Nirgends challenges in particular some of the fundamental assumptions about subjectivity and gender on which Western patriarchal societies have been based. Approaching sexual difference from a historical angle, Wolf explores subjectivity from the perspective of androgyny. She had begun to challenge conventional, bipolar notions of gender also in *Selbstversuch*, when the protagonist's first thought as she comes round after the 'operation', before she has fully regained consciousness, is that she is "Nicht Fisch, nicht Fleisch." (GE, 163) *Kein Ort. Nirgends* aims to heighten awareness of the fact that the demands for self-realization denied women by the historical development of a patriarchal social system prevented them from finding "den ganzen Menschen" (KON, 94) and forced men "zur Selbstaufgabe, zur Selbstzerstückelung, beschädigt[e] ihre Fähigkeit, zu lieben, [zwang] sie, die Ansprüche unabhängiger, zur Liebe fähiger Frauen als 'unrealistisch' abzuweisen." (DdA II, 1978, 93) Wolf's approach re-emphasizes the ideas of writers of the early Romantic period like Friedrich Schlegel, who, in *Lucinde*, refused to think of man and woman in terms of binary opposites but searched rather for the "volle

ganze Menschheit in jedem"¹⁴² - for the woman in man and for the man in woman. This constitutes the element of utopian longing in *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, since Wolf holds out the hope that restrictive gender role definitions and their related patterns of thought and behaviour might, at some point in the future, be overcome. Her utopian ideal is the androgynous human being who, experiencing both worlds, allows dualist thinking to be overcome and hitherto untapped potential to be freed. She is thus again echoing Ernst Bloch, who in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, explained that the creation of social and legal equality for man and woman in a future socialist society constituted only a necessary starting point for a much more fundamental debate about women's issues.¹⁴³ Official policy-makers in contemporary GDR society, however, as I shall illuminate further in the third section of the second part of this thesis, had persistently ignored such insights, declaring the questions which GDR women writers were keen to address as anathema.

With literary works that challenged the complacency about progress achieved, women writers in the GDR, such as Brigitte Reimann, Sarah Kirsch, Irmtraud Morgner, Gerti Tetzner and, of course, Christa Wolf, began from the mid-1970s to fill an important gap, forcing their problems as women writers and the everyday problems and conflicts of women in socialism on to the public agenda.

Later in this thesis I shall demonstrate that Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends* occupies a special position in this context, since Wolf begins here to trace the exclusion of female subjectivity and of female authorship back to its historical roots. Women have been denied a voice throughout the millennia, and they have thus also been largely excluded from the creation of meaning in the symbolic order of our culture. Feminist readings of Wolf's text have highlighted that its intertextuality, its linguistic ambivalences, and its dissolution of a unified, single authorial voice allow for interpretations which go beyond the bounds of a 'modernist' representation of experience. They originate in particular in the specific

¹⁴²Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, the chapter 'Dithyrambische Phantasie über die schönste Situation' in 'Kritische Schlegel Ausgabe', vol. 5, F Schöningh (ed.), (Munich, 1962), p 10. Quoted here from Bernhard Greiner, 'Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod', in Mauser (ed.), (1985), p 115.

¹⁴³See the section 'Kampf ums neue Weib, Programm der Frauenbewegung' in Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, part four, chapters 33-42, pp 687-698.

experiences of women and in feminine authorship, permitting feminine subjectivity to be inscribed and to be constituted within the text.¹⁴⁴

Wolf's essays on Karoline von Günderrode and Bettine von Arnim¹⁴⁵, which complement her fictional elaboration of the former, shed additional light on Wolf's experimentation with poetological concepts that undermine established, patriarchal conventions. In contrast to institutionalized literary criticism, Wolf approaches the biographical and fictional material of her literary forebears from a specifically anti-authoritarian and anti-hierarchical perspective. Wolf believes that the relationship between author and critic should ideally be based on "eine Art von Kongenialität", and she is interested in uncovering the "Subjekt, das hinter dem Geschriebenen steht." (DdA II, 1983, 446) Her essay on Bettine von Arnim gives a particularly good illustration of Wolf's experimentation with highly personal forms of expression as a means of transcending established genre categories in order to explore subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Bettine is viewed by Wolf as more than just a literary forebear whose life and work she deeply admires and feels inspired by. As a woman writer of her generation, Bettine stands out as the exception to the rule, as "ein Einzelfall" (DdA II, 1979, 121), and as the embodiment of a particular philosophy of life, Wolf views her as "eine Alternative." (DdA II, 1979, 149) Bettine is aware of her potential and is willing to compromise, managing to reconcile the traditional roles of wife and mother with her professional ambitions. But Christa Wolf was clearly also fascinated by Bettine's exceptional status as a female author of her time who actually did get published. Rather than depleting her energies in a futile battle for recognition by an established male orthodoxy, Bettine possessed both sufficient confidence and the necessary economic freedom to assert herself as a woman in her own right. Applying her own yardsticks and fully exploiting her repertoire of feminine stratagems,

¹⁴⁴I am referring here in particular to Helga G. Braunbeck's feminist reading of *Kein Ort. Nirgends* in Helga Braunbeck, *Autorschaft und Subjektgenese. Christa Wolfs 'Kein Ort. Nirgends'*, (Vienna, 1992). Braunbeck bases her analysis in particular on the works of French poststructuralist feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

¹⁴⁵Christa Wolf, 'Der Schatten eines Traumes. Karoline von Günderrode - ein Entwurf' (1978), and Christa Wolf, 'Nun ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an. Ein Brief über die Bettine' (1979). Both in DdA II, pp 55-115 and 116-154, respectively.

Bettine developed a degree of inscrutability which was so baffling to the establishment that it was incapable of entering into open confrontation with her. Her epistolary novel *Die Günderrode* (1839), which is based on the letters which Karoline von Günderrode and Bettine von Arnim exchanged between 1804 and 1806, demonstrates how Bettine made her status as an 'author' productive for her colleague and friend. Bettine's sensitive treatment of her material has allowed the particular subjectivity which is expressed in Karoline's writing to emerge, bestowing on the latter the very 'authorship' which had formally been denied her. Bettine's understanding of authorship constitutes a feminine alternative to the genealogy of male authorship. Whilst the latter has evolved along competitive and hierarchical lines which reflect the power structures of patriarchal societies, Bettine adopts an authorial stance which is anti-authoritarian and sisterly. Bettine, therefore, is interesting to Wolf as a pioneer in a literary tradition which allows this female genealogy of authorship to become established. This line of tradition, which espouses values such as solidarity, equality, sisterhood, and empathy, is undoubtedly also that within which Christa Wolf has consciously located herself by the late 1970s. As I shall discuss in greater detail in my section on the 'Faust' theme later in this thesis, it is significant that Wolf establishes Bettine as a counterpoint to Goethe's great 'Faust' figure. In doing so she highlights the fact that female figures like Bettine provide important alternatives to the many male figures who have dominated the self-representations of the symbolic order from which our culture is woven.

When *Kein Ort. Nirgends* was published, it acquired a degree of topicality that was even more sinister than Wolf could have imagined. In June 1979 the state apparatus of the GDR dealt yet another severe blow to the group of critical writers who had taken the decision to remain in the GDR, a blow which was callously premeditated and ruthlessly carried out. This time it was Wolf's colleague Stefan Heym who was made an example of as the author the SED viewed as the ringleader of all insurgent intellectuals in the country.¹⁴⁶ Since the events have now been well documented¹⁴⁷, I shall limit myself to

¹⁴⁶See Goodbody et al for a summary of these events, 'The failed socialist experiment', in Burns, esp. pp 187 ff.

summarizing the most important aspects. After Heym had published his novel *Collin* in the West without first obtaining written permission from the GDR's Copyright Office, he was accused of having defrauded the state by paying no taxes on his earnings and was fined 9,000 marks. With some justification, Heym and his colleagues understood the Party's decision as a thinly disguised attack on their freedom of speech and as an attempt once more to pressurize members of the intellectual community to conform. Despite the precedent set by the Biermann affair, the fact that the literary community once again responded with strong support for Heym (eight colleagues writing an open letter of protest) indicated that it had retained a considerable measure of cohesion and solidarity. However, predictably, the Writers' Union toed the Party line, expelling Heym, three colleagues who had supported him and those signatories of the letter of protest who were members on the pretext that they had incriminated themselves by criticizing the Party's policy. On this occasion, the Party even went so far as to amend the Criminal Code in such a way that disseminating in the West materials deemed damaging to the GDR could attract a penalty of up to five years' imprisonment. The letters of protest which poured into the offices of the Berlin section of the Writers' Union in large numbers (their authors were not only respected GDR writers, but also readers and international organizations such as the PEN centre in Sweden), were of course never published. Christa Wolf, who had witnessed the sham tribunal with obvious dismay and alarm, wrote:

Ein solcher Ausschluß so vieler Kollegen - ohne Beispiel in der Geschichte des Verbandes - wird verhängnisvolle Folgen haben: nicht nur für die Betroffenen, auch für den Verband, für unser kulturelles Leben, für jeden einzelnen von uns. Menschen von sich zu entfernen ist immer einfacher, als sich mit ihnen auseinanderzusetzen und dabei Gefahr zu laufen, auch die eigene Meinung teilweise revidieren zu müssen. Ausschlußverfahren sind kein Mittel, Widersprüche zu erkennen und zu lösen, aber ein ziemlich sicheres Rezept, die Polarisierung im Verband weiterzutreiben. Anstatt jene Kollegen vor die Alternative

¹⁴⁷See Joachim Walther, Wolf Biermann, Günter de Bruyn, Jürgen Fuchs, Christoph Hein, Günter Kunert, Erich Loest, Hans-Joachim Schädlich, Christa Wolf (editors), *Protokoll eines Tribunals. Die Ausschlüsse aus dem DDR-Schriftstellerverband 1979*, (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1991).

zu stellen: Widerruf oder Bestrafung!, würde ich es nützlicher finden, nach ihren Motiven zu forschen und den Konflikten auf den Grund zu gehen, die auch viele von uns immer schärfer erleben.¹⁴⁸

The fact that even the Writers' Union of the GDR was now firmly in the grip of reaction strengthened Wolf's resolve to defend the cultural values she had been articulating so clearly in her writing. By the end of the 1970s, she was a member of an increasingly fragmented community of critical intellectuals endeavouring - against growing odds - to put into practice the values they held most dearly: solidarity, brother- and sisterhood, and communality.

Almost immediately, however, as the new decade of the 1980s dawned, Wolf was obliged to broaden the horizons of her concerns, responding to a threat so fundamental and all-pervasive in nature that everything else paled into insignificance beside it. NATO's decision to deploy Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, as a means of countering the presence of SS-20s in the Warsaw Pact nations, indicated that the Cold War, the "Nicht-Krieg" as Wolf aptly called it (FPV, 1980, 96), was being revived to a degree which made its escalation into a nuclear war appear a very real and imminent possibility. It was clear, furthermore, that the superpowers intended to use Europe as their battleground which, by definition, meant that Germans on either side of the Elbe faced total annihilation in the event of a nuclear war. The fact that politicians and strategists were seriously contemplating the pros and cons of a 'limited' nuclear strike on European soil was but one facet of the utterly cynical and potentially self-destructive frame of mind in which decisions about the future of our civilization were being taken. It now appeared that politicians were being guided not by serving the purposes of humankind, but by self-perpetuation and the apotheosis of war. In the face of such inhuman military strategies which threatened mass slaughter on a scale that even Adolf Hitler could not have envisaged, the literary community, in Christa Wolf's view, could not allow itself to fall

¹⁴⁸Walther et al, 'Protokoll eines Tribunals', p 116.

silent. Even though she harboured no illusions that literature would actually be able to avert an impending catastrophe, she felt that it had, nevertheless, an important role to play:

Wahrscheinlich ist es so, daß sie [die Literatur, RR] nichts wird ändern können. Aber sie hat mindestens zu artikulieren, was so viele Leute empfinden, hat sie zu unterstützen, wenigstens in ihrer Angst, wenigstens in ihren Depressionen - und natürlich auch in ihrem Sich-Wehren, weil sie sich sonst sehr alleine fühlten. (DdA II, 1983, 466)

Such sentiments were widely shared by Wolf's colleagues from either side of the Iron Curtain, a fact which became particularly evident in December 1981 when representatives of the European cultural intelligentsia gathered in East Berlin (later followed by both the 'Haager Treffen' and the 'Interlit' in Cologne) in order to attract maximum publicity for their conviction that they had a responsibility to defend the interests of humanity and the survival of our planet.

Wolf's contributions to peace initiatives such as these - like the literary works which followed them - highlight the fact that in the 1980s all her energies were focused on the question of whether European civilization still had a chance of survival: "Wenn ich mich beobachte, ertappe ich mich täglich, nächtlich auf einem andauernden inneren Monolog, der kaum abreißt: Ist Europa, sind wir zu retten?"¹⁴⁹ Wolf's commitment and existential responsibility did not permit her to give in to despair, since, as she had warned in *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, "Wenn wir zu hoffen aufhören, kommt, was wir befürchten, bestimmt." (KON, 117) Clearly, it was not possible for literature to influence military policies, but literature could strengthen the 'Glauben an Irdisches', promoting those values which the scientific and technological age had persistently ignored: "Freundlichkeit, Würde, Vertrauen, Spontaneität, Anmut, Duft, Klang, Poesie. Ungezwungenes Leben. [...] Das eigentliche Menschliche. Was uns bewegen kann, diesen Frieden zu verteidigen."¹⁵⁰ In a historical situation so devoid of viable alternatives, Wolf again closely identified, as her

¹⁴⁹Christa Wolf, 'Ein Brief', in Klaus Sauer (ed.), *Christa Wolf. Materialienbuch*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied, revised edition, 1983), pp 61-67, p 62; first published in Ingrid Krüger (ed.), *Mut zur Angst. Schriftsteller für den Frieden*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1981).

¹⁵⁰Sauer (ed.), p 66.

speech in Darmstadt indicates, with Georg Büchner, who had managed, "auf jedes Risiko hin [...], den finsternen Verhältnissen seiner Zeit eine lebbare Alternative zu entreißen." (DdA II, 1980, 156) Existential threats, Wolf had discovered during moments of deep personal crisis before, were never entirely negative, since they could also liberate and radicalize those sufficiently emancipated and radical to place themselves outside the power structures and the self-legitimizing rationale of the establishment. This, Wolf had been at pains to point out, had also been Bettine von Arnim's experience, from whose example Wolf was clearly continuing to draw strength:

nun ist es aber ein Gesetz, daß eine reale Bedrohung jemanden, der nicht auf Anerkennung durch die bestehende Ordnung angewiesen, also nicht korrumpierbar ist, in seinen Ansichten und Grundsätzen radikalisiert, ihn weiterrückt über die Schranken, die seinem Denken durch Herkunft und Lebensweise gesetzt zu sein scheinen. (DdA II, 1979, 133)

The "'Lage', in der wir uns nun befinden" (DdA I, 1981, 439), Wolf entreated her colleagues at the peace conference in East Berlin, requires the European cultural community to formulate the most radical questions and critical responses. Literature must do more than subvert and oppose the conceptual frameworks which have created this desperate crisis, it must above all provide alternatives, however utopian in nature these might be. Should literature, in the face of the unthinkable, Wolf wondered, not endeavour to recapture the particular kind of magic that women like Bettine had woven: "zu denken und für möglich zu halten, was eigentlich nicht geht? Ich bin nämlich der Meinung, uns kann nur noch helfen und retten, *was eigentlich nicht geht*. Was für möglich zu halten wir uns abgewöhnen ließen." (DdA I, 1981, 440)

In her working diary of September 1980 (later to be published as the third of her Frankfurt lectures), Christa Wolf noted, in an allusion to Peter Weiss' great novel, that an aesthetic framework which would represent an effective protest against a "Logik, deren letzte Erscheinungsform die Rakete ist"¹⁵¹, could not yet be defined: "Die Ästhetik des

¹⁵¹Sauer, (ed.), p 63.

Widerstandes *dagegen* wäre erst noch zu entwickeln." (FPV, 1980, 94) Yet, Wolf was clear in her own mind that as a first step towards "Friedensvorbereitung und Kriegsverhinderung" (DdA I, 1981, 439) writers now had to embark on the task of fundamentally re-assessing and re-evaluating European culture. Continuing her critique of patriarchy begun in the 1970s, Wolf was resolved to disassociate herself from literary traditions that had persistently excluded feminine principles and celebrated war and destruction:

Kampfbeschreibungen sind die ersten Beschreibungen der
abendländischen Literatur, Schlachtenschilderungen,
Beschreibung von Schlachtgeräten: der Schild des Achill.
Daran, ist mir klar geworden, kann ich nicht anknüpfen.
Das kann meine Tradition nicht sein. Es ist kein Hymnus
denkbar auf die Schönheit der Atomrakete. (DdA I, 1981,
441)

In the 'Tabula rasa' section of 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf had regarded literature as a "Gang zu den Müttern" (DdA II, 1968, 18) and reading as a process which anchors the individual within the conceptual and moral universe of our culture, establishing "das Maß für Menschen und Dinge" (DdA II, 1968, 18). In view of the fact that European civilization had now evidently become so self-alienated that it was capable of callously planning its own destruction, such optimistic notions were clearly in need of revision. In the light of her feminist consciousness, Wolf was now convinced that the yardstick by which European culture had defined itself over the millennia had not been those of the mother, but those of the father. Shocked by the realization that "Frauen seit dreitausend Jahren in unserer Kultur keine Stimme haben" (DdA II, 1983, 447), Wolf felt motivated in the early 1980s to embark once more on a "Gang zu den Müttern" (FPV, 1981, 136), but this time she was travelling with the analytical tools and the consciousness of a feminist. On her journey back in time¹⁵² Wolf was guided by a "Stichwort [...], das hieß:

¹⁵²This was not merely an intellectual journey, since Christa Wolf and her husband Gerhard travelled to Greece in the summer of 1980 when they visited the historical locations where Cassandra's tragedy is believed to have unfolded more than three thousand years ago.

KASSANDRA, und ich hatte Lust [...], dieses eine Mal in groben Umrissen die Wege nachzuzeichnen, die das Wort mich führte." (FPV, 7) The perspective of feminism, Wolf believed, would allow her to probe the blind spots of our culture and civilization, continuing the tradition of Büchner who had hitherto understood this best: "Wenn einer, muß Büchner das Verlangen gekannt haben, das Unmögliche zu leisten: den blinden Fleck dieser Kultur sichtbar werden zu lassen. Er umkreist ihn mit seinen Figuren." (DdA II, 1980, 161)

The mythological figure Cassandra, daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, had captured Wolf's imagination long before she transformed this material into her narrative of 1983. Against the background of an escalating threat of war in Europe, the story of the loyal priestess who had predicted the fall of Troy, but whom nobody would believe, must have invited ever-more pertinent points of comparison with Wolf's own situation as a writer who had always been committed to peace.¹⁵³ Although Wolf continued with *Kassandra* a trend in her work of going back in time, her underlying purpose was to illuminate the events and concerns of the day, a fact she was eager to stress in the summer of 1980: "In diesen konkreten Verhältnissen ist ein Zustand verantwortungsloser Unschuld nicht vorgesehen. Heute und hier! heißt es da, und im Gehen reißt es uns die Masken vom Gesicht." (DdA II, 1980, 155) Wolf's Frankfurt lectures tell us that the narrative evolved over a period of about three years and that its final form was the outcome of a number of adjustments and shifts in intention. Originally conceived of as a 'Lehrstück', the story was subsequently developed into a complex, multi-stranded and multi-layered aesthetic construct described by Wolf as a "Gewebe" (FPV, 7).

¹⁵³As Therese Hörnigk has pointed out, the name of this female figure from Greek mythology first appeared in Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* in conjunction with Charlotte Jordan's tendency to focus on the black side of things (KM, 158). See Hörnigk, p 205. Cassandra reappears in the early 1980s in Wolf's Büchner Prize Acceptance Speech, 'Von Büchner sprechen. Darmstädter Rede' (DdA II, 1980, 155-169, 167), where Wolf tentatively explores the belligerent and destructive nature of European culture and society from a feminist perspective. In 1982, Wolf was invited to write an epilogue for Kleist's drama *Penthesilea*, an occasion which, according to her personal statement, coincided with the "Vorgeschichtsforschungen zu *Kassandra*" (DdA II, 1982, 446). It is evident, therefore, that Wolf's preoccupation with this figure from Greek mythology intensified against the background of the escalation of the Cold War, a factor borne out not least by Wolf's detailed recording of this process of 'Anverwandlung' in her Frankfurt lectures.

Of the two editions which appeared separately in 1983 in East and West Germany, only the East German Aufbau edition was faithful to Wolf's intentions of treating her Frankfurt lectures and the 'Erzählung' as one text.¹⁵⁴ The four Frankfurt lectures which precede the story proper are closely interrelated with the narrative, providing explanations designed to enhance our understanding of the story as well as giving detailed references to the historical material and to the figure of Cassandra. A complex tapestry of travel journal, work diary, reflection and self-reflection of a poetological, aesthetic, philosophical and ideological nature, the lectures document how the author appropriates and transforms the mythological story, stripping away layers of male-biased historical transformation in order to uncover the truth of the historical figure: "Wer war Cassandra, ehe irgendeiner über sie schrieb?" (DdA II, 1983, 447)

As David Jenkinson has pointed out, there are clear connections between Cassandra's conflict of loyalties and the difficulties Wolf was experiencing in the GDR in the 1980s. Approaching the narrative from this perspective, Wolf can be seen to have explored her own doubts and fears by projecting them on to a fictional character whose circumstances are even more extreme. The tests of Cassandra's loyalty to Troy reflect a strand of experience of distressing relevance to Wolf's own life. It is clear that, with *Kassandra*, Wolf was considering the extent and limits of her own loyalties. In this

¹⁵⁴West Germany's Luchterhand published the 'Erzählung' *Kassandra* and the *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra* in two separate volumes. The Aufbau edition, on the other hand, suffered at the hands of the East German censorship authorities. Wolf's apparently inflammatory support for unilateral disarmament had to be cut, and the text did not appear in the GDR in its complete version until 1988. In a contribution to an anthology edited jointly by Eberhard Günther, Brigitte Böttcher, Ingrid Engler, Katrina Moschner, and Martin Reso, which was published under the title *Die Taubenfeder. Schriftsteller der Welt für den Frieden der Welt* by the Mitteldeutscher Verlag (Leipzig) in 1983, Christa Wolf included some open and pertinent questions about the interrelationship between censorship, self-censorship and violence in our civilisation which were excised from the published version: "wie hängen sie, Zensur und Selbstzensur und alle die anderen Beschränkungen vitaler Lebensbedürfnisse, mit der Gewalttätigkeit unserer Zivilisation zusammen? Mit dem Irrglauben, mehr und entsetzlichere Waffen bedeuten mehr Sicherheit? Mit der Angst vor dem selbstgeschaffenen Mythos 'Feind' - also mit der Gefahr, die Widersprüche des einen Systems, die verschleiert und mit den Widersprüchen des anderen Systems verdeckt werden, durch einen Gewaltakt zu lösen anstatt durch produktive Veränderungen?" In Ernst Wichner und Herbert Wiesner (eds.), *Ausstellungsbuch 'Zensur in der DDR'. Geschichte, Praxis und 'Ästhetik' der Behinderung von Literatur*, (Berlin, 1991), pp 81-82. The full text did appear in West Germany in 1981, however, in Krüger's West German anthology *Mut zur Angst*, pp 64-65.

respect, *Kassandra* closely reflects Wolf's own experience, as did *Kein Ort. Nirgends*.¹⁵⁵ But the fact that Wolf conceived of her narrative at one point as a 'Schlüsselezählung' (FPV, 119) should not tempt us to restrict our interpretation of the narrative to the analogies between the myth and actual events and individuals in the contemporary context. For all the parallels we can draw between the Trojan Wars and the East-West confrontation of the 1980s, with the belligerent and militarily aggressive Greeks representing an obvious cipher for the United States of America on the one hand, and the morally increasingly corrupt Trojans providing the corresponding point of reference for the GDR on the other, Wolf herself warned against misconstruing her narrative as an allegory:

Das was ich dann schrieb, ist kein Gleichnis. Am ehesten ist es vielleicht der Versuch eines Modells. Die Erzählung hat nicht die Tendenz, etwas, was auch immer [...] zu beweisen. Dafür hat mich die Figur der Kassandra zu sehr interessiert, ihre Widersprüchlichkeit zu sehr fasziniert. (DdA II, 1983,462-463)

As Colin Smith has suggested, Wolf's decision to work on mythology was by no means as sudden as her Frankfurt lectures suggest. Among those aspects which indicate a clear progression of thought from *Kein Ort. Nirgends* to *Kassandra* are thematic links such as the protagonist's emotional anguish and psychological breakdown, her conflicts with authoritarian, patriarchal structures, her crisis of identity, her desperate search for alternatives and a "realen Lebens-Ort" (FPV, 104), and even her impending death.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, *Kassandra* has generally been regarded as a major new turning point in Christa Wolf's development, an evaluation which has been supported by the author herself who has, as Colin Smith has observed, compared her attraction to mythology to her initial discovery of Marxism and who has referred to it as "einer der Sprünge in meiner

¹⁵⁵For an extensive and illuminating discussion of *Kassandra* as a roman à clef, see David Jenkinson, 'Loyalty and its Limits: Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* as a "Schlüsselezählung"', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Roland Smith (eds.), *Literature on the Threshold. The German Novel in the 1980s*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp 235-252.

¹⁵⁶See Smith, pp 255 and 246 respectively.

Weltsicht."¹⁵⁷ In terms of Wolf's aesthetic conception as well as of the premises of her argument, *Kassandra* certainly has a radical outlook and a universal appeal which sets it apart from the author's previous prose works.

Wolf came to accept the view that our society's origins could be discerned in classical Greece and investigated structures of modern Western civilization which were foreshadowed in the ancient world. A specific method of this study was to identify patterns of behaviour and thought which have promoted conflict and war throughout the history of our civilization. Wolf's objective was to raise awareness of the possibility that alternatives to these acquired patterns might exist.

Colin Smith has observed that mythology offered Wolf "an extended range of suggested reference".¹⁵⁸ A key example is the fact that many myths and mythical themes are common to almost all societies and consequently they operate beyond the dimensions which normally determine the radius of impact of literary works engendered within a specific set of socio-political and cultural circumstances. They are particularly powerful on account of the strong imagery their authors have traditionally employed to fire the reader's imagination, and they communicate a whole host of suggestive references and patterns of thought which even the most subtle use of language often fails to convey. The most important advantage of working with mythology for Wolf, as I see it, however, was the opportunity it provided to criticize modern culture and society at its roots from a feminist perspective, while realizing the programme she had set out at the international peace conference at The Hague: "Mir scheint, daß Autoren in besonderem Maße verpflichtet und in der Lage sind, vertrauensbildend zu wirken, was heißt: Friedensfähigkeit herzustellen." (DdA I, 1982, 444).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷Interview with Rüdiger Wischenbart and Uli Diethardt, in *Die Presse*, (Vienna, 17/18 March, 1984). In the fourth Frankfurt lecture, Wolf stated: "Mit der Erweiterung des Blick-Winkels, der Neueinstellung der Tiefenschärfe hat mein Seh-Raster, durch den ich unsere Zeit, uns alle, dich, mich selber wahrnehme, sich entschieden verändert, vergleichbar jener frühen entschiedenen Veränderung, die mein Denken, meine Sicht und mein Selbst-Gefühl und Selbst-Anspruch vor mehr als dreißig Jahren durch die erste befreiende und erhellende Bekanntschaft mit der marxistischen Theorie und Sehweise erfuhren." (FPV, 132).

¹⁵⁸Smith, p 255.

¹⁵⁹From the late 1970s onwards, myths again met with widespread interest among writers in both East and West Germany, a factor which has generally been attributed to the crisis of postmodern times which

While many writers have reworked myths to suit their own subjective needs, Christa Wolf took great pains to strike a balance between assumed historical truth and exploitation of her artistic freedom. Cassandra is mentioned in many works of classical literature, and she figures most prominently in the great epics of Homer (the *Iliad*), in Aeschylus (*Agamemnon*), and later in Virgil (*Aeneid* 2).¹⁶⁰ In general terms, Wolf's version of the legend has stayed close to documented accounts of the fall of Troy, and the author has explained that her approach "innerhalb der Frühgeschichte über die man recht wenig gesichertes Wissen hat" (DdA II, 1983, 469), has been historical. Wolf consulted not only literary sources, but incorporated also some of the views put forth in less-well known interpretations of Greek history provided by historians such as Robert Ranke-Graves, Bachofen, and George Thomson.¹⁶¹ But this does not mean that Wolf has reproduced either the classical portrayal of the mythological figure or the transformations the story has undergone in (male) historical accounts. These had told Cassandra's story from the perspective of the victors of the Trojan Wars, but not from either the Trojan's or from the woman's point of view. Insofar as it has always been reconstructed from incomplete and imperfect evidence, history, in Wolf's view, has always had a strong element of both subjective interpretation and the imaginary, and Wolf has read the myth as a woman and as a feminist, adapting the story to her purposes as a writer, but portraying the figure as truthfully as possible: "es [war] mir natürlich sehr wichtig [...], sie möglichst 'wirklich' in ihre Zeit hineinzustellen - soweit ich sie mir vorstellen konnte. Ich wollte ihr keine Gewalt

has given rise to lack of meaning, lack of justification of social institutions and a loss of belief in progress. See, for instance, Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1982) and Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1979). See also Sigrid Weigel, *Die Stimme der Medusa. Schreibweisen in der Gegenwartsliteratur von Frauen*, (Reinbek near Hamburg, 1989), pp 267 ff. Apart from Wolf's *Kassandra*, Irmtraud Morgner's *Amanda* (also published in 1983) ranks among the most noteworthy GDR works using mythology. As J.H. Reid has pointed out, there are striking similarities between these two literary works. See J.H. Reid, 'Woman, Myth and Magic: On Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* and Irmtraud Morgner's *Amanda*', in David Childs (ed.), *Honecker's Germany*, (London, 1985), pp 97-117.

¹⁶⁰She appears and is cited in Greek literature also in: Euripides, *Andromache*, in Appollodorus, "epitome", in Cypria 1; Sack of Liliun 1, and Pausanias. Apart from Virgil, she is mentioned in Roman literature also in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. See Heidi Gilpin, 'Cassandra: Creating a Female Voice', in Sibley Fries (ed.), (1989), pp 349-366, p 363.

¹⁶¹See Rosemarie Nicolai, 'Christa Wolf, *Kassandra*. Quellenstudien und Interpretationsansätze, in *Literatur für Leser*, (1985), pp 137-155.

antun, wie auch nicht Kleist und Günderröde." (DdA II, 1983, 447) As in her previous prose works, Wolf's aim has not been the portrayal of specific historical events, which merely helped her to organize the material, but of their impact on the subjective experience of individuals, "was ein bestimmter Mensch erlebt oder was eine Gruppe von Menschen aneinander und miteinander erfährt." (DdA II, 1983, 458)

In her extensive engagement with the Cassandra myth, Wolf was again struck by the consistency with which all dominant traditions in European culture have excluded or objectified women, a realization which had first disturbed her in her analyses of the lives of German Romantic writers. It now seemed evident that this historical pattern had already been established when the first written documents of our culture were produced. In the literary works of the Hellenistic period, Wolf found, "das Alltagsleben [...], die Welt der Frau", shimmered through only "in den Lücken zwischen den Schlachtbeschreibungen" (FPV, 1980, 91-92). It appeared that this trend, which Christa Wolf identified with the onset of patriarchal domination, had survived all historical ruptures and was still manifest in the institutional and organizational structures of European culture and civilization in the 1980s; Wolf was aware from personal experience "daß in der heutigen Zivilisation jede Frau, wenn sie versucht, in den gegebenen Institutionen tätig zu werden, zum Objekt gemacht wird." (DdA II, 1983, 447). Wolf saw Cassandra as the first female figure "deren Schicksal vorformt, was dann, dreitausend Jahre lang, den Frauen geschehen soll: daß sie zum Objekt gemacht werden" (FPV, 1980, 86). When she embarked on reworking the Cassandra story, Wolf was driven by the question whether a pattern so deeply ingrained in the fabric of our culture and civilization could still be changed. Identifying closely with the analytical framework of contemporary feminism¹⁶², Wolf took a personal step forward by

¹⁶²It is true that Wolf has been careful not to be appropriated by a single cause and that she has been particularly wary of the label 'feminist'. (See 'Aus einer Diskussion an der Ohio State University. Gespräch mit Christa und Gerhard Wolf', DdA II, 1983, pp 440-455, p 452) This does not mean, however, that she has not been deeply sympathetic to feminist ideas and causes. Feminism has developed into an extremely diverse and multi-stranded international movement which encompasses a host of different theoretical approaches and political strategies. This diversity has been the particular strength of feminist criticism, since it has been able to provide a dynamic and open forum for debate which has welcomed difference rather than sought to create consensus. As an analytical framework, feminism has played a fundamental role in facilitating precisely those reforms in basic thought patterns which Wolf

beginning to systematically expose patriarchal bias and to unmask male projections on to female figures like Cassandra, aiming to dissolve the "Entfremdungssyndrome [...], die das Patriarchat auf jede weibliche Stimme dieser Kultur gelegt hat." (DdA II, 1983, 447)¹⁶³ Motivated by her strong fascination with Cassandra's particular subjectivity and by her deep intuitive understanding of her conflict-filled life, Christa Wolf has re-invented the mythological figure from the perspective of contemporary feminism, allowing Cassandra's story finally to be told by an authentic female voice.

In choosing to work on mythology, the author is able to provide an analysis of modern culture which criticizes its very core from the perspective of women's experience. Wolf sees the "Grundlage für bestimmte Fehlentwicklungen, die heute bis zu der ungeheuren Kriegsgefahr führen, in der wir uns befinden" (DdA II, 1983, 450) in the intensification of positivist thought and the rule of unadulterated rationalism during the development of modern industrial society in the nineteenth century. But their origins lie in the onset of patriarchal domination and the concomitant rise of class society during the period of historical transformation Wolf reaches back to in her narrative. This is also a major reason why Wolf attached such great importance to Cassandra. This mythological figure embodies the conflicts of her age in intensified form; Cassandra stands at the historical watershed when a highly complex cultural matrix was being reduced to one strand:

Erst als Besitz, Hierarchie, Patriarchat entstehen, wird aus dem Gewebe des menschlichen Lebens, das die drei Uralt-Frauen, die Moiren, in der Hand halten, jener eine blutrote Faden herausgerissen, wird er auf Kosten der Gleichmäßigkeit des Gewebes verstärkt: die Erzählung von

herself has aimed at promoting. It was, however, clearly a matter of concern to the author not to be categorized in an oversimplified manner or burdened by undue expectations.

¹⁶³Wolf's epilogue to Kleist's *Penthesilea* (1983) provides a further example of her approach to a patriarchal cultural 'Erbe'. Her feminist reading of Kleist's drama exposes the extent to which even a radical author like Kleist was trapped within the male-biased conceptual universe of his time. Out of a complex mixture of self-alienation, fear, and unease with his sexuality, Kleist, in Wolf's view, was bound to replicate the familiar pattern of unconsciously projecting that which he could not accept in his own nature on to a female figure. Wolf, a reader with a different consciousness, is able to 'see' what Kleist himself was unable to acknowledge. But she unmasks his male bias from a perspective of sympathy and solidarity, not in order to judge or prove herself superior.

In 'seeing through' the historical figure, the author becomes re-acquainted with this older, matriarchal, culture. Cassandra embodies the 'cultural memory' of an alternative cultural fabric and of an alternative value system which, in Wolf's view, promoted life, solidarity, and friendship, not domination and conflict. The figure incorporates the processes through which this older culture was suppressed; Cassandra has largely lost all awareness of these ancestral roots. Only through her contact with the Skamander community is this deeply buried memory reawakened. This experience allows Cassandra to set off on a difficult journey to a deeper self, eventually allowing her to find her own voice. The protest of Wolf's Cassandra figure and her decision to disassociate herself from the mainstream historical forces of her time must be understood as a symbolic act which provides a model for an alternative to them. Wolf's narrative aims to heighten the reader's awareness that "wonach wir uns sehnen, als Möglichkeit in uns angelegt ist." (SoStck, 160) The author's work on the myth is thus itself a symbolic act: she frees the figure from the patriarchal text which had imprisoned her and reinscribes her into a contemporary feminist text, allowing Cassandra's particular subjectivity to become a productive political force in the present.

Because their values and experiences have hitherto been persistently excluded or suppressed, women, in Wolf's estimation, can make a seminal contribution to changing basic patterns of thought and to promoting a more flexible appreciation of the system of values on which our culture could be based in future. In order to do so, they must have the confidence and the courage to step outside the self-perpetuating rationale of the patriarchal system of thought. As my analysis of Wolf's short prose narrative 'Selbstversuch' later in this thesis (in section 2.3) will show, Wolf had thematized the issue of women's complicity already in this earlier, overtly feminist, text. In *Kassandra* she explores this theme in greater depth, re-emphasizing that women must recognize that they have deeply internalized the values and assumptions of the patriarchal mentality. In this process the representations of gender in the symbolic order of our culture have played a significant role. The questions women wish to formulate must aim at overcoming

antithetical judgements and bipolar notions such as 'right' or 'wrong'.¹⁶⁴ In seeking to challenge the assumptions on which our culture has been based, women can take advantage of their unique position inside and outside European society; they are both subjects and objects, victims as well as perpetrators. As a consequence, they would be able to combine self-discovery with self-questioning, aimed at revealing their own blind spots. *Kassandra* has been written with such insights in mind: "Ich will zusammentragen, was mich, uns zu Komplizen der Selbstzerstörung macht; was mich, uns befähigt, ihr zu widerstehn." (FPV, 1981, 109)

The complex aesthetic construct Christa Wolf has provided with *Kassandra* provoked contradictory responses in critical quarters. Whilst some critics, particularly in the GDR, have expressed concern about the open and highly personal form of the four Frankfurt lectures and about the strong feminist colouring of Wolf's argument, others, who have been able to appreciate the author's theoretical rigour in the *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung*, have regarded the relatively traditional aesthetic construct of Wolf's narrative or its elevated prose style as at least inconsistent, if not entirely in contradiction with the author's intention as revealed in the lectures.¹⁶⁵ My personal assessment is that Wolf, to the extent that she took notice of these critical responses, will have drawn encouragement and strength from them. While her decision to conceive of the lectures and the novel as one interrelated aesthetic fabric most probably evolved only gradually in the course of

¹⁶⁴The author makes this clear, for instance, when she recounts an episode from a discussion with young scientists in the early 1980s. One of the male participants argued that without woman's supporting role, the achievements of modern science would never have come about, an evaluation which cannot be faulted if one accepts the basic premises of such an argument: "Ich fand, der Mann hatte recht. Die Art Fortschritt in Kunst und Wissenschaft, an die wir uns gewöhnt haben: ausgefallene Spitzenleistungen, ist nur so zu haben. Ist nur durch Ent-Persönlichung zu haben." (DdA II, 1981, 181) Wolf, by contrast, poses a fundamentally different question which stresses that the price of such 'progress' is unacceptable.

¹⁶⁵ For an illustration of the perspective offered in the first category, see above all Wilhelm Girnus, 'Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?', *Sinn und Form*, (2/1983), pp 439-447, who considered that Wolf no longer properly emphasized the class struggle. Further examples of critical responses to *Kassandra* in the GDR may be found in the selection of reviews included under '*Kassandra* von Christa Wolf' in *Weimarer Beiträge*, (8/1984), pp 1353-1381. See particularly the contributions of Karin Hirdina and Hans-Georg Werner, pp 1366-1368 and pp 1376-1381, respectively. Within the second category belong the positions adopted by Siegfried Rönisch in the GDR, (ibid., pp 1372-1376) and by Anthony Stephens and Sigrid Weigel in the West. See Anthony Stephens, "Die Verführung der Worte" - Von *Kindheitsmuster* zu *Kassandra*, in Manfred Jurgensen (ed.), *Christa Wolf. Darstellung - Deutung - Diskussion*, (Bern, 1984), pp 127-147, and Sigrid Weigel, 'Vom Sehen zur Seherin', in Drescher, (ed.), (1989), pp 169-203.

writing, her intention was certainly to challenge conventional expectations about literature in order to promote a more open and flexible appreciation of its untapped potential.

As my exposition of Wolf's development has shown, the network structure was not new to Wolf's thinking at the time she created *Kassandra*. Wolf had declared already in 'Lesen und Schreiben' that she considered the linear narrative forms of classical literature on which Socialist Realist writing had modelled itself inadequate for the portrayal of the totality of human experience. With *Nachdenken über Christa T.* she had begun to explore aesthetic means which capture also the more elusive aspects of human nature and experience and which incorporate more authentically the subjective experience of the author, the dimension of authorship, in the fictional framework of the narrative. Wolf's definition of the principle of 'subjective authenticity' in the early 1970s, furthermore, was based on her new perception of the changing interrelatedness of all social experience, which has become objectified and segregated in the discourses of established sociological and ideological structures. Once the subjective nature of all social experience is revealed, connections can be made between subjective experience and objective reality which allow subjective agency to be explored as a medium for social change:

Plötzlich hängt alles mit allem zusammen und ist in Bewegung; für 'gegeben' angenommene Objekte werden auflösbar und offenbaren die in ihnen vergegenständlichten gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen (nicht mehr jenen hierarchisch geordneten gesellschaftlichen Kosmos, in dem Menschenpartikel auf soziologisch oder ideologisch vorgegebenen Bahnen sich bewegen oder von dieser erwarteten Bewegung abweichen) [...]. (DdA II, 1973, 324)

The aesthetic means developed by Wolf have aimed at making transparent the thematic, aesthetic, and subjective interrelatedness of her writing, breaking down the artificial separations of art and life which conventional genre categories and aesthetic norms have promoted. The complex tapestry of Wolf's writing has conveyed her perception that life, from the perspective of human consciousness and experience, cannot be neatly separated

into time and place, reason and emotion, imagination and reality, or subject and object. Pursuing her overarching goal of developing narrative techniques which as closely as possible resemble the complexity of life itself, Wolf has persistently illuminated also the fundamental interrelatedness of all social and literary activity, that is of life and art. She has explored the issues most urgent to her as a socially and politically committed author in literary forms most appropriate for her particular purpose at the time, exploiting her narrative means to the full in order to accommodate the thematic complexity she found herself confronted with. Inevitably, however, she has had to accept certain limitations: *Kindheitsmuster* became structurally cumbersome through the incorporation of extensive theoretical considerations, and *Kein Ort. Nirgends* split up the thematic complex the narrative embraces by separating the essays on Bettine and Karoline from the aesthetic framework of the prose text. Wolf's short pieces of prose, on the other hand, had acquired neither the historical depth nor the wide referential framework which both *Kindheitsmuster* and *Kein Ort. Nirgends* successfully conveyed. The aesthetic network structure of *Kassandra* offers a kind of synthesis here: the reader is allowed both to perceive the complexity of experience of the historical figure and its interrelatedness with the contemporary dimension of authorship. Whilst the *Kassandra* narrative, as Wolf has explained, "steht als eine andere Art von Erzählkörper mehr für sich" (DdA II, 1983, 458), it must be read in conjunction with the lectures: "Die Struktur der Vorlesungen, in denen ich Unterschiedliches ausprobieren, die nicht mit der Erzählung korrespondieren, hilft, die Geschlossenheit aufzubrechen." (DdA II, 1983, 458) ¹⁶⁶

I shall discuss Wolf's theoretical ideas as she has developed them above all in her fourth Frankfurt lecture as well as their relationship to the *Kassandra* story when I analyse Wolf's reading and re-writing of the myth in the final part of this thesis. At this stage I merely intend to outline some aspects of Wolf's theoretical argument in her Frankfurt lectures which relate to her writing after *Kassandra*. If one compares the four essays

¹⁶⁶In her working diary of July 21 1981, Wolf recorded: "Empfinde die geschlossene Form der *Kassandra*-Erzählung als Widerspruch zu der fragmentarischen Struktur, aus der sie sich für mich eigentlich zusammensetzt. Der Widerspruch kann nicht gelöst, nur benannt werden." (FPV, 120)

collected as *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung* with Wolf's similarly comprehensive theoretical re-evaluation and rigorous aesthetic re-definition in 'Lesen und Schreiben' a decade and a half earlier, one can immediately identify three aspects of difference: the highly personal form in which Wolf's ideas are presented, the openness and indeterminacy of the lectures throughout, and the strong feminist colouring of Wolf's argument.

Having selected a loose mixture of personal forms for the presentation of her argument, Wolf is able to exploit fully the advantages each has to offer, without being under any obligation to maintain it once its limitations have been reached: "Ich beobachte verschiedene subjektive Formen bei der Arbeit, die sie leisten können, die ich in ihnen leisten kann." (FPV,8) In contrast to conventional aesthetics which, in Wolf's understanding, have always underpinned the alienation of the writer from the work, and from life, the Frankfurt lectures reveal the 'real life' behind the composition of the in many ways traditional aesthetic construct of the *Kassandra* story. Wolf's aim in the Frankfurt lectures is to communicate her ideas openly, allowing her readers to witness the thought processes as well as the emotional and sensual experiences which her fascination with the mythological figure *Kassandra* has triggered. Whilst the first two lectures fulfil a more informative function of tracing the story's genesis as it was taking shape in the author's mind, the third and fourth lectures offer extensive insights into the author's personal and literary responses to the present deadlock, expanding on and substantiating arguments only implicitly stated in *Kassandra's* interior monologue and establishing parallels with the contemporary world. The fourth lecture is of particular significance, since it provides an extensive discussion of traditional aesthetics from ancient to modern times from the perspective of the woman writer confronted with the difficulties of writing without a sense of her own, gender-specific, literary tradition. The personal forms in which Wolf presents her argument underline the point that she has no intention of matching the claims to objectivity and certainty of her male forebears and is engaging with tradition on her own, specifically feminine, terms. Highlighting from the outset the experimental nature of her undertaking, Wolf writes with the intention of contributing to an open and diverse debate about literature in the contemporary context. Whilst she fundamentally questions the

system of values on which conventional aesthetics has been based, she does not seek to establish new certainties or pronounce definitive judgements. In her deliberately polemical statement, all institutionalized corpora of knowledge, be they those of the sciences, philosophy, or conventional aesthetics, have contributed, through "Selbst- und Stoffbeherrschung" (FPV, 153), to processes of alienation and self-alienation. Rather than allowing greater understanding of complex reality, they have tended to trivialize or obscure through complex theoretical constructs the real experiences of countless human beings. As a hierarchically-organised system of norms and regulations which have governed the evaluation and appreciation of literary works in European culture since Homer, conventional poetics have also produced alienation: "Es gibt keine Poetik, und es kann keine geben, die verhindert, daß die lebendige Erfahrung ungezählter Subjekte in Kunst-Objekten ertötet und begraben wird." (FPV, 8)

Wolf's argument proposes that the crisis of values which the nuclear menace brought to a head calls for an open, national as well as international, debate which acknowledges difference, the relativity of established value systems, and peoples' real uncertainties, fears and anxieties. If individuals or groups of individuals were willing to drop the 'masks' of the competing professional, political, or ideological systems to which they have pledged their allegiance, and instead communicated as 'human beings' committed to peace and the survival of our species, viable alternatives might eventually be identified¹⁶⁷. Once the real, that is economic, self-interests which have sustained these political and ideological systems have been exposed, the deeply ingrained pattern of thinking in terms of 'Feindbilder' might be broken and a constructive dialogue might ensue which focuses on issues of life rather

¹⁶⁷The fact that Christa Wolf continued to explore highly personal forms of literary expression after *Kassandra* is of significance here. At one point in Wolf's *Störfall* (1986), on p 94, for instance (written in response to the nuclear accident at Chernobyl in April 1986), the narrator writes a letter to her brother, a scientist, on a day when she has resolved not to write a single word: "Heute kein Wort." (Stf., 30) This highlights the point that Christa Wolf considers open and direct processes of communication between people as 'human beings' to be paramount in the face of the fundamental threat posed to the survival of our planet by scientific and technological advance. Angela Drescher's documentation *Verblendung. Disput über einen Störfall*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1991), provides revealing insights into the debates between scientists and artists which Wolf's narrative was able to promote in the GDR. Wolf's participation in these discussions bears testimony to the fact that her commitment to such a debate was not restricted to her literary endeavours.

than war and destruction.¹⁶⁸ Wolf signals her willingness to take part in such a debate as both a woman and a writer in European society who is prepared to reconsider old loyalties and acquired patterns of thought. With *Kassandra*, she has demonstrated her determination radically to question the poetological and aesthetic conventions of European culture in an endeavour to create a much broader, democratic base for the appreciation and social organisation of literature. As one instrument of social analysis amongst others, Wolf now believes, literature can continue to challenge pre-conceived ideas and assumptions about how we interpret our lives and our possibilities of organizing and constructing human relationships.

As my exposition of Wolf's development in the 1970s has shown, Wolf had already deplored the absence of a feminine literary tradition in her essays on Bettine and Karoline. Her theoretical reflections in the fourth Frankfurt lecture re-emphasize the particular difficulties women writers have experienced in a patriarchal culture whose normative aesthetic prescriptions have left them no viable alternative between the polarized choices of "sich anpassen oder verschwinden zu müssen." (FPV, 150) But whilst Wolf reiterates the problems which the absence of a feminine literary tradition have given rise to for female authors striving for autonomy in defining their own aesthetic criteria, her deliberations now strike a more confident, if not rebellious note: "Sage Dir alle großen Namen der abendländischen Literatur auf, vergiß weder Homer noch Brecht, und frage dich, bei welchem dieser Geistesriesen Du, als Schreibende, anknüpfen könntest. Wir haben keine authentischen Muster, das kostet uns Zeit, Umwege, Irrtümer; aber es muß ja nicht nur ein Nachteil sein." (FPV, 146). The very fact that women writers have not been able to identify with the reified system of poetological theories and aesthetic conventions of patriarchal culture, Wolf seems to be suggesting, has, paradoxically, unburdened them

¹⁶⁸By the time Wolf wrote *Kassandra*, this process of communication between individuals and between groups of individuals no longer willing to communicate through the official channels open to them, had, of course, already begun in the GDR. Inspired and encouraged by the international peace movement and by the women's movement in the West, an unofficial peace movement and a women's movement came into existence in the GDR during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Gaining strength and momentum throughout the 1980s, they formed two major strands of a much wider network of social communication and alternative cultural organization which, as we now know, eventually led to the peaceful revolution of autumn 1989.

of the pressure of upholding these traditions. The outside perspective they have been able to retain as a consequence of their very marginalization has actually made it easier for some women writers at least to challenge preconceived ideas and to develop greater creativity in exploring alternative aesthetic means. Bettine von Arnim, as Wolf emphasized in her essay, furnishes one outstanding example of a radical approach to conventional aesthetics: "Was an diesem Brief-Buch am ehesten ins Auge fallen sollte, wird, da es nicht formuliert ist, am leichtesten übersehen; die Aussage, die in der Struktur des Buches liegt, seine Weigerung nämlich, sich einem ästhetischen Kanon zu unterstellen." (DdA II, 1979, 144) It has been precisely this absence of their own, gender-specific, literary tradition, furthermore, which has strengthened women's determination to search for female forebears from whom they might draw inspiration. Their shared experiences of isolation and alienation as literary outsiders have drawn women writers more closely together, promoting solidarity, affinity and sisterly love rather than competition. The literary forms they have pioneered have promoted both subjectivity and intersubjectivity, a feature Wolf particularly admired about Bettine's approach to Karoline von Günderrode's writing:

Die Mischform, die sich [der Bettine] aufdrängt, ist am ehesten imstande, Bewegungen mitzumachen, wie die beiden Frauen sie aneinander und miteinander erleben, und die Person ganz, inkommensurabel und widersprüchlich zu zeigen, wo die geschlossene Romanform hätte reduzieren, beurteilen, einteilen und richten müssen. (DdA II, 1979, 145)

Bettine was one of the first women in German culture who accepted that the price she had to pay for offering resistance to the "Vorherrschaft des Formenkanons" was "Unbedeutendheit", but she was also among the first female authors to fully exploit the freedom she gained as a result from the "tagtäglichen Strenge unangemessener Anforderungen." (DdA II, 1979, 145) Wolf's Frankfurt lectures extend the list of female forebears who have shared Bettine's courage, pointing again to Ingeborg Bachmann, and adding other names like those of Marie-Luise Fleißer and Virginia Woolf. Although still

small in number, these female forebears form a strand in the fabric of European culture which provides a significant alternative to those other cultural strands which have for so long set the standards which have determined whether a work of literature is significant. The metapoetic and metahistorical narrative of Wolf's Frankfurt lectures no longer describes, as her predecessors from Aristotle to Brecht had done, abstract rules of art and genre distinction, but begins to create a poetological network whose strands are interwoven through subjectivity and intersubjectivity, inextricably linking theory and literary practice and bringing the literary text as close as possible to the life from which it was engendered. The unconventional, non-linear and highly personal form in which Wolf explores her ideas not only corresponds to the nature of her argument, but it constitutes also a symbolic act through which Wolf as a woman writer consciously disassociates her writing from all aesthetic and poetological traditions which have promoted those patterns of alienation in our culture, "deren andere perfekte Produkte zum Zweck der Selbstvernichtung produziert werden [...]." Her overarching question, she has explained, "richtet sich auf, genauer: gegen das unheimliche Wirken von Entfremdungserscheinungen auch in der Ästhetik, auch in der Kunst." (FPV, 8)

Kassandra is underpinned by Wolf's new, widened perception "was für mich 'wirklich' ist." The "Erweiterung des Blick-Winkels" and the "Neueinstellung der Tiefenschärfe" (FPV, 1981, 131) of which she tells us in her Frankfurt lectures have been widely interpreted as providing her new feminist perspective. In my view, however, Wolf's position is even more complex than this. What she aims at promoting is a sober, honest appreciation of the deadlock our culture and civilization seems to have arrived at through the ruthless exploitation of the very natural resources which have sustained our survival over the millennia. In pursuing the creation of ever-greater material wealth with the help of scientific and technological 'progress', Wolf suggests, we have allowed ourselves to become blind to the destructive and self-destructive mentality which the subjugation of all nature to these overriding goals has fostered. Wolf's new angle of vision incorporates a wide temporal perspective in conjunction with a heightened awareness that a multiplicity of alternatives to our particular system of thought and values has, in fact, been available to

us. Rather than embracing difference and heterogeneity, however, Western culture and civilization have promoted, through complex processes of exclusion and domination, homogeneity and the creation of cultural hierarchies. In her essay 'Der weiße Kreis' (1985), Wolf has expressed her belief that the historical patterns of thought which have ultimately deprived us of viable alternatives are, in fact, deeply rooted not only in our civilization, but also in successive preceding civilizations. One common feature of the evolutionary process of our civilization, Wolf believes, has been the affirmative role which has been demanded of or imposed on art and on literature across the millennia:

Die Erde ist kein weißer Kreis, kein unbeschriebener Planet. Unter der Oberfläche, die wir Heutigen ausbeuten und dabei immer häufiger zerstören, stoßen wir in immer tieferen Schichten auf immer frühere Kulturen. Seit Tausenden von Jahren versuchen die einander ablösenden Zivilisationen, ihre Götterzeichen, das heißt: ihr Bild von sich gewaltsam dem ihnen bekannten Erdkreis aufzuprägen. Ebenso lange haben sie das Rechtfertigungsgedröhn der Kunst gebraucht, erhalten, wenn es sein mußte: erzwungen. Dies sind unsere historischen Wurzeln, da wurden unsere Begierden, Gewohnheiten und Maße geschaffen. (DdA I, 1985, 458-459)

By their very nature inextricably intertwined with the very fabric from which our culture has been woven, art and literature have, perforce, replicated the antithetical patterns of thought which are so deeply ingrained in our thinking even today. This has manifested itself above all in the imaginative projection and self-projection of our unacknowledged fears and anxieties on the one hand, and of our deepest longings for peace and harmony on the other, into our great cultural achievements: "Wir leben in dem ungemütlichen Gelände zwischen Katastrophe und Idylle, und so wird es, falls wir überleben, lange bleiben." (DdA I, 1985, 457) The task facing artists and writers as a consequence, Wolf suggests, is to radically disassociate themselves from all patterns of thought which either promote escapism into utopian visions or, equally destructively, forecast impending doom in the form of dystopian visions. Both of these options, Wolf believes, have impeded the very

processes of thought through which we might, against all the odds, eventually discover a way of securing the survival of our planet and of our species.

What Wolf aims at promoting, then, is the courage to confront our culture and ourselves as we really are in the here and now. Literature can play a role in this process, a first step of which must be the sober and honest acknowledgement of our hidden fears and anxieties and of the contradictions and uncertainties which confront us as human beings in an increasingly complex and threatening reality. As a Marxist, Wolf has, of course, always sought to make productive in her writing the potential for change which she has discovered in crises, tensions and contradictions. But her new perspective in *Kassandra* - and in the literary works which follow it - is the recognition that conflict, contradiction and paradox can be embraced without fear, even though they cannot be resolved, and that uncertainty can be expressed without the pressure of having to identify from which direction change might come. This is a perspective which regards difference - not only of gender, but also politics, history and ethics - as a constructive basis from which to gain deeper understanding of both ourselves and the 'other'. Marxism, Wolf now emphasises, has shared with other systems of thought and values a deeply ingrained need for harmony, consensus and resolution of conflict. This fear of difference and diversity, however, has, paradoxically, had the effect of emphasizing and promoting discord and conflict in that it has distracted our attention away from an investigation of our own blindspots and inadequacies. With *Kassandra*, Wolf has acknowledged the limitations of her own experiential context as well as the limitations of conventional aesthetic means in allowing her contradictions and uncertainties as a writer to be revealed as she searches for new meaning in her text. From the perspective of her new angle of vision, all 'innocent' notions of writing and the writer - be they of the kind which look to literature as the 'conscience of the nation', as an authoritative source of absolute truths or values, or as a confirmation of our worst fears about ourselves and the world we have created - must be abandoned in favour of an understanding which embraces uncertainty and the relativity of all meaning:

[Es] ist nicht zu beschreiben, mein waches Berufsinteresse, das auf Beschreibung gerade zielt, muß sich zurückhalten, zurückziehen und hat lernen müssen, seine Niederlage selbst zu wünschen, selbst herbeizuführen. (Freude aus Verunsicherung ziehn - wer hat uns das denn beigebracht!). (FPV, 1981, 131)

Kassandra develops a contradictory understanding of herself as both subject and object of history, as both resisting and at the same time collaborating in the circumstances in which she finds herself. While she apportions blame where it is due and distances herself from the warmongering tactics, attitudes, and actions of the palace world, she also critically reflects a deeply internalized awareness of herself and others as victims which represents the first step towards genuine emancipation. This juxtaposition of a self which is resisting as well as collaborating reflects not only modern feminist thought, but also a postmodern recognition that the old dualistic modes of thinking can no longer be of validity in today's world. At the same time, the depiction of Cassandra's quest for autonomy and emancipation as an inner and self-motivated process reflects also the critique of modern civilization articulated from a psychoanalytical perspective and comes close to Margarete Mitscherlich's understanding of genuine emancipation of the human subject:

Für mich ist Emanzipation: Befreiung von bestehenden, sozial fixierten, oft verinnerlichten Werten und Vorstellungen, die man oder frau als falsch und gefährlich erkannt hat oder deren Widersprüchlichkeit ausgeklammert wird. Emanzipation ist nichts Abgeschlossenes. Sie ist eher Haltung als Ergebnis. Sie ist für den einzelnen, denn nur er oder sie kann sich emanzipieren, eine lebenslange Auseinandersetzung mit der Innenwelt und der von Menschen geschaffenen und gestalteten Umwelt, die sich heute durch heuchlerische Moral, tödliche Rigidität, falsche und verhängnisvolle Ehr- und Rechtsbegriffe auszeichnet.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹Margarete Mitscherlich, *Über die Mühsal der Emanzipation*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp 174-175. Because of the aptness of this statement for Wolf's work as a whole, I have chosen this quotation also as a motto for my thesis.

Kassandra and the autobiographically based works which follow in its wake reflect this understanding of emancipation and of the responsibility of the writer which results from it. Once again, it has become much harder for Wolf as an author to say 'I', but at the same time inevitable, if not imperative, that she should do so.

In *Störfall* (1987), *Sommerstück* (1989), and *Was bleibt* (1990), Christa Wolf develops some of the thematic and aesthetic issues of both *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and *Kassandra* more extensively from a deeply personal perspective. These works thus again pick up the autobiographical strand in Wolf's writing which has consistently been developed since *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Juninachmittag*. Although the autobiographical material is undoubtedly subject to 'literarization', Christa Wolf has now found both the narrative means and the personal courage to subject herself to the questioning and self-questioning which is part of an inner process of emancipation from deeply internalized values and attitudes. These works testify to the increasing importance Wolf has attached to the task of uncovering the blind spots of our culture and civilization. In an interview in 1984, she commented: "Jeder Mensch erfährt - wenn er sich überhaupt erfährt - daß er in jedem Stadium seines Lebens einen blinden Fleck hat. Etwas, was er nicht sieht. Das hängt mit seiner Geschichte zusammen. Und so hat auch eine Gesellschaft oder eine Zivilisation einen blinden Fleck. Genau dieser blinde Fleck bringt die Selbstzerstörung hervor."¹⁷⁰ According to Wolf, uncovering the blind spots of a society or civilization often initially takes the form of self-searching, of 'Selbsterforschung', a task which she now embraces as a first step to probing the blind spots of the society whose values and beliefs had once shaped her perception of herself and of her role and responsibility as a writer.

Wolf's autobiographically based narratives of the 1980s and early 1990s also mark a shift in emphasis in Wolf's writing from the theme of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' to the task which Anna K. Kuhn has so aptly referred to as 'Gegenwartsbewältigung'¹⁷¹, a

¹⁷⁰Documentation: Christa Wolf (Interviews), *German Quarterly*, (vol. 57, no.1, 1984), pp 91-115, p 114.

¹⁷¹Anna K. Kuhn, 'Rewriting GDR History: The Christa Wolf Controversy', a paper presented at the Nottingham WIGS conference, 9 - 11 September 1993. A revised version of this paper was subsequently

process which also forms one aspect of *Kassandra*. In view of the recognition that the social, economic, and ideological systems in both East and West have played an equally sinister role in the creation of the horrors of the modern world, an investigation of her more recent biography and a coming to terms with communism, and specifically with Stalinist legacy, assumed increasing urgency in the course of the 1980s. As Wolf had depicted in the fictional realm of the *Kassandra* narrative, she faced the difficult task of coming to terms with the possibility that she had overlooked or avoided considering many injustices in the GDR and that she had unwittingly become an accomplice of its discreditable regime.

A close investigation of the problems facing the woman writer in patriarchal society forms a further important strand in Wolf's autobiographically based prose works. As I have already pointed out in my exposition above, Christa Wolf was increasingly disturbed by the inevitability with which conventional narrative techniques have reflected the nature of social and cultural organisation in any particular society. In her Büchner Prize Acceptance Speech (1980), Wolf gave a first clear indication of her belief that it is through the very linguistic structures of the language through which it communicates that literature ultimately colludes in the processes of alienation and self-alienation which characterize modern industrial societies: "Muß sie [die Literatur, R.R.] nicht, wie immer sie sich dreht und wendet, sich quälen und zermartern mag, Komplize des Entfremdungs- und Entwicklungsprozesses sein und bleiben?" (DdA II, 1980, 157) In this essay, as in her Frankfurt lectures, Wolf made the point that she considered the search for a new language a primary concern of her writing. This new language, which she had "im Ohr, noch nicht auf der Zunge" would, by abandoning all "bescheid- und besserwissenden, [...] urteilenden, auftrumpfenden oder aufgebenden Wörter" (DdA II, 1980, 157 and 158), seek to facilitate an open, honest and truthful process of communication among autonomous human beings. The language she was interested in developing, Wolf stressed, would express "ein anderes,

published under the title "'Eine Königin köpfen ist effektiver als einen König köpfen': the gender politics of the Christa Wolf controversy", in *German Monitor*, "Women and the Wende: Social effects and cultural reflections of the German unification process", (No. 31, 1994), pp 200-215.

zeitgemäßes Wertgefühl" (DdA II, 1980, 158), and it would rely on words which sought to denote "Unauffälliges [...], den kostbaren Alltag, konkret." (FPV, 1981, 125)

Störfall, *Sommerstück*, and *Was bleibt* are, at least at first sight, set resolutely in the present, with the author focusing on the events of a single or a few successive days. The 'Alltagssprache' Wolf explores in these texts provide a kaleidoscope of different language registers and usages. It comprises the most sophisticated poetic language of literary texts, the sensationalist language of the media, the most complicated scientific and technological jargon as well as the language of everyday life. The narratives juxtapose everyday occurrences with threatening outer events as they impinge on the apparently mundane everyday lives of individuals in the private sphere of their home. In the face of uncertainty and threat, it is precisely the 'Alltag' which is shown to provide a sense of security and emotional support. From this basis, Wolf's narrators find the courage to subject themselves to the inner uncertainty created through ruthless self-questioning and self-elucidation. The close observation of the intimate thought processes of a single day or of a few days permits Wolf to scrutinize the deeper layers of her narrator's conscious as well as subconscious mind in an endeavour to expose the extent to which these reflect the system of thought and values of a patriarchal, authoritarian society.

The unconventional narrative means Wolf has explored in her strongly autobiographically based texts initially attracted the condemnation above all of those critics who hold hard and fast to conventional standards of what makes a literary work noteworthy. More recently, however, under the dynamic influence particularly of feminist scholarship, these texts have been understood as experimenting with literary and linguistic forms which lend themselves to an ever-closer investigation of the more elusive aspects of subjective experience and make conscious the extent to which language itself replicates the organisational structures and values of modern society. This new body of critical research has highlighted above all three aspects of importance in Wolf's strongly autobiographically based works: their highly intertextual nature, the deep psychological, inner perspective of these texts and their revelations and self-elucidations as verbal gestures that create social bonding beyond or outside the limits of society's institutionalized relationships; and the

close investigation Wolf conducts of the problems facing the woman writer in patriarchal society. Within the scope of this thesis, I cannot possibly do justice to this developing field of Wolf scholarship. I have to restrict myself here to a brief outline of the main focus of analysis in Wolf's autobiographical works. Since I have furnished a comprehensive analysis of *Störfall* elsewhere¹⁷², I shall concentrate on *Sommerstück* and *Was bleibt*. This will be supplemented in the subsequent sections of my thesis, since some of the most important aspects of Wolf's approach in her autobiographically based works form strands in *Kassandra*.

The narrative technique Wolf adopted in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* already goes some way towards dissolving a central narrative perspective, pointing towards the ideas of a reader-oriented concept of the novel as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin.¹⁷³ The text remains open and is structured through montage, change of perspective and questions about the extent to which language contributes to the upholding of the status quo. In *Sommerstück* Wolf endeavoured more radically and systematically to dissolve a central narrative perspective, moving even closer to Bakhtin's concept of polyphony than she had done before. What at first presents itself merely as an artistic mixing of authorial and personal perspectives develops into a kaleidoscope of changing perspectives and tenses. In terms of narrative technique, *Sommerstück* is a highly complex text with a multiplicity of intertextual references and self-references (a technique Wolf later applies also in *Störfall*). Hans-Peter Ecker's attempts at describing the complex structure of *Sommerstück*, for instance, have identified a host of intertextual self-references as well as external references which range from Wolf's *Juninachmittag* to Gorky's *Summer Visitors* [Dachniki].¹⁷⁴ Hannes Krauss, in a recent essay, moreover, has put forward a convincing argument that there is a conscious reception in *Sommerstück* of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Given that Joyce Crick noted,

¹⁷² See Renate Rechten, "'Prinzip Hoffnung' oder 'Herz der Finsternis'? Zu Christa Wolfs *Störfall*", in *New German Studies* (vol. 17, part 3, 1992/3), pp 229-253.

¹⁷³ A comprehensive study in the GDR of Bakhtin's ideas has been provided by Edward Kowalski and Michael Wegner (eds.), *Untersuchungen zur Poetik und Theorie des Romans*, (Berlin and Weimar, 1986).

¹⁷⁴ Hans-Peter Ecker, 'Plädoyer für eine neue Rezeption von DDR-Literatur, demonstriert an Christa Wolfs *Sommerstück*', *Euphorion* 88, (2,1994), pp 223-235.

as early as 1989, a close affinity between the writing of Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf, it seems now certain that Wolf's engagement with the work of women writers who pioneered new forms of the novel appropriate to more elusive perceptions of reality intensified between the 1970s and the 1980s, locating Wolf clearly within the context of modern European women's literature.¹⁷⁵

In *Sommerstück* Wolf illuminates from a highly autobiographical perspective her experiences in the aftermath of the Biermann affair. On one level, the narrative continues Wolf's exploration of the problem of 'Scheitern', now focusing closely on the experiences of a small community of like-minded critical intellectuals in the GDR. As in *Juninachmittag*, the dimension of outer, social and political reality, is kept firmly in the background of the narrative. The central characters have taken refuge from the tensions and conflicts of their public life in an idyll-like, sheltered existence in a remote village in the Mecklenburg countryside. Feeling no longer needed in a society whose concerns and future development has hitherto been central to their self-understanding, the characters attempt to realize their shared vision of an alternative way of life informed by the values and beliefs they have stood and fought for. The isolated setting away from the troubles and exigencies of normal life in the public domain permits Wolf to conduct a close exploration and self-exploration of the problems of 'Zu-sich-Selber-Kommen' and of identity from the perspective of individual psychology and intersubjectivity. While Christa T. had already made the demand to become: "Man selbst, ganz stark man selbst" (Chr. T., 147), the narrator of *Sommerstück*, too, feels that this summer was about: "Wir sollten so stark wir selbst sein, wie sie [die Dinge, RR] sie selbst sein mußten" (SoStck, 8), is succeeded by an examination of the factors that stand in the way of this. Probing deeply beneath the surface of apparently harmonious and happy relationships underpinned by

¹⁷⁵See Hannes Krauss, 'Avant-Garde or Idyll? Christa Wolf's Discovery of Modernity', in Hilary Chung (ed.), *In the Party Spirit. Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*, (Rodopi Critical Studies, vol. 6, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996), pp 150-157. For a detailed analysis comparing Christa Wolf's *Juninachmittag*, *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster*, and *Kein Ort. Nirgends* with Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse*, see Joyce Crick, 'Christa Wolf and Virginia Woolf: Selective Affinities', in Marilyn S. Fries (ed.), *Responses to Christa Wolf: Critical Essays*, (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

shared visions and ideals, the narrative gradually reveals a whole host of personal conflicts, contradictions and tragedies. Temporarily freed from the pressure of having to rethink and remould their lives in the face of an inflexible, authoritarian and patriarchal social system, the characters are confronted with themselves, with their inner contradictions, suppressed fears and unacknowledged feelings of inadequacy. Ultimately, they undergo a process of individuation in the course of which they are forced to accept the limitations of the security and support a group like this is able to provide in the long term. Each person has to find the courage of determining his or her future individually, even if this means depriving him/herself of the emotional succour of a closely-knit community. Whilst they are suffering from the irrefutable reality that the prospects of self-realization in their society seem to have been permanently destroyed, the cohesion and viability of their community is threatened to an equally severe degree from within: personal jealousy, possessive behaviour, inflexibility, patriarchal and authoritarian attitudes, emotional escapism into unrequited love and an inability to love, but above all lack of self-knowledge, are some of the factors which are shown to create conflicts and contradictions which make them fall short of the ideals and visions they claim to cherish.

In the course of the narrative Ellen, the figure based most strongly on the author herself, manages to overcome a writer's block by confronting her fears and deep-seated anxieties. She learns to accept herself with all her compromises and inadequacies, but she also rediscovers a younger, more absolute self and, through a process of critical self-questioning, opens up the possibility for change and renewal. While her daughter Jenny and her friend Anton are able, as members of the younger generation of GDR citizens, to distance themselves from the society into which they have been 'hineingeboren', Ellen accepts responsibility for having been part of its development from the very beginning. As a member of the second generation of authors in the GDR she has, by implication, belonged to an élite, and she now critically reflects on the responsibility she carries as a woman who has been collaborating as well as resisting at the same time. When Ellen studies a tapestry which depicts the first great betrayal in recorded history (i.e., St. Peter betraying Jesus), she is conscious that the generation which came before her, the

"Menschen auf den Bildern in den Bauernkostümen" (SoStck, 84), would be at a loss to even comprehend the nature of the betrayal Ellen feels guilty of. And the young generation, the "Halbwüchsigen [...] verstünden die Frage schon wieder nicht mehr, aus anderen Gründen" (SoStck, 84). It is therefore up to Ellen and her generation to accept their responsibility and explain, without wishing to be exonerated, "Du sollst nur sagen, wie es kam" (Stf., 109).

Was bleibt is another of Wolf's literary responses to the problems of the writer in a closed society. She began to write this prose text, like *Sommerstück*, shortly after the Biermann affair, but only reworked it for publication late in 1989. Again, as in the case of *Sommerstück*, the postponement of publication has given the text an interesting mixture of immediacy and distance to the experiences portrayed. As in 'Juninachmittag' and the later prose text *Störfall*, *Was bleibt* is loosely structured around the thought processes and reflections of a central narrating figure. The reader is allowed to witness the narrator's experiences over a period of a few days: from the completion of mundane, everyday activities such as eating and shopping to the most intimate reflections, memories, doubts, and self-doubts. As in *Sommerstück* the emotional upheavals which the narrator is experiencing have been triggered by direct pressure from outside. Wolf's narrator responds to this situation with personal courage and a determination to make the inner crisis productive for her personal development and self-understanding. Rather than shying away from her emotional and psychological reality by deflecting her energies into work, boundless activity or the company of others, the central figure of the narration allows her deep-seated fears and inner conflicts to rise to the surface and to be fully experienced. *Was bleibt* is above all a close study of fear: of its origins, mechanisms and impact, but also of the personal strategies which allow the individual to understand and deal with it, thereby reducing its power and potentially destructive impact on the individual. Wolf had already pursued a similar line of questioning in *Kindheitsmuster*, where she expressly devoted a whole chapter to the issue of fear. But while the primary need in the earlier work had been to understand the manner in which the deep-seated fears and anxieties instilled in her generation during the Nazi period and the war still affected them today, she is confronting

in *Was bleibt* the atmosphere of fear and suppression created by an insecure, yet ruthlessly repressive political régime. The situation of surveillance and intrusion into the private sphere of the home reactivates and amplifies old memories and fears which threaten to imprison and paralyse the narrator. The narrative depicts in minute detail the difficult, complex and non-linear process of dealing with this situation, as the narrator, with an effort of will and determination reminiscent of Heinrich von Kleist's *Marquise von O.*, confronts both her internal uncertainties and the external threat. *Was bleibt* crystallizes the experiences of many GDR writers and citizens whose self-confidence, personal integrity and self-respect was constantly under threat from the intimidatory techniques of the SED's secret police. As a close and highly complex psychological study, however, the text is of profound relevance to individuals in any given society, since it provides insights into emotional and psychological suffering.

2. THREE ASPECTS OF A NETWORK

2.1 Relations of production? Christa Wolf's extended engagement with the legacy of Bertolt Brecht¹

In the first part of this thesis I argued that the mid- to late 1960s marked a key stage in Christa Wolf's personal and aesthetic emancipation from the narrowly defined parameters of official GDR *Kulturpolitik*. I also suggested that her critical engagement with the ideas and cultural values of the first generation of GDR authors and intellectuals formed an important aspect of this process. In view of the fact that Anna Seghers' role has been extensively explored with regard to our understanding of Wolf's search for new prose forms during this period, I propose in this section of my thesis to examine Wolf's extended engagement with the ideas of Bertolt Brecht which will illuminate a further, hitherto insufficiently explored, dimension of Wolf's contribution to the development of a credible socialist culture in the GDR. Although Brecht may not seem as natural a choice as Seghers as a focus of an investigation of the narrative methods and literary responses Wolf evolved in the crucial stages of her self-distancing from the norms of Socialist Realism, I wish to argue that there are significant links connecting Wolf's work to Brecht's theatre which repay closer analysis. My investigation in this section of the thesis will show in the first instance that the dialectical critical tradition deriving from Brecht could provide inspiration as well as offer theoretical insights on which Wolf could build. Secondly, and equally significantly, my exploration here will illuminate in detail the

¹This chapter has already appeared, slightly altered, under the title 'Christa Wolf and Bertolt Brecht: A case of extended intertextuality?', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Julian Preece (eds.), *Contemporary German Writers, their Aesthetics and their Language*, (Berne, 1996), pp 35-53.

significance of Wolf's personal re-appraisal of Brecht as part of her commitment to the establishment of literary traditions in the GDR which orthodox GDR culture had persistently excluded. I wish to argue that our understanding of this process, which I shall discuss in detail in the next section of this part of my thesis, is significantly enhanced once we have fully appreciated the complexity of the task which confronted Wolf and her colleagues in this respect. As a result of the restrictive practices employed by the GDR's cultural apparatus from the early 1950s onwards, intellectuals like Brecht were subsumed into the official canon of 'socialist national culture' in a manner designed to support the political and economic goals of the SED, while the more radical and challenging aspects of their work were played down or repressed altogether. As a consequence, Wolf's generation of authors did not only have to open up important strands of European culture, but they also had to re-appraise the heritage of writers and intellectuals like Brecht. My examination of Wolf's response to this challenge aims to show that Wolf's experience in this regard exemplifies key features of the process of emancipation of her generation of writers and intellectuals from the constraints of orthodox GDR culture. The final section of this part of my thesis will show that Wolf discovered in feminist thought a theoretical framework which caused her to question the literary traditions which had evolved in patriarchal culture. The fact that Brecht nevertheless continued to play a role for Wolf during the 1980s illustrates the complexity of the fabric of her personal and literary identity.

For no other generation of GDR authors did the engagement with the ideas of their forebears assume as important a role as for Christa Wolf's generation of writers. The complex interrelationship between their desire to develop a distinctive literary identity and tradition on the one hand, and the demands made on them by the state at crucial stages of the GDR's socio-political history on the other, frequently forced these writers to define and redefine their roles. As we have seen, the critical examination and re-examination of literary heritage played an important part in this process. Wolf herself has consistently linked her work to the experiences and ideas of other writers in an endeavour to establish lines of literary tradition in the GDR. These were intended to

constitute an alternative to dominant cultural trends in the West and, at least as importantly, to the narrow dogmatic proscriptions of SED cultural functionaries. In Wolf's critical engagement with tradition and literary heritage and in her discussion of poetics from ancient to modern times, Bertolt Brecht's work has played a seminal role.

In the opinion of Sara Lennox, Christa Wolf's entire work may be said to exist in a tension between the two poles Brecht and Bachmann, with the influence of Bachmann growing progressively stronger from the seventies. Lennox suggested that pursuing Brecht's influence on Wolf and her growing disenchantment with him would be a fascinating enterprise.²In raising this issue Lennox is echoing Wolf herself who stated in her 1966 essay on Brecht, "Es könnte eine interessante Studie werden, wenn jemand es unternähme, das Verhältnis meiner Generation zu Brecht zu untersuchen", before reminding herself that Brecht would have preferred to have this relationship expressed in terms of "Spannungen" and "Entwicklung". (DdA I, 1966, 84) Since her first encounter with Brecht's theatre in the early 1950s, Christa Wolf has engaged with Brecht, both overtly and covertly, in her prose and essay works as well as frequently referring to him in interviews and conversations. However, she passed a remark in a conversation in the United States in 1983 asserting that, despite an initially positive attitude towards Brecht, she had later become aware that "Brecht auf mich als Autorin überhaupt keinen Einfluß gehabt hat, daß ich mich nie mit ihm auseinandergesetzt habe, weder positiv noch negativ" (DdA II, 1982, 451). Taken together, these points suggest that an element of tension in her relationship to Brecht has existed.

This section of the thesis seeks to illuminate the nature of this tension along with some of its possible causes. It will re-examine also the extent to which Wolf's work develops and refines some of Brecht's ideas on the basis of her own experiences with prose rather than dramatic writing and as a member of a younger generation than that of Brecht and his contemporaries. It will focus on two key stages in Wolf's development as

²Sara Lennox, 'Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann: Difficulties of Writing the Truth', in Marilyn Sibley Fries (ed.), *Responses to Christa Wolf. Critical Essays*, (Detroit, Michigan, 1989), pp 128-148, p 128.

a writer, when the question she had first posed in 1964: "Wie aber soll man heute schreiben?"³ assumed a new and urgent relevance: the later 1960s, as we have seen, when this question formed a part of Wolf's search for new prose forms, and the 1980s, when the crisis within her own society as well as within the Eastern bloc and Western civilization at large prompted her to challenge the received truths of Marxism as well as some of the fundamental assumptions on which European culture has been based. As I have shown earlier in the thesis, this process has involved a profound re-evaluation by Wolf of her role as a woman writer in European society. But it also led her to renew her interest in Brecht, as my analysis of the intertextual references to Brecht in Wolf's *Störfall* towards the end of this section suggests.

In his discussion of Brecht in the GDR, David Bathrick has stressed the controversial role and the contradictory function which the dramatist played throughout the cultural and political history of that society, which Bathrick discusses in terms of "the dialectics of legitimation".⁴ This he takes to describe the two diametrically opposed, yet intricately linked functions of Brecht's revolutionary theatre within GDR culture: On the one hand, beginning with his return to the GDR in 1948 and his production of *Mutter Courage* in 1949, his theatre was supported as a distinctive feature of 'socialist national culture', and thus served the cultural aims of the SED. On the other hand, however, Brecht was always at odds with the prevailing official affirmative notion of culture, and continuously sought to challenge, undermine and transform it. Forged as a means of transforming society, art was understood by Brecht to be more than simply a superstructural affirmation of reality. He defined its role as active and critical appropriation of reality, with the artist confronting, exposing and acting upon real societal contradictions with a view to bringing about social change. Going back to his debate about realism in art with Georg Lukács in the 1930's, Brecht was particularly at odds with the prominence given in the official "Kulturerbe" to the literature of Weimar

³Christa Wolf, 'Tagebuch - Arbeitsmittel und Gedächtnis', in DdA I, pp 13-27, p 22.

⁴David Bathrick, 'The Dialectics of Legitimation: Brecht in the GDR', in *New German Critique*, (2,1974), pp 90-103, p 91.

classicism as well as with the dogmatic and unidimensional manner in which the works of Goethe and Schiller were being proposed as models for contemporary authors. Together with other intellectuals (such as Walter Benjamin, Erwin Piscator, John Heartfield and Gustav von Wangenheim) Brecht had already fought against the linking up of socialist literature with the classical bourgeois tradition in the 1930s, and he sought to establish an alternative literary tradition in the GDR. With his experimentation with alternative art forms (montage, techniques of "Verfremdung", epic theatre), Brecht drew on the artistic and political tradition of the Formalists and Futurists of post-revolutionary Russia (Tretjakov, Arvatov) and introduced production aesthetics into the GDR as an alternative and challenge to Socialist Realist art. In fact, Brecht's ideas on heritage and aesthetics were much closer to the essence of Marx's thought on history than the favoured interpretations of SED cultural apparatchiks at the time. When he argued, for instance, that the legacy of a historical period with different social and political circumstances could not be applied to a period with an entirely different set of historical circumstances, Brecht echoed Marx's objections to the application of his theory to Russia and the metamorphosis of his "historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself".⁵ In a similar manner, Brecht aimed in his aesthetics to create genuinely democratic and emancipatory art forms and rejected hierarchical concepts of social, political or artistic production. In so doing he captured the spirit of Marx's conception of *revolutionary practice* and the prominent role ascribed therein to the critical individual in bringing about social change.⁶ It is precisely this challenging and potentially more subversive dimension of Brecht's work which official GDR criticism tended to ignore or play down, as it was considered too

⁵David McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx. Selected Writings*, (Oxford, 1977), p 572.

⁶In *The German Ideology* (1845-6) Karl Marx opposed Feuerbach's materialist doctrine of social change, arguing that this "forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator himself" and declaring that this "doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society". See McLellan, (1977), p 156.

threatening to the ideological programme and hegemony of the SED.⁷ At the same time, it is precisely this emancipatory and democratic potential of Brecht's notion of unfettered production and particularly the notion of the writer as co-producer, not merely recorder, of the social process which has acted as an inspiration to both playwrights and writers alike in the GDR.

There can be no doubt that Christa Wolf's work also stands within the dialectical critical tradition of Brecht. As a fellow Marxist and committed socialist of a subsequent generation of artists in the GDR she has, whether consciously or unconsciously, addressed a number of the issues and concerns which had also been of importance to him. Wolf first became acquainted with Brecht's work as a student at Leipzig University. Her first reaction to Brecht's theatre is perhaps best described as a mixture of admiration, curiosity and - according to her own analysis⁸ - a considerable degree of misunderstanding. Her account of visiting the Berlin Ensemble expresses with unconcealed admiration the deep and lasting impression which above all the innovative, fresh and provocative nature of Brecht's work made on her. Brecht seemed to have captured in his dramatic technique as well as in his plays the essence of Marx's thought and of socialism. In contrast to classical drama with its tendency to idealize and seek unity, coherence, harmony and certainty, Brecht confronted his audience with contradiction, disharmony and uncertainty - without sacrificing either his love of life or his belief in and respect for the integrity of the individual human being. The contradictions expressed in his drama are those which characterize our modern, scientific age; Brecht's dramatic technique of involving the audience emotionally, while at the same time appealing to its desire for a rational understanding of why the characters act in a

⁷Werner Mittenzwei was one of the first critics in the GDR who, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Brecht's birth, recognized him as "the great model for the theatre of the GDR". Mittenzwei was also the first critic in the GDR to analyse in detail Brecht's debate with Georg Lukács, which had remained entirely unpublished in the GDR until 1967. See Werner Mittenzwei, 'Die Brecht-Lukács-Debatte', in *Sinn und Form*, 19/1967, pp 235-269. Only five years after Mittenzwei's positive evaluation of Brecht's work, the official verdict on Brecht was reversed and both Brecht and Mittenzwei came under severe attack for their sacrilegious attitudes towards the German classical literary tradition. See Werner Hecht (ed.), *Brecht-Dialog 1968*, (Berlin, 1969), p 31. See also Bathrick, 'The Dialectics of Legitimation'.

⁸Christa Wolf, 'Brecht und andere', DdA I, pp 83-85.

particular manner, clearly aroused Wolf's curiosity. However, due partly to the manner in which GDR Germanists at the time taught Brecht and partly to the over-confidence and gullibility of her generation, whose members were only too keen to consider themselves the "Menschen des wissenschaftlichen Zeitalters" (DdA I, 1966, 84) whom Brecht had addressed, much of the fundamentally critical and challenging aspects of Brecht's aesthetics and theatrical practice was overlooked. As a consequence, most of Wolf's generation also failed to understand Brecht's message regarding their own role in the historical process and in shaping the future of their society. Looking back in the later 1960s, Christa Wolf deplores the fact that people in the GDR of the 1950s had not been ready for Brecht's revolutionary theatre; as a result, it tended to be imitated rather than properly understood.⁹ Wolf's theoretical and prose writing of later years testifies to the fact that her engagement with Brecht did not end with the views she had first absorbed in the GDR of the 1950s. While her interest in Brecht in the early stages focused almost exclusively on his dramatic technique, the ethical issues of works such as *Leben des Galilei* or *Urfaust* later assumed increasing importance for Christa Wolf.

Wolf's first major prose work *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) shows that, at this stage, she had a selective interest in Brecht's *Galilei*. The narrative raises critical questions about the importance of truth and honesty in socialist society when the female protagonist, Rita, asks: "Hat es Sinn, die Wahrheit, die man kennt, immer und unter allen Umständen zu sagen?" (GH, 185). With the insertion of "die man kennt", Wolf alludes to the words of Brecht's Galilei figure who explains: "Wer die Wahrheit nicht weiß, der ist bloß ein Dummkopf. Aber wer sie weiß und sie eine Lüge nennt, der ist ein Verbrecher."¹⁰ In contrast to the official Party line in the early 1960s, which maintained that truth needed to be communicated to the public at large in carefully measured doses, Wolf re-emphasizes in her narrative Galilei's insistence on openness and honesty at all times. This conviction is expressed in the narrative by Erwin Schwarzenbach, a committed socialist, when he states, "Die reine nackte Wahrheit, und nur sie, ist auf die

⁹Wolf comments on this in her essay of 1966 on Brecht as well as in 'Lesen und Schreiben'.

¹⁰Bertolt Brecht, *Leben des Galilei*, (Berlin, 1963), p 81.

Dauer der Schlüssel zum Menschen. Warum sollen wir unseren entscheidenden Vorteil freiwillig aus der Hand legen?" (GH, 186).

A key concern for Brecht during the 1950s was the lack of emphasis which politicians and cultural functionaries in the Soviet Zone of Occupation placed on a reappraisal of Germany's most immediate past. The trend towards exoneration of GDR citizens from their past, the general spirit of optimism and belief in progress and above all the simple reinterpretation of German history from the 'deutsche Misere' to the triumph of progressive over reactionary forces, with the foundation of the GDR representing the final, logical outcome of this struggle, seemed to Brecht to harbour dangerous consequences for the GDR's future development towards socialism. Moreover, it also contravened the ideas of Karl Marx himself. Marx had highlighted the critical role which the individual human being plays in the process of historical change.¹¹ He had also stressed that it is important for each individual to understand the particular historical circumstances in which he finds himself at any given point in time as circumstances which are not simply pre-given or automatic, but as circumstances which have been created through the actions of individual human beings acting together in history.¹²

In line with these ideas Brecht was eager to point out that socialism had not been brought to Germany by way of a popular revolution and that progress which failed to seek fully to understand the past could never be lasting progress. Despite the incisive economic and political changes in the Soviet Zone of Occupation, Brecht considered the changes brought about by the SED in the area of ideology to have been undialectical and schematic, with the Party merely replacing the old ideology and ideas with new ones. For him, as for Karl Marx, a fundamental precondition for genuine social change was that people should arrive at a new understanding by themselves rather than through the

¹¹See for instance Karl Marx, 'The Holy Family' (1845): "History does nothing; it does not possess immense riches, it does not fight battles. It is men, real, living men, who do all this, who possess things and fight battles. It is not 'history' which uses men as a means of achieving - as if it were an individual person - its own ends. History is nothing but the activity of men in pursuit of their ends." Quoted here from David McLellan *The thought of Karl Marx*, (London, 1980), p 137.

¹²See for example Karl Marx : "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." Quoted here from McLellan, (1980), p 137.

acceptance of a new ideology imposed from above. Thus, his theatre addressed an audience which would be "stets kritisch [...] und wachsam, auch keiner revolutionären Legende erliegend."¹³ Fundamental to Brecht's method of helping his audience to achieve a new way of seeing, of transcending the appearances of a false reality guided by false consciousness, is his technique of 'Verfremdung' which, according to Werner Mittenzwei, sets itself the goal:

das Alltägliche auffällig zu machen, damit es in den Blickpunkt des Betrachters rückt, damit dieser sich wundert und sich fragt, ob es nicht auch anders sein könnte. Sich zur Wirklichkeit so zu verhalten, als kenne man sie bereits, schien Brecht ein verhängnisvoller Irrtum zu sein.¹⁴

Both in her dialectical understanding of history as an open and contradictory process of change rather than a linear progression towards a pre-given finite goal, and in the prominence which she gives to the role of the individual in the process of change, Christa Wolf's work echoes the ideas of Brecht and other socialist intellectuals of his time. For Wolf, who has been equally committed to social change as Brecht was before her, prose writing in the GDR also had to be firmly anchored in the contradictions arising out of the everyday experiences of people in society, since "der Vorstoß zu den Fragen unserer Zeit ist - jedenfalls in der Prosa, wenn sie sich nicht im Gleichnishaften bewegen will - an das Alltägliche gebunden." (DdA I, 1964, 18) For her, as for Brecht, art has little to do with spreading comfortable truths or ideas of harmony and certainty in the manner in which Socialist Realist dogma would have it, but springs from the "anstrengenden[n], schmerzhaft[e] Versuch, nicht zu Vereinbarendes miteinander zu vereinbaren", which, according to Wolf's statement, has always been "eine Wurzel für den Zwang zum Schreiben." (DdA I, 1979, 65) In her essay 'Tagebuch - Arbeitsmittel und Gedächtnis' (1964) Wolf quotes from Brecht's poem 'Lektüre ohne Unschuld' (1944) and from his

¹³See Hans Mayer, *Brecht in der Geschichte. Drei Versuche*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1971), p 240.

¹⁴Werner Mittenzwei, 'Die Brecht-Lukács-Debatte', p 262.

diary of 1955 in order to stress the fact that one such fundamental contradiction in modern society, which her forebear had already indentified in the 1940s and 1950s, had lost none of its topicality and urgency in the GDR of the mid-1960s, namely the gap between the "Entwicklungsstand der Wissenschaft und den vielerorts zurückgebliebenen Gesellschaftszuständen" (DdA I, 1964, 22). Picking up Brecht's warnings against the dangerous destructive potential of technological and scientific advance as it had been revealed in twentieth century warfare, Christa Wolf reminds her readers that this dangerous contradiction has remained very much unresolved. Furthermore, she holds it responsible also for the many manifestations of politically apathetic attitudes and behaviour patterns in modern socialist society. Like Brecht, Wolf believes that artistic and literary production have an important, if not essential role to play in helping to bridge this gap and in seeking to help people overcome a deep-seated resistance to and disbelief in the possibility for change. Wolf clearly identifies with Brecht's method of confronting his audience with complex issues rather than offering easy answers as a means of promoting independent, mature and critical thought. And when she writes, referring to the works of Gorki, Seghers, Thomas Mann, and others, that what they all share with Brecht is "daß die Struktur ihrer Arbeiten auf eine sehr komplizierte, öfter durchaus indirekte Weise mit der Struktur ihrer Wirklichkeit übereinstimmt, mit der sie andererseits, Veränderung wünschend und verändernd, dauernd im Streit liegen", (DdA I, 1966, 85), she comes close to Brecht's concept of realism itself. For Werner Mittenzwei, Brecht's essential partisanship and commitment to the political struggles of his time manifests itself through the "Lust am Erkennen" and the "Spaß an der Veränderung" which his theatre inspires.¹⁵ While she does not seek to emulate Brecht, Christa Wolf, too, clearly considers the particular merit of Brecht's work for her as an author to be the "Ermunterung zu eigenen Entdeckungen." (DdA I, 1966, 85)

Wolf's essay 'Lesen und Schreiben' as well as her narrative *Nachdenken über Christa T.* demonstrate that by the late 1960s Wolf had clearly made productive the

¹⁵Mittenzwei, 'Die Brecht-Lukacs-Debatte', p 257.

encouragement which Brecht's work had provided. In contrast to Brecht's revolutionary theatre which had already addressed an audience of the scientific age in the 1950s, prose writing in the GDR of the 1960s in the form prescribed by the doctrine of Socialist Realism seemed, for Wolf, to be more and more dangerously out of step with actual social developments. But modern prose, Wolf demonstrated, could go further than drama in addressing big political questions as well as the seemingly banal, everyday experience of the individual in society, and it could help to gain greater understanding of the dilemmas and contradictions of the individual as a moral agent in a complex social reality. In his drama Brecht sought to dispel false consciousness by applying Marx's theory of historical materialism. In this theory, Marx argued that we must understand individuals "[...] not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination but rather as they really are, that is, as they work, produce materially, and act under definite material limitations, presuppositions, and conditions independent of their will."¹⁶ Brecht considered that, to gain a rational understanding of individuals' actions, it was necessary to portray these in the way that Marx had proposed.

Wolf's prose theory and her literary practice take the interpretation of Marx's theory of historical materialism an important step further than Brecht had done. While her exploration of 'individuals as they really are' continues to include the dimension of outer material, socio-political and historical reality as it impinges on the individual's ability to act, her prime focus of attention shifts towards those aspects of human experience that are less easily penetrable by rational or scientific observation and thought, namely to the domain of the inner emotional and psychological reality of subjective individual experience. In her writing Wolf explores the complex interrelationship between the 'outer' and the 'inner' dimensions of experience, insisting that the "Spuren, die die Ereignisse in unserem Innern hinterlassen" (Chr.T., 170), are far more deserving of literary reflection than those phenomena more readily accepted as significant social facts within the institutional discourses of modern society. Modern

¹⁶Karl Marx, quoted here from McLellan, (1980), p 37.

prose must seek to support "das Subjektwerden des Menschen" (DdA II, 1968, 47) through the honest and open reflection of the totality of human experience; this Christa Wolf takes to mean:

everything that happens to a person [...] not only what he actually experiences, but what he has thought about and what has affected him, as well as any ideas he may have assimilated from ideology or literature or knowledge from any other field, in fact all those things that come together to mould his mind, the way he feels and thinks as an individual.¹⁷

Moreover, where Brecht's emphasis had been on encouraging a rational understanding of human action by his audience, Wolf's prose has aimed also at an equally strong emotional response from her reader, at an understanding which is based on empathy, compassion and love. This approach, she stated in a conversation with Hans Kaufmann in 1973, could, like Brecht's theatre, still be explained within the framework of historical materialism:

Wenn Brecht den Akzent für seine Untersuchungen zeitweise stärker auf die Herausarbeitung der sozialen Determinanten, heutige marxistische Autoren ihn stärker auf die Erforschung der Rolle des Individuums [...] legen, - sollte man nicht auch dies mit Hilfe historisch-materialistischen Denkens erklären können? (DdA II, 1973, 328)

In 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf expresses her belief that the development of new prose forms in a socialist Germany might begin by combining Brecht's ideas as applied in his epic theatre with Büchner's method and aesthetics. For Büchner, the artist's desire for greater understanding and knowledge of the world must be based on love and compassion rather than rationality. His aesthetic theory is expressed by his character Lenz, who states: "Man muß die Menschheit lieben, um in das eigentümliche Wesen

¹⁷McPherson, 'Christa Wolf in Edinburgh.', p 4.

jedes einzudringen; es darf einem keiner zu gering, keiner zu häßlich sein, erst dann kann man sie verstehen [...]."¹⁸

In contrast to drama which, according to Christa Wolf, tends to objectify characters by placing them outside the dramatist's self and his or her direct personal experience into a constructed reality,¹⁹ prose writing, as Wolf envisaged it, should also express the authentic, subjectively mediated experience of the writer, the dimension of authorship. Wolf's approach to prose writing presupposes that the writer can no longer be the conduit for unalienated reality or agitational didacticism. Instead, the writer's mediation would entail a refraction of that 'external' reality: "Lassen wir Spiegel das Ihre tun: Spiegeln. Sie können nichts anderes. Literatur und Wirklichkeit stehen sich nicht gegenüber wie Spiegel und das, was gespiegelt wird. Sie sind ineinander verschmolzen im Bewußtsein des Autors." (DdA II, 1968, 40) While Brecht had already rejected the crude Socialist Realist notion of the artist as passive recorder of reality in his essay 'Wir müssen nicht nur Spiegel sein' of the 1950s²⁰, Wolf's poetological statement develops his ideas further and stresses in particular the role of the author as conscious subject in history who both acts upon and perceives reality in a manner which is inseparably linked with his or her entire way of being. Wolf's poetics therefore attach particular importance to the role and integrity of the individual, whether as writer or reader.

On the basis of my exposition so far, Christa Wolf's aesthetic positions of the 1960s may be said both to draw on and to develop aspects of the critical dialectical tradition emanating from Brecht. As a fellow Marxist who had been as concerned as Wolf was later to distinguish between Marxism as it was being propagated by Party functionaries and his own interpretations of Marx's thought, Brecht without doubt played

¹⁸Georg Büchner, *Lenz*, (Stuttgart, 1982), p 15.

¹⁹Christa Wolf made this point in a discussion at Ohio State University when she replied to the question why women rarely write drama: "Man hat das Problem, die Figuren aus sich herauszustellen, ganz zu objektivieren und in eine Konstruktion zu bringen." Christa Wolf, 'Aus einer Diskussion. Gespräch mit Christa und Gerhard Wolf, in DdA II, pp 440-455, p 451.

²⁰Bertolt Brecht, 'Wir müssen nicht nur Spiegel sein', in Bertolt Brecht, *Über Lyrik*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1964), p 73. Here Brecht had stated: "Wir müssen nicht nur Spiegel sein, welche die Wahrheit außer uns reflektieren. Wenn wir den Gegenstand in uns aufgenommen haben, muß etwas von uns dazukommen, bevor er wieder aus uns herausgeht."

an important role in Wolf's aesthetic emancipation from the discourse of the state during the later 1960s. Earlier in the thesis I have shown, moreover, that Wolf's reception of the works of the Early Romantic poets which formed the focus of her literary work during the 1970s echoed the highly differentiated understanding of heritage defended by Marxists like Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler. Both Eisler and Bloch, for instance, had argued the case for a critical reception of the literary heritage of the past which stressed "[...] eben das WIE der Erbmethode, die lebendige Beziehung des heute lebenden und progressiven Menschen zur Vergangenheit [...]." ²¹

In her endeavour to counteract the tendency to objectify an author and his or her work, Wolf was concerned in her reception of literary heritage to focus on authors with whom she felt a deep affinity deriving from a close identification with their experiences and with their conflicts and concerns. As a woman writer, she felt alienated by "die Art von Selbstaufgabe, die Brecht Frauen abverlangte." ²² Her interest in Ingeborg Bachmann's work during the mid-1960s led her increasingly into experimentation with more personal forms of writing frequently associated with women's literature. In the reflective and self-reflective literature of women, Wolf detected a far greater potential for breaking with literary conventions which promoted alienation and self-alienation and which had above all objectified the experience of women in patriarchal societies. From the mid-1970s onwards, she closely identified with the works of literary outsiders in Germany's cultural history, such as Karoline von Günderrode, Heinrich von Kleist, and Hölderlin. In collaboration with like-minded colleagues, among them her husband Gerhard, Wolf played a seminal role in establishing lines of literary tradition in GDR culture which emphasized the role of subjective experience. This process, according to her husband Gerhard, aimed at:

eine Literaturtradition wieder aufleben zu lassen, die
verschüttet und in manchen Fällen fast vergessen ist. [...]
Bei uns ist die Klassik eigentlich eine Pyramide - man kennt
nur die Spitze, Goethe und Schiller. Darunter liegt eine

²¹Hanns Eisler, Ernst Bloch, 'Die Kunst zu erben', in *Materialien zu einer Dialektik der Musik*, p 149.

²²Hörnigk, p 24.

unheimliche Breite von Strömungen, die bis in die gegenwärtige Literatur der DDR hineinreichen. (DdA II, 1983, 448)

That Brecht, who had become canonized as the classic of socialist literature, could play no role in these endeavours is self-evident. It is above all this affirmative role imposed on Brecht by the GDR cultural apparatus - the "erbarungsloses Scheinwerferlicht der offiziellen Glorifizierung"²³ - which, I would suggest, goes some way towards explaining Wolf's ambivalence with regard to him. In this way, I take her denial in 1983 of Brecht's influence on her, especially as she was speaking abroad, to indicate the importance she attached to guiding critics away from an approach to the literature of her country which followed the official SED version of literary history in the GDR at the expense of the alternative lines of tradition established in literary practice. As I have suggested in the first part of this thesis, by the late 1960s, Wolf clearly regretted that the absence of documents about the tensions, contradictions, and inner conflicts of socialists of Brecht's generation had led to a lack of understanding on the part of her generation.²⁴ The extreme marginalization of writers and artists in the GDR of the 1970s which climaxed in the expatriation of Wolf Biermann, furthermore, led to an increasing disillusionment for Wolf with 'really existing socialism'. In contrast to Brecht, who had been able to hold on to his utopian visions of a future socialist Germany, Wolf's experiences left little room for hope and optimism that the contradictions she perceived and thematized in her writing might be resolved by any future socialist state. Forced to become accustomed to "härtere Beleuchtungen, schärfere Einsichten, größere Nüchternheit" (Stf., 43), Wolf's writing from the 1970s onwards became concerned with unveiling the silences which the voice of reason and rationality in European male culture and history had sublimated and repressed. Writing from the perspective of a woman within European society, both insider and outsider, Wolf also began to grapple with the difficulties of expressing a more complex and less comfortable understanding of truth which would question not only the

²³Hörnigk, p 19.

²⁴Hörnigk, p 19.

most basic assumptions on which European culture rests, but also her own role in supporting the false consciousness of her earlier socialist optimism.

However, Brecht does return in Wolf's work of the 1980s, not on account of his poetics, but because of the ethical principles and the warnings he issued against scientific progress in works such as his version of *Urfaust* and *Galilei*. Wolf's prose writing of the 1980s was informed by an acute awareness of the destructive path towards annihilation and self-annihilation on which European culture and politics had been headed. The intensification of the very real possibility of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers, followed by the first acknowledged nuclear accident on Russian soil in 1986, left little doubt about the fact that the leadership in any modern society, whether East or West, would go to any length in order to protect the supposed progress and achievements of modern civilization. In such a climate, any claim to moral superiority traditionally upheld by socialist ideologues had clearly become unmasked as false consciousness by the events themselves. For Wolf as a writer, the full conscious acknowledgement of these complex and dangerous realities forced a final abandonment of the notion of art as a didactic instrument which Brecht had upheld. In *Kassandra* (1983) she makes this point through an intertextual allusion to Brecht's *Galilei* who had rejected the classical notion of the value and merit of individual heroism by emphasizing instead the hope which lay in a socialist conception of the collective assuming this role. For Wolf in the 1980s, this conception had become equally invalid, as "Gegen eine Zeit, die Helden braucht, richten wir nichts aus." (K, 156). For her, any notion of heroism, whether individual or collective, remains trapped in conventional patterns of antithetical thinking in terms of victor and victim, subject and object, which Wolf's aesthetics seek to overcome.

Christa Wolf's narrative *Störfall* (1986) reflects similar ideas on a much more autobiographical level. By letting the reader witness the thought-processes of her narrator over the course of one day in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident, Wolf depicts the process of seeking emancipation and inner independence from deeply internalized values, attitudes and patterns of thought and behaviour. In this narrative,

Wolf continues to put into literary practice an intention she expressed in her Frankfurt lectures (1983): "Ich will zusammentragen, was mich, uns, zu Komplizen der Selbstzerstörung macht; was mich, uns befähigt, ihr zu widerstehn." (FPV, 109). As a highly intertextual work²⁵, *Störfall* also contains overt as well as indirect allusions to Brecht's work. After the news of the nuclear accident has reached her, the narrator of *Störfall* can no longer continue to look upon the world in her accustomed way, for "Wieder einmal, so ist es mir vorgekommen, hatte das Zeitalter sich ein Vorher und Nachher geschaffen" (Stf., 43). Just as Brecht's *Galilei* had turned the belief system of a millennium on its head with his discovery: "Die alten Lehren, die tausend Jahre geglaubt wurden, sind ganz baufällig"²⁶, the narrator of Wolf's narrative has to learn a "neues Sehen" in order to transcend the false appearances of outer reality. But for Wolf, this new way of seeing involves also attacking the deeply internalized values and beliefs transmitted through Western culture and society over the millennia, and it also has final implications for her socialist commitment. In the course of the narrative, Wolf critically re-examines how our thought has been shaped by theories of evolution, history, biology and even religion. Attacking preconceived ideas about outer and inner reality seems to involve first of all overcoming the fear of doing so, for, as *Kindheitsmuster* had already established, "Lust und Angst" are "innig miteinander verbunden" (KM, 13). The narrator's reflections begin, therefore, with an attack on the obvious, outer enemy: the nuclear accident is the result of scientific progress. In contrast to the promises made by GDR scientists of the earlier years that scientific progress in socialist societies would be guided by ethical and humanitarian principles²⁷, the scientists depicted in *Störfall* have

²⁵For an excellent discussion of intertextuality in Wolf's *Störfall*, see Brigid Haines, 'The reader, the writer, her narrator and their text(s): intertextuality in Christa Wolf's *Störfall*', in *German Monitor* (No.30, 1994), pp 157-172. See also Ute Brandes, 'Probing the blind spot: Utopia and dystopia in Christa Wolf's *Störfall*', in *Studies in GDR Culture and Society*, (9/1989), p 107.

²⁶Bertolt Brecht, *Leben des Galilei*, (Berlin, 1963), p 21.

²⁷In Wolf's conversation with the GDR biologist Hans Stubbe in the later 1960s, the latter had affirmed his belief that scientific progress in the GDR will and must occur in a manner which echoed Brecht's understanding of it: "Die Frage: Sollen wir weiterforschen? ist müßig. Wir werden weiterforschen. Was erfindbar ist, wird erfunden werden. Aber wir werden unsere eigenen Erfahrungen nur als Menschen überleben, als vernunftbegabte Wesen in vernünftig organisierten Gesellschaften - oder gar nicht." Christa Wolf, 'Ein Besuch', in *DdA II*, pp 239-270, p 268. Compare Bertolt Brecht, *Leben des Galilei*, p 78: "[...] der Sieg der Vernunft kann nur der Sieg der Vernünftigen sein."

cast aside all ethical and humanitarian considerations. Wolf's narrative depicts them in terms reminiscent of the Faust characters of Brecht's and Eisler's suppressed works, (*Urfaust* and *Johann Faustus*, respectively) and with the emphasis on the dangerous and ruthless side of their nature, as "Wissenschaftler[n], die, von keiner Ehrfurcht gehemmt, was die Natur im Innersten zusammenhält, nicht nur erkennen, auch verwerten wollen" (Stf., 34) and as "Faust, der nicht Wissen, sondern Ruhm gewinnen will." (Stf., 73). A further indirect allusion to Brecht's warnings against the dangers of scientific and technological advance contained in *Störfall* is the narrator's scream of horror towards the end of the narration which reminds the reader of Galilei's words:

Ihr mögt mit der Zeit alles entdecken, was es zu entdecken gibt, und euer Fortschritt wird doch nur ein Fortschreiten von der Menschheit weg sein. Die Kluft zwischen euch und ihr kann eines Tages so groß werden, daß euer Jubelschrei über irgendeine neue Errungenschaft von einem universalen Entsetzensschrei beantwortet werden könnte.²⁸

While Brecht's apocalyptic vision of a universal scream of horror has not yet become a reality, Wolf reminds us that Brecht's warnings, which had been issued with a view to the abuse made of scientific progress in Western capitalism and German fascism, have lost none of their relevance and poignancy in modern European societies, whether socialist or capitalist. The reference to Brecht's poem '1940', which is about the early days of the Second World War, "...daß die Mütter entgeistert den Himmel durchforschen nach den Erfindungen der Gelehrten ..." (Stf., 33)²⁹, serves a similar function of underlining the narrator's sense that the horrors of Chernobyl were not new but familiar, predictable and perhaps avoidable.

In the face of a massive nuclear accident, ordinary people are shown to have no meaningful course of action open to them. Even full contemplation and comprehension of the extent of the accident has been rendered impossible, for events are dominated

²⁸Bertolt Brecht, *Leben des Galilei*, p 126.

²⁹See Brecht's poem '1940', in Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, edited by W. Hecht, J. Knopf, W. Mittenzwei, K-D. Müller, vol. 12, (Frankfurt/Main, 1993), p 96.

completely by the language of science in a conspiratorial pact with political power. For the narrator of *Störfall*, who is a writer, this has serious implications. While Brecht, in his essay 'Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit' (1934) had still been able to conceive of literature as a process of communication: "Die Wahrheit aber kann man nicht eben schreiben: man muß sie durchaus jemandem schreiben, der damit etwas anfangen kann"³⁰, the narrator here seems to have lost any belief that she could communicate the truth as she sees it to anyone:

Mir ist ein Briefftext durch den Kopf gegangen, in dem ich - beschwörend, wie denn sonst - irgend jemandem mitteilen sollte, daß das Risiko der Atomtechnik mit fast keinem anderen Risiko vergleichbar sei und daß man bei einem auch nur minimalen Unsicherheitsfaktor auf diese Technik unbedingt verzichten müsse. Mir ist für meinen Brief keine reale Adresse eingefallen. (Stf., 113)

But Wolf by no means depicts people as mere victims of outer circumstances. The narrator of *Störfall* also identifies the political apathy, disinterest and passivity of ordinary people in society as important contributory factors. The dangerous contradiction Brecht had pointed to in the 1950s which Wolf had reiterated in her essay 'Tagebuch' in 1964, is shown to have remained very much unresolved in the GDR of the late 1980s as well. And the "Übereinstimmungssucht und Widerspruchsangst" (Stf., 23) of people in the village also highlight the fact that behaviour patterns and attitudes which Brecht and Eisler had traced back to the impact of Lutheranism on the German psyche, have also survived well into the late 20th century.³¹

³⁰Bertolt Brecht, 'Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit', in Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. VIII - Schriften 2, (Frankfurt/Main, 1967).

³¹Karl Otto Maue comes to the conclusion that official interpretations of German cultural history in the GDR, rather than being interested in overcoming this particular legacy, had contributed significantly to ensuring the survival of these very characteristics. GDR efforts to re-establish links to German humanism and Goethe's classicism had been far less significant than had been generally claimed: "Statt zuwenig Sozialismus und zuviel Humanismus, wie der DDR-Führung jener Jahre in der Sekundärliteratur häufig vorgeworfen wird [...], scheint die festgestellte Ideologisierung auch der Faust-Dichtung ein Beispiel dafür zu sein, daß von der DDR-Führung gar nicht so sehr an die Ideale des Humanismus angenüpft wurde, sondern vielmehr an solche, die vor der Zeit des Humanismus entstanden und mehr mit dem Namen Martin Luthers in Verbindung zu bringen sind als mit dem Goethes: Gemeint sind Strebsamkeit, Unterordnung, Obrigkeitsgläubigkeit, Duckmäusertum und

However, Wolf's critical excursion into the blind spots of modern civilization does not end with her reminders of past warnings unheeded and an examination of the manner in which present circumstances and the persistence of false consciousness collaborate in and contribute to the present crisis. The narrator of *Störfall*, albeit reluctantly, takes her questioning much further than Brecht had done by also probing the depths of her own psyche in order to gain greater understanding of the extent to which she, as a member of an intellectual élite as well as a woman in patriarchal society, has collaborated in these conditions. As in *Kassandra*, collaboration and resistance are juxtaposed in the recognition that she has to cast aside her own preconceived ideas and acquired modes of 'seeing' in order to gain greater understanding of her own need to think in terms of 'Feindbildern', which she unmasks as a means of self-protection, as it allows the projection of unwanted aspects of herself onto an apparent enemy. What she learns is the "Verzicht auf den Feind" (Stf., 114) which forces her to take a closer and more critical look at herself. As in *Kassandra*, Wolf's questions and reflections in *Störfall* move far beyond the ethical issues addressed in Brecht's *Galilei* or *Urfaust*.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated that Christa Wolf has, in her prose and essay work, repeatedly engaged with Brecht's work and aesthetics. During the 1960s, this centred to a large extent around her search for new prose forms and the development of an aesthetics which would challenge and oppose the officially propagated dogma of Socialist Realism. In this quest, Brecht's theatre could act as inspiration as well as offer important theoretical insights on which Wolf could build. Wolf's attitude to tradition and her reception of other writers has been informed throughout by the essentially Marxist understanding that such relationships should be productive and lead to personal as well as professional growth. But it has also been underpinned by the need for close identification and affinity with other authors - whether contemporary or of earlier generations - in an endeavour to counteract the kind of objectification of their work to

Anpassungswille", in Karl Otto Maue, *Hanns Eisler's 'Johann Faustus' und das Problem des Erbes: Interpretation des Libretto und seine zeitgenössische Diskussion in der DDR 1952/53*, Göppinger Akademie Beiträge Nr. 113, ed. by Ulrich Müller, Franz Hundsnurscher und K. Werner Jauß, (Göppingen, 1981), p 89.

which literary criticism has frequently given rise. With her growing disillusionment with 'really existing socialism', Wolf became increasingly influenced by women's literature and feminist aesthetics. But Brecht continued to play a role in terms of the ethical guidance his work could offer Wolf during a time of crisis in the 1980s. In a manner not dissimilar to Brecht's own approach to literary heritage and conventions, Wolf's intention has never been to invalidate the important insights and developments of other writers before her, but rather to arrive at necessary new positions on the basis of a fresh examination of tradition. Brecht (above all through *Galilei* and *Urfaust*) continued to play a role for Wolf in terms of his deep commitment to the development of a humanitarian and ethical socialism, and Wolf picks up his warnings against ruthless scientific and technological progress. In her essay on Hans Mayer which was written after the demise of the GDR³², Wolf describes her pain and horror at the sight of Bertolt Brecht's grave which had been vandalized by a generation that was obviously no longer able to differentiate between their experience of the GDR version of socialism and the ideas and hopes which Brecht and his generation had stood for. Above all in view of the very real dangers which the survival of GDR literature as an important part of our European cultural traditions faces today, my exposition here has intended to make a contribution to keeping alive these ideas and the challenges they can continue to offer both in aesthetic and ethical terms.

³²Christa Wolf, 'Ein Deutscher auf Widerspruch', in Tabou.

2.2 The Faust theme in Christa Wolf's work³³

In this section of the thesis I intend to pursue a theme in Christa Wolf's work that is rarely overtly stated but that nevertheless runs through it as a kind of undercurrent or subtext, which I intend to refer to as the 'Faust' theme. I will focus on an examination of Wolf's endeavours from the late 1960s onwards to link up with alternative literary traditions to those recommended by the SED's cultural apparatchiks of which Goethe's *Faust* is one of the most important. As an alternative, Wolf returned to the works of the Romantic writers, in particular to the writing of Bettine von Arnim, a female forebear of considerable significance for Wolf's development of narrative techniques which permit the articulation of female subjectivity. My understanding of Bettine's role in Wolf's personal and literary emancipation points towards my detailed investigation of the development of Wolf's writing in the light of her feminist consciousness which will form the final section of this part of my thesis.

However, outlining the development of the 'Faust theme' will allow us, on a more superficial level, to trace Wolf's engagement with a certain type of 'Menschenbild', or, more precisely, a certain type of 'Männlichkeitsbild' that was officially propagated in the GDR from its inception. On a deeper level it will serve as a focus for analysing Christa Wolf's disassociation from a cultural tradition which, in a unidimensional and undialectic manner, reinforced the 'Faustian' characteristics of reason, intellect, action and knowledge at the expense of the (equally Faustian) goals of totality of emotional experience. Christa Wolf's work represents a conscious and consistent linking up with the antitheses to this dominant culture and ideology, to a literary tradition which

³³This chapter has already appeared, slightly altered, under the title 'The Faust theme in Christa Wolf's work', in *German Monitor*, (no. 30, 1994), pp 107-125.

emphasizes subjective experience and the role of emotion, imagination and reflection. This literature was created by courageous, at times rebellious forebears who, often at great personal cost, defended progressive ideals against reactionary social tendencies and authoritarian régimes. Christa Wolf's work picks up the threads of this alternative tradition and adds to the finely woven web which it represents.

In the section on images of men and women in Christa Wolf's writing in this thesis I argue that two types of male characters figure most prominently in her writing: the 'Faustian type' who stands for a belief in facts, scientific and technological progress and instrumental reason on the one hand, and his counterpart on the other who represents a kind of middle way between bipolar notions of femininity and masculinity and is characterized by personal courage, intuition, creativity, sensitivity, and imagination. The Faustian characters tend to be men of action who hold powerful and responsible social positions. As scientists, professors of medicine, Party functionaries and bureaucrats, their professional opinions, decisions and actions have a wide-ranging and profound impact on the course of social progress and on the lives and fates of many individuals. These influential men define themselves through professional success, power, and status. The emphasis in their lives has been on action and on self-realization within the professional system. In Christa Wolf's prose work these characters are decidedly less well developed in terms of inner life and psychology. They appear rather as cardboard cutouts who represent a certain type of 'Männlichkeit' where reflection, self-doubt or self-criticism have no place.

Wolf's undisguised criticism of these hard-working men who prove themselves socially through their actions may be traced back to her earlier prose works. Already in *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) the female protagonist begins to emerge from the 'Verzauberung' created by her love to Manfred when she sees him playing up to his professor and joining in the chorus of those who thirst for the approval of this powerful man: "In diesen wenigen Sekunden rückte Manfred für sie aus der unscharfen Nähe in einen Abstand, der erlaubt, zu mustern, zu messen, zu beurteilen." (GH, 112) Manfred is

fully at home in the circle of scientists, mathematicians and engineers who, together, believe that they have discovered what humanity needs for its future progress and happiness. He shares the 'Ungeduld' of the scientist who is keen to subject "ganze Städte und Länder" to the scrutiny of scientific experimentation and believes the scientific problem of the century to be the realization of a "Dasein ohne Leerlauf durch technische Unvollkommenheiten" (GH, 100). This task, his colleagues and he believe, will only be accomplished through scientific progress and technological advance. Wolf's undisguised criticism of such 'Faustian' conceit is epitomized, furthermore, in her biting satirical shortstory 'Neue Lebensansichten eines Katers' (1970). Here, a professor and his colleagues work on the development of a single scientific formula which will simply engineer absolute human happiness: TOMEGL (GE, 10). But while professor Fettback is thus absorbed in this truly superhuman project, he is, characteristically, an absolute failure in his private life, where he fails to deal with the deep unhappiness of those nearest and dearest to him; he is utterly oblivious to the troubles of his wife who is deeply unhappy in their marriage.

Wolf's work raises the question of what price these men have paid in personal terms for their professional ambitions and success and highlights the damage they are doing to their fellow human beings. Whether we consider the professor in *Selbstversuch* (1972), the scientists and economists partaking in the tea party in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979), or Clemens in *Sommerstück* (written in part at the same time as *Kein Ort. Nirgends*), what these men share is a rather unsuccessful private life, self-denial, suppressed fears and insecurities, lack of self-knowledge and above all an inability to love. Wolf's *Kassandra* narrative (1983) traces the utter self-alienation which characterizes these male figures back to the beginning of European culture and civilization. Wolf depicts some of the great heroes of Greek mythology who have served as blueprints for the countless heroic male figures who have since dominated world literature as dehumanized robots or killer machines (Achilles), or as men beset by deep inferiority complexes and suppressed fears (Agamemnon, King Priam of Troy). In

Störfall (1986), the Faust theme is more explicitly stated. Here, the narrator thinks of a young scientist who has dedicated his entire life exclusively to the pursuit of scientific progress gone mad, as 'Hagelstein-Faust'. The scientists in *Störfall* epitomize the 'Tatendrang' and 'Wissensdurst' of Goethe's Faust character, and they certainly share his arrogance when they aspire to subject nature fully to the logic of their discipline. However, they exhibit neither the awe nor the conscience and tragic awareness of their great forefather. They are, rather, "Wissenschaftler[.], die, von keiner Ehrfurcht gehemmt, was die Natur im Innersten zusammenhält, nicht nur erkennen, auch verwerten wollen' (Stf., 34)³⁴

While Christa Wolf's work is, in this way, clearly critical of the dominant position given to science and technology in the GDR and in European civilization in general, she also critically reflects the role which a certain kind of literature has played in producing alienation. Emphasizing a general lack of concern and consideration in the modern world for the psychological motivations underlying what we generally regard as 'progress', Wolf persistently highlights the need to explore in literature the inner life and the full complexity of human experience. Wolf is profoundly sceptical of an understanding of progress which idealizes man's journey through history into a continuous triumph of reason and rationality over nature, understood as both outer and inner nature. Literature which fails to acknowledge the darker side of human nature along with the emotional and psychological anguish produced by the suppression of our deepest fears and anxieties will, in Wolf's view, contribute to the "Abschaffung der Tragödie" (GE, 101). It will also ignore the tragedy contained in Faust's pact with the devil when he aspires to total self-indulgence, "[...]Und was der ganzen Menschheit zugeteilt ist, Will ich in meinem innern Selbst genießen"³⁵. In view of the patterns of crisis, confrontation and destruction which have characterized the history of European civilization, Christa Wolf seeks to promote

³⁴Cf. Goethe's *Faust*, "Daß ich erkenne, was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhält", Goethe, *Faust. Der Tragödie ersten und zweiten Teil*, special edition, edited by Erich Trunz, (Munich, 1976), p 59, lines 382-383.

³⁵Goethe, *Faust*, p 59, lines 1669-1770.

through literature changes in established patterns of thought; as a first step towards the creation of a humanitarian society, we must learn to 'see' ourselves and the world we have created without fear and without illusion. The 'progress' to which Wolf has been committed must be based on values such as solidarity, compassion and love, and it must enable us "die Menschen zu lieben und uns selbst nicht zu hassen." (KON, 118)

Earlier in the thesis I have explained that Christa Wolf's understanding of progress was not shared by the cultural ideologues of the SED. Whilst Wolf assigned the close investigation of the inner life and of psychology most insistently and exclusively to literature³⁶, the SED's official *Kulturpolitik* tolerated only literature which supported the political and economic goals of the Party. In fact, the cultural functionaries of the SED had never seen a need for experimentation with literary forms that promoted an understanding of the more elusive aspects of human experience. Instead, they insisted from the outset that the literature of Weimar classicism could unproblematically be transferred to the context of the GDR.³⁷ The reception of Goethe's *Faust* drama into the official canon of GDR literature assumed a key role in this respect. In the opinion of the SED's cultural ideologues, bourgeois culture, from the Renaissance via the classical period and into the nineteenth century, seemed pervaded by a spirit of action and industriousness. Goethe was hailed as the "Vorbild eines stets arbeitenden Menschen", and his Faust character counted as the prototype of the "gesellschaftlich und tätig [sich] bewährenden Menschen."³⁸ To cultural apparatchiks like Alexander Abusch Goethe's character seemed to embody all those ideals which they considered worthy of emulation by the positive heroes of Socialist Realist literature: action, thirst for knowledge, and industriousness.

As early as the late 1940s, Bertolt Brecht had deplored the "Faust-Verherrlichung" in the Soviet Zone of Occupation and had warned against an

³⁶See, for instance, Wolf's essay 'Glauben an Irdisches', (1968), in DdA I, 1968, 293 ff.

³⁷See Emmerich, (1989), p 102.

³⁸Emmerich, (1982), p 102.

"Einschüchterung durch die Klassizität".³⁹ Brecht was fascinated by the Faust material and used it several times in his work. However, he considered the 'Sturm und Drang' version of Goethe's Faust adaptation, the more fragmentary *Urfaust* which, like *Werther*, was the work of a younger and more idealistic Goethe, to offer far more exciting and productive possibilities. Despite its fragmentary form, Brecht considered it to be complete and placed it on a par with Kleist's play *Robert Guiskard* and Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. As Hans Bunge's documentation has demonstrated, Brecht and Eisler debated passionately against Party functionaries in the early 1950s to defend their separate adaptations of the Faust material.⁴⁰ Brecht and Eisler each approached the Faust myth from a different angle to that favoured by the SED. In their adaptations, Faust is no precursor of the positive hero of scientific socialism, but rather a complex figure riddled with self-doubt and incapable of piercing through the complexity of the wider political circumstances and power struggles of his time. While Brecht's *Urfaust* character might be described as a mixture of a scientist and a criminal, Eisler's *Johann Faustus* is characterized by negativity and political apathy, and his thirst for knowledge does not spring from a desire for true "Erkenntnis", but rather for social recognition and status. As their works were considered too uncomfortable for the political programme of the SED, both Brecht's *Urfaust* and Eisler's opera libretto *Johann Faustus* were ruthlessly suppressed. While Hanns Eisler was forced into an involuntary exile, Bertolt Brecht became canonized as the classic of socialist literature in a manner which was amenable to the purposes of the SED.

Alexander Abusch's dismissal of *Johann Faustus* as a "Volksverräter", a negative hero, "gepeitscht von den Furien seines schlechten Gewissens"⁴¹ was instrumental in sentencing Eisler's opera to death before it had even been written. The ideological debate

³⁹ See Peter Schmitt's comprehensive study on both Brecht's and Eisler's *Faust* interpretations, 'Faust und die "Deutsche Misere". Studien zu Brechts dialektischer Theaterkonzeption', in: *Erlanger Studien* 26, edited by Detlef Bernd Leistner and Dietmar Peschel, (Erlangen, 1980), pp 29 and 40, respectively.

⁴⁰ Bunge (ed.), (1991).

⁴¹ Alexander Abusch, 'Faust - Held oder Renegat in der deutschen Nationalliteratur?', reproduced in Bunge, pp 47-61, p 54; originally published in *Sonntag*, 17 May, 1953.

in the 'Mittwoch-Gespräche' of the *Akademie der Künste* which followed Abusch's attack was clearly designed to make an example of Eisler and, by destroying him, to paralyse artistic freedom in the GDR in general. Abusch's refutation of Eisler's work went beyond a mere reaffirmation of Georg Lukács's positions of the 1930s and 1940s on issues of literary heritage and Socialist Realism. He affirmed Goethe's Faust character as the precursor of the positive hero of socialist literature who learns that progress is brought about through the victory of reason and intellect over the desire for emotional fulfilment. Moreover, Goethe himself was recommended by Abusch as a model for all socialist writers who wished to be associated with a progressive direction. The repression of the more rebellious aspects of Goethe's nature was depicted by Abusch as a necessary and desirable, even admirable quality which Abusch clearly wished to see emulated by writers in the GDR. With *Faust*, according to Abusch, Goethe had created a mirror image of the "Kampf zwischen Dunkelmännern und Wissenschaft, zwischen Reaktion und Fortschritt im Leben der Deutschen."⁴² Goethe was characterized as the model of an enlightened writer who, in the course of his "Suchen nach Erkenntnis", his "Sich-wund-Stoßen an den engen Schranken der Umwelt" and his "Streben nach der höchsten Vollendung als tätiger Mensch"⁴³, learns to overcome the weaker and darker aspects of his being and arrives at what GDR functionaries considered to be a mature position. Goethe's full self-realization had, at his time, been thwarted by the limitations set by bourgeois society. Taking this line of argument to its logical conclusions, it clearly transpires that the victory of progressive social forces over all reactionary elements in scientific socialism has created the conditions for the final resolution of the Faustian struggle: Faust III would and could only be written in the GDR.⁴⁴

⁴²Bunge, p 51.

⁴³Bunge, p 51.

⁴⁴J.H. Reid has pointed out that Walter Ulbricht suggested in a public address in 1962 that the third part of *Faust* could only be written in the GDR. See J.H. Reid, 'From Adolf Hennecke to Star Wars - the Fortunes of "Faust" in the GDR', in *GDR Monitor*, (no. 6, 1990), pp 142-159.

While Abusch's analysis clearly links progress exclusively to the triumph of attributes of scientific investigation such as reason, intellect, action and knowledge over their counterpoints emotion, imagination, reflection and experience, his interpretation of Goethe's *Faust* noticeably excludes the wider and decidedly tragic aspects of Goethe's great drama: the fact that Faust is as a person completely dominated by his obsessive quest for knowledge; the conceit of his desire to gain access to all the secrets of nature by himself; his pact with a minor, demonic spirit as an acknowledgement of defeat by, not victory over, the great earth spirit who alone knows "was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält"⁴⁵, and whose secrets are firmly placed outside the bounds of human comprehension; and the fact that Faust ruthlessly destroys and murders in the course of his odyssey, objectifying both human and outer nature in his relentless quest.

Brecht and Eisler were isolated 'Einzelkämpfer' in the early years of the GDR who were defeated. The verdict passed on Eisler by SED functionaries was never revised in the lifetime of the GDR. When Hans Bunge in Rostock and Helene Weigel at the Berlin Ensemble attempted in 1968 to put Eisler's text on stage, a directive by the Minister of Culture banned their projects. As Hans Bunge concludes, "1953 hat das Politbüro eine Diskussion noch für nötig gehalten, 1968 genügte bereits eine 'Weisung'."⁴⁶

As I have explained earlier in the thesis, Christa Wolf has herself known the 'Verlierergefühl', the experience of what it means to be defeated in this manner, since the Eleventh Plenum in 1965 and the subsequent difficulties with the publication of her prose work *Nachdenken über Christa T.* And it is the perspective of the 'Verlierer', of socially marginalized, defeated, isolated, creative individuals which has since that time been a dominant theme in her prose and essay work.⁴⁷ As I have indicated in the first part of my

⁴⁵ Goethe, *Faust*, p 20, lines 382-382.

⁴⁶ See Bunge, p 19.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of this aspect see also Jutta Marx, 'Die Perspektive des Verlierers', in Mauser (ed.), (1985), pp 161-179, as well as Greiner, "'Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod'", in Mauser, pp 107-140.

thesis, Christa Wolf's understanding of this kind of defeat was not entirely negative. On the contrary, given the increasing polarization in GDR culture and society, the perspective of those whose relationships to the dominant culture and ideology was characterized by tension and opposition assumed an ever more important role in Wolf's work, since: "manchmal, wenn er nüchtern, ohne Selbstmitleid und Selbstschonung, dafür aber lernfähig ist, kann ein Verlierer mehr sehen als ein Sieger, und vielleicht Wesentliches."⁴⁸

Wolf's work has been fuelled by a commitment to the development of a genuine alternative to Germany's fascist past where art and literature had so shamelessly been abused by "höchst irdische Usurpatoren der Macht" (DdA I, 1968, 316). Like Anna Seghers, Wolf believed that many classical works of art had promoted self-alienation, since the author could hide behind the text and project unwanted aspects of his or her 'self' onto the fictional characters. In Wolf's view, authors who fail to overcome such a self-alienating split into two selves which do not know each other, but "starren sich ganz verwundert an"⁴⁹, will perpetuate patterns of alienation.

Both through her choice of main characters and through her engagement with literary forebears outside the classical bourgeois tradition, Wolf has offered alternative 'Menschenbilder' and alternative perspectives to the official literary canon of the SED. Viewed within the wider socio-political and cultural context of the GDR, the statement Wolf makes through the Faustian characters in her prose work takes on a further dimension through her repeated engagement with the Faust theme in her essays. Literature, in Christa Wolf's view, must not allow itself to be dominated by the demands of political rationale and expediency. It must, furthermore, reject the mechanisms of repression which other disciplines demand of the individual. From the late 1960s onwards, Wolf links her work to that of literary forebears who resisted making the false compromises demanded of them by the establishment. In doing so, she is also clearly

⁴⁸Christa Wolf, 'Ein Deutscher auf Widerspruch.', in *Tabou*, pp 23-32, p 27.

⁴⁹As quoted from Karoline von Günderrode in the motto of Christa Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends.*

critical of the increasing radicality with which SED functionaries suppressed works of art that had been inspired by a genuine humanitarian and socialist spirit. The expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 strengthened her resolve to follow the "arge Spur" of those "Vorgänger [...], Blut im Schuh" (KON, 5). Through the medium of her own work, she has allowed these silenced voices of Germany's past to speak again and remain alive in the consciousness of the contemporary reader. Going back to her engagement with the work of Anna Seghers, Wolf has thus picked up and entwined the threads of her own, contemporary experience into a finely woven 'Gewebe', where "Jeder Faden, den sie behutsam aus dem Gewebe zieht", takes up other threads and creates "geschriebenes Leben, gelebtes Leben [...] Wirklichkeit." (DdA I, 1968, 314)

Since *Der geteilte Himmel*, the guiding structural principle of Christa Wolf's work has been the reflection, the 'Nachdenken' of a female narrator. Wolf's protagonists may be regarded as the antithesis to the unidimensional Faustian characteristics propagated through the positive heroes of Socialist Realist doctrine. They are complex characters who defy any easy, comfortable or superficial categorization. What these figures share is contemplation, extreme sensitivity, creativity, vulnerability, deep emotions and above all a love of and respect for nature and their fellow human beings. Instead of the impatience of the modern scientist, they are driven by the restlessness and disquiet of the creative artist. Their quest for knowledge and deeper understanding is guided by compassion, honesty and conscience. Moreover, characters like Kleist and Karoline von Günderrode seek also to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, being painfully aware of their own self-alienation. In contrast to the Faustian image of bourgeois literature, to the "Bild des alten, blinden Faust, der das Geräusch der Spaten, die ihm sein Grab schaufeln, in grotesker Selbsttäuschung seiner glückhaften Zukunftsvision einpaßt"(DdA II, 1980, 156), the eyes of Wolf's characters are relentlessly forced wide open to see that the "Aufteilung der Menschheit in Tätige und Denkende" (KON, 113), with the former dominating the latter, will increasingly isolate people who share their visions for a better humanitarian future. For Christa Wolf, as for

Anna Seghers before her, these are the literary forebears who wrote "Hymnen auf ihr Land, an dessen gesellschaftlicher Mauer sie ihre Stirnen wund rieben"⁵⁰, not, as Abusch claimed, the Goethe of the classical bourgeois period. The lives of these literary outsiders, though conflict-filled, were, in Wolf's view, not tragic, since they fully explored the possibilities for self-realization open to them. Like the protagonist of her narrative *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Kleist and Günderrode may have been defeated by some standards. Christa Wolf, however, does not share conventional interpretations of the term, as she underlined in a letter to Christa Thomassen of 1977, "Es freut mich, daß Ihre Methode Sie dazu führt [...], 'Scheitern' nicht als 'Scheitern' zu interpretieren, wie die meisten platten Rezensenten, sondern die Hoffnung aufzugreifen, die in einem solchen Ende liegt."⁵¹ For Wolf, the personal courage of historical figures like Kleist and Günderrode, who remained true to themselves and the values they defended against considerable odds, encapsulates the very utopian element which she has endeavoured to keep alive in her literary work.

Some of the literary forebears Wolf chooses to link up with in her work share much of the rebelliousness and personal courage of her protagonists without, however, being defeated in the same way. I am thinking in particular of Georg Büchner and Bettine von Arnim, both of whom had a profound impact on the growth and development of Christa Wolf as an author. Büchner is admired by Wolf as a combination of a "Dichter, Naturwissenschaftler und Revolutionär" (DdA II, 1968, 31). While Goethe had been forced to adapt the ideals of his youth in order to secure his position at the court of Weimar, Büchner never compromised his socialist ideals and remained committed to his revolutionary cause throughout his life. In his method as well as in his aesthetics, Büchner constitutes a powerful and strikingly modern alternative to Goethe. He never

⁵⁰"Diese deutschen Dichter (Hölderlin, Büchner, Günderrode, Kleist, Lenz, etc., RR) schrieben Hymnen auf ihr Land, an dessen gesellschaftlicher Mauer sie ihre Stirnen wund rieben!", from Anna Segher's essay of 1935, 'Vaterlandsliebe', in Anna Seghers, *Glauben an Irdisches: Essays aus vier Jahrzehnten*, edited by Christa Wolf, p12.

⁵¹Christa Wolf in a letter to Christa Thomassen of 15 September 1977, quoted here from Krogmann, (1989), p 91.

objectified his characters, but allowed them to speak with their own voices, adding only the dimension of his own, contemporary experience, the dimension of authorship. In contrast to Faust's quest for knowledge, Büchner was guided in his life and in his work by deep compassion and love for his fellow human beings. In 'Lesen und Schreiben' Wolf suggested that Büchner, rather than the Goethe of Weimar classicism, provided an appropriate model for the development of new prose forms in a socialist Germany.

Like Büchner, Bettine von Arnim, whose biography and work provided new inspiration to Wolf during a time of intense crisis in the late 1970s, embodied a revolutionary spirit. However, as a woman in an authoritarian patriarchal society, she could not participate in the revolutionary struggles of her time in the way that Büchner had been able to. Although she was committed to socialist ideals, hers was a less revolutionary socialism than that of Büchner or of Brecht and Eisler later. Bettine stood for a much more practical kind of socialism which realized concrete utopian ideas in everyday life. Her tea parties in the literary salons of nineteenth century Berlin aroused the suspicions of the authorities because of a supposed "sozialistische [...] Tendenz" (DdA II, 1979, 127). Bettine managed to turn the extremely limited scope for self-realization imposed on her sex in a reactionary social and political climate to her advantage, fully exploiting the fact that the authorities were reluctant to believe a woman could be dangerously subversive. Constantly discovering new ways of defying the establishment, Bettine succeeded where so many of her female contemporaries were defeated, "Nicht ohne Genugtuung sieht man ihr zu, wie sie den Vorteil zu nutzen weiß, der in dem Nachteil, Frau zu sein, in Männergesellschaften zeitweilig verborgen ist - falls die Betreffende und Betroffene es aushält, für leicht verrückt zu gelten." (DdA II, 1979, 127) Although she never compromised her ideals or her commitment to her literary work, Bettine waited patiently until the external circumstances of her life permitted her to realize herself in her work. Through her inscrutability, her energy and flexibility, Bettine managed to discover a viable alternative as a woman in a patriarchal society in which "jeder Stuhl besetzt, jedes Amt eingenommen [ist]." (DdA II, 1979, 126) The

particular kind of feminine magic which Bettine has woven is embraced by Christa Wolf as a philosophy of life with which contemporary women can identify. In contrast to Goethe's Faust character whose relentless quest for knowledge has tragic consequences both for himself and for his fellow human beings, Bettine values life and respects nature. Wolf's essay places Bettine in direct contrast to Goethe's Faust character:

Welch andre Szene! Nicht die Kampfansage auf Leben und Tod, nicht die bedingungslose Unterwerfung der Natur; nicht die Hybris des 'faustischen' Menschen, der Erkenntnis nur gewinnt, indem er die Natur auf die Folterbank nimmt, ihr falsche Geständnisse abzwängt mit Hebeln und mit Schrauben. (DdA II, 1979, 149-150)

In replacing Goethe's Faust as a model for human experience by Bettine von Arnim, Christa Wolf highlights the fact that female figures like Bettine provide important alternatives to the male-biased self-representations which have dominated the symbolic order from which our culture has been woven. Since women have persistently been excluded or objectified in patriarchal culture, they have been expected to recognize themselves either in the alienating and self-alienated self-representations of male culture exemplified by Faust or in female figures which have been created by men. Bettine is thus significant to Wolf as one of the first women in German culture who became visible as a person in her own right. As a female author whose works could get published, Bettine authentically portrayed the subjective experiences of women at a time when credible representations of the feminine were almost entirely absent. Wolf's essay on Bettine thus already points towards her comprehensive critique of patriarchal culture in her *Kassandra* project.

Despite all affinities and parallels with Büchner and Bettine, Wolf was clearly also aware of the differences between their circumstances and her own. Wolf's life and work has been intricately interwoven with the history of her country, and her source of creativity has been inextricably bound up with the very contradictions and tensions which have arisen out of her commitment to the development of a humanitarian and democratic

socialism in East Germany. When the ruthless marginalization of authors unwilling to conform to the narrowly defined parameters of the SED's official *Kulturpolitik* in the late 1970s confronted her with the existential decision whether to leave the GDR for the West or whether to remain true to herself and continue - against growing odds - to defend the cultural values she and her colleagues had stood for, she seemed forced to make her own 'Faustian' pact, "dann müsse man seine Seele verkaufen." (Wb, 48) Faced with this dilemma, Wolf decided to follow the example of Bettine, whose "Verdienst [es] bleibt, die Rolle angenommen zu haben, die ihr zufiel, sich in die Lücke gestellt und nach den Folgen nicht gefragt zu haben." (DdA II, 1979, 127) As I have explained in the first part of this thesis, Christa Wolf was fully aware that for herself there could be no innocent way of doing this. While remaining in the GDR, however, she began to write herself deeper and deeper into the blind spots of her own psyche as a first step towards uncovering also those of her society.

In the light of Wolf's feminist consciousness, it is hardly surprising that she never worked on the Faust myth itself in her literary work. Yet, in pursuing the Faust theme in her writing, I have been able to demonstrate that she has been increasingly disturbed by the status which the works of Weimar classicism in general and Goethe's *Faust* in particular enjoyed in official GDR culture. The biased interpretation of Goethe's drama by cultural functionaries like Alexander Abusch and the ruthless suppression of Brecht's and Eisler's alternative Faust adaptations signalled in no uncertain terms that Faust was viewed by SED cultural functionaries as the ideal precursor of the positive hero of Socialist Realism. Wolf's 'Faustian' characters are portrayed, as a result of their destructive self-alienation, as the antithesis of such heroic figures. Identifying ever more closely with literary outsiders in European culture, Wolf has intertwined the complex fabric which her work represents with the works of like-minded colleagues from both past and present. The network she has created has, in its own way, also played an important role in the more recent peaceful social revolution:

Es gab Jahre hier, in denen Bücher wie Taten wirkten,
Lebens- und Arbeitsmittel jener Gruppen, die in den
achtziger Jahren entstanden und die im Herbst des vorigen
Jahres in einer Reihe ganz neuer Organisationsformen das
Gesicht, die Gestalt einer freien, humanen, sozialen
Gesellschaft ahnen ließen, die sich unter dem Panzer des
alten Staatswesens als Puppe herausgebildet hatte.⁵²

It is with her quest for the realization of this goal and through her commitment to the
development of a free, humanitarian and socially just society that Christa Wolf also
echoes the vision of Goethe's Faust himself:

Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,
Der täglich sie erobern muß. [...]
Solch ein Gewimmel möcht' ich sehn,
Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn.⁵³

⁵²Wolf, 'Ein Deutscher auf Widerspruch', in Tabou, p 27.

⁵³Goethe, *Faust*, p 348, lines 11575 - 11576 and 11579 - 11580.

2.3 The self and the other: images of men and women in Christa Wolf's writing of the 1970s and 1980s⁵⁴

This final section of the second part of my thesis focuses on a detailed examination of the development of Christa Wolf's feminist consciousness from the early 1970s onwards. A textual analysis of key aspects of three of Christa Wolf's narratives which appeared before *Kassandra* aims at illuminating Wolf's engagement with feminist thought from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. This examination provides a link to my exposition in the previous section which highlights the significance of Karoline von Günderrode and, above all, of Bettine von Arnim for Wolf's development as a woman writer. In terms of both the thematic and the theoretical links which my examination here establishes to Wolf's *Kassandra*, this section also illuminates some key stages in Wolf's poetological and literary development which supplement my analysis of *Kassandra* in the first and in the final part of this thesis. As the considerable weight I give to these aspects suggests, I consider the feminist strand in the network I aim to illuminate in this thesis as a whole to be of great significance for Wolf's personal and aesthetic emancipation.

At first sight, the following list in Christa Wolf's *Störfall* (1986) of activities which men of science and technology do not practise or would regard as a waste of time seems astonishing:

Liste der Tätigkeiten, die jene Männer von Wissenschaft und Technik vermutlich nicht ausüben oder die sie, dazu gezwungen, als Zeitvergeudung ansehen würden: Einen Säugling trockenlegen, Kochen, einkaufen gehn, mit einem Kind auf dem Arm oder im Kinderwagen. Wäsche

⁵⁴This chapter has already appeared, slightly altered, under the title 'The self and the other: images of men and women in Christa Wolf', in Arthur Williams and Stuart Parkes (eds.), *The individual, identity and innovation. Signals from contemporary literature and the new Germany*, (Berne, 1994), pp 149-164.

waschen, aufhängen, abnehmen, zusammenlegen, bügeln,
ausbessern, Fußböden fegen, wischen, bohnen,
staubsaugen. Staubwischen. Nähen. Stricken. Häkeln.
Sticken. Geschirr abwaschen. Geschirr abwaschen.
Geschirr abwaschen. Ein krankes Kind pflegen. Ihm
Geschichten erfinden. Lieder singen. (Stf, 38)

How can an author like Christa Wolf who, after all, has, since the 1970s, increasingly incorporated women's issues and feminist thought in her work, postulate such a crude stereotype? But it should not be forgotten that the list ends with the question: "Und wieviele dieser Tätigkeiten sehe ich selbst als Zeitvergeudung an?" (Stf, 38), signalling a more complex understanding of gender issues than might at first be apparent. By looking at the depiction of men and women in some of Christa Wolf's prose works of Wolf of the 1970s and 1980s, it is intended here to show the development of Wolf's feminist consciousness through this period. It is true that the main protagonists in Wolf's prose work have been women, but one of her concerns, a kind of subtext, has been the criticism of male culture and society, or, as Regula Venske expressed it, of a "jeweils historisch näher zu bestimmenden Männlichkeit"⁵⁵ After all, a destructive indifference had already been the key problem posed by the the female protagonist's lover in Wolf's first major prose work, *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963), while it had been the love of a woman which had awakened him to a new life, "Euridike holt Orpheus aus dem Schattenreich." (GH, 64). Does Wolf then, as a rash interpretation of the above quotation would suggest, adopt a simplistic, stereotypical view of femininity and masculinity, does her writing reflect the ideas of Western feminism and is she guilty even of creating a new myth of womanhood? In order to answer these questions, I shall concentrate here on 'Selbstversuch' (1972), on *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979), and on *Sommerstück* (written in part at the same time as *Kein Ort. Nirgends* and revised for publication in 1987). My analysis aims at illuminating some of the thematic links between these texts and *Kassandra*, above all Wolf's exploration of intersubjectivity and of gender relationships.

⁵⁵Venske, Regula, *Das Verschwinden des Mannes in der weiblichen Schreibmaschine. Männerbilder in der Literatur von Frauen*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1991), p 80.

It was with 'Selbstversuch' that Christa Wolf first explicitly addressed feminist topics and issues. Her protagonist Johanna, a highly qualified scientist, volunteers for an experiment which will transform her into a man, her motivation being to discover 'his' secret. But the woman-become-man "Anders" has to register a loss of imagination and spontaneity, of compassion with fellow human beings and, above all, of the ability to love. In return she discovers the secret of invulnerability, indifference and imperturbability. Women in the society of 1992 depicted in this story seem, according to Wolf, to be faced with the choice either of becoming like men or of serving them in the traditional role of wife and mother, always offering them a "spiegelbereites Gesicht" (SV 184) to reflect their greatness and importance. Johanna had rejected this role long before undergoing the experiment and thus differs little from her professor in terms of a desire to find self-fulfilment and self-realization through work and professional status. She had decided against marriage and family in order to devote herself fully to her professional interests as a scientist. In effect, therefore, she acts in complicity with the values of patriarchal society. However, once the transformation into a man has made her realize that as a man she has lost the ability to love, she leaves the experiment immediately. "Als Spion im Hinterland des Gegners" she has experienced that the activities a man loses himself in cannot be "sein Glück" either. (GE, 181).

Taken at face value, the image of man sketched in this story is without doubt a crass stereotype, to which qualities traditionally attributed to women seem to be seen as a positive counterpoint. But, as Anna Fattori has suggested⁵⁶, the sex change may also be understood as a metaphor for the narrator's search for identity. Johanna's treatise, written two weeks after the experiment and composed in an ironic and at times even playful tone instead of the sober and factual language of scientific reports, allows the 'I' of the narrator to access the experiences of a past self. The transformation had never been complete, since the experiences of the man "Anders" had been made with the

⁵⁶Fattori, Anna, ' Schreiben als Identitätssuche: Christa Wolfs *Selbstversuch* im Hinblick auf Virginia Woolfs *Orlando*', in *GDR Monitor* (19/88), pp 1-27.

consciousness of the woman Johanna, and it is the woman who re-asserts herself after the experiment through the medium of language. The career-woman Johanna had trained herself fully to conform to the exigencies of a male-dominated, patriarchal society, competing with men on their terms and suppressing parts of her self in order to become successful. The narrator rejects the woman she has become, exposing her work as "Doktor der Physio-psychologie", which she had hoped would lead to self-realization, as a sham. The price she had to pay was the perpetual suppression of self and an increasing self-alienation. Read in this light, the story is not about defending women's emotionality. The deliberate polarization of the narrator's self into a male and a female component serves rather as a ploy to bring back to consciousness and reassert qualities which, in the world of work and social success, are awarded no status. Due to women's different historical situation in society and culture, these qualities have come to be associated with women, but are not to be taken as biologically determined. In *Der geteilte Himmel* Wolf had identified the fascist past as the root cause of man's inability to love. Now, in 'Selbstversuch', she clearly attributes it to the price men in particular have paid in modern society (with its high division of labour and a highly specialized institutionalized and professional system) for professional success: conformism and self-suppression leading to increasing self-alienation. One way forward towards a humanitarian society, Wolf believes can be women's quest for identity and 'Subjektstatus' in culture and history of European society.

That Christa Wolf felt very strongly about the issues addressed in 'Selbstversuch' is evident from her passionate response to Hans Kaufmann in a conversation in 1973:

Jetzt werde ich mich zügeln müssen, denn wir kommen auf eines der Themen, bei denen mir leicht die Galle überläuft, eben weil der radikale Ansatz, von dem wir ausgegangen sind, ('Befreiung der Frau'), steckenzubleiben droht in der Selbstzufriedenheit über eine Vorstufe, die wir erklommen haben und von der aus neue radikale Fragestellungen uns weiterbringen müßten. Fragestellungen dieser Art (wie ich sie gerade mit dieser Erzählung provozieren will): Ist es denn das Ziel der Emanzipation, kann es überhaupt

erstrebenswert sein, daß die Frauen 'werden wie die Männer', also dasselbe tun dürfen, dieselben Rechte wie sie bekommen und immer mehr auch wahrnehmen können, wo doch die Männer es nötig hätten, selbst emanzipiert zu werden? (DdA II, 1973, 343)

Wolf became increasingly aware that women in the GDR of the 1970s, despite having been granted legal equality and equal access to the professional system, were deeply dissatisfied with their situation and the roles assigned to them in the private and public sphere. While official Marxist doctrine and political practice failed to address the issues which were relevant to women's direct everyday experience, Christa Wolf increasingly identified with women and their actual experience in socialist society and committed herself to understanding the causes of conflicts and dissatisfaction of women in the GDR.

But 'Selbstversuch' is, of course, also Wolf's engagement with Western feminist thought of the early 1970s when women increasingly rejected "Gleichheitsmodelle"⁵⁷ à la Simone de Beauvoir, according to whom the goal of women's emancipatory endeavours is to acquire the 'privilege' of becoming as a man, that is by rejecting motherhood and its related restrictions and by developing the same productivity and industry as a man. This line of argument, the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne believes, would eventually leave women the choice between the kitchen sink and the production of bombs.⁵⁸

Western feminism of the 1970s turned instead to modifications of this model and focused increasingly on gynocentric feminist perspectives which re-emphasize the value of specifically female qualities such as creativity, love and empathy. Gynocentric feminism has highlighted that women's liberation involves much more than their integration into the professional and institutional system of patriarchal society, and that the real issue is for women to explore difference as a biologically as well as culturally determined factor for the potential transformation of gender relations.⁵⁹ In contrast to some strands of

⁵⁷For an overview of developments in Western feminism, see, for instance, Dorothe Schuscheng, *Arbeit am Mythos Frau: Weiblichkeit und Autonomie in der literarischen Mythenrezeption Ingeborg Bachmanns, Christa Wolfs und Gertrud Leuteneggerts*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1987), pp 4-28.

⁵⁸See d'Eaubonne, Françoise, *Feminismus oder Tod*, translated by Gina Giert, (Munich 1977), p 127.

⁵⁹See Schuscheng, (1987), pp 4-28.

gynocentric Western feminist theories which have run the risk of regressing into biologicistic positions on gender by constructing notions of femininity as a positive counterpoint to masculinity,⁶⁰ Christa Wolf, while also searching for woman's place in history and subscribing to the need to re-discover and re-affirm her potential, has consistently highlighted that gender differences are in her view a historically and culturally determined problem. The historical period around 1800, when modern capitalism began, seemed to be a key stage in this process, re-establishing traditional gender roles after the hopes raised by the French Revolution, placing men firmly in the realm of production while forcing women back into that of reproduction. With the representatives of Early Romanticism, Christa Wolf found a generation of women writers who had already asked more radical questions with regard to the 'Zu-sich-Selber-Kommen des Menschen' and who, between the echoes of the French Revolution and the emerging scientific, technological and industrial age, voiced claims to establish themselves as 'Subjekte' in history, insisting on their desire "zu leben" instead of "gelebt zu werden." (GE, 165) But an emphasis on instrumental reason and on scientific and technological progress in patriarchal authoritarian society marginalized those who envisaged a different, more humane kind of social progress.

This situation marginalizes the male protagonist of Wolf's prose work *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (1979), Heinrich von Kleist, as much as her female protagonist Karoline von Günderode, eventually driving both to suicide. Neither of them fits a traditional image of man or woman, neither of them is able to conform to traditional gender roles and the characteristics associated with them.

Karoline von Günderode, a member of the impoverished nobility, is forced to reduce her aspirations in life to the role of wife and mother. However, as "Weib" with "Begierden wie ein Mann, ohne Männerkraft" (DdA II, 1978, 55), she cannot fulfil this expectation. The limitations of her narrow material existence leave her only mental activity and a withdrawal into her inner life as a place, an 'Ort' where she can overstep

⁶⁰See Weigel, (1989), p 31.

the limitations imposed on her. Only in her dreams and in her poetry and prose can she realize herself. However, her work, in which she gives expression to her deep, passionate and powerful emotions, is derided as un-feminine by the society of her time. Günderrode wears herself out as she pursues the conflicting aims of realizing herself through the creation of great poetry and literature in the classical model, while aspiring at the same time to find true love. She feels misunderstood as a woman and as a writer. The women surrounding her in the salon society of Wolf's narrative, being intellectual women like Günderrode, may, like Sophie Mereau or Lisette von Esenbeck, suffer in the narrow role assigned to them, but they shy away from conflict either for reasons of self-protection or because they have completely internalized the role of wife and mother who exists only in relation to man. They conform and adjust to existing circumstances, even at the cost of effacing themselves completely. Günderrode, by contrast, is uncompromizing in her demands. Interestingly enough, Wolf's essay on Bettine von Arnim⁶¹ outlines yet another possibility for women at the time. Bettine manages fully to realize her creative potential and herself only after she has been a wife and mother. She sets her own standards in her art and expresses herself in a literary form true to her subjective experience.

The male representatives of bourgeois society in *Kein Ort. Nirgends* all think and act within firmly fixed limits. It is sober facts and rationality which matter, and anybody seeking to overstep set limits is cast out by society as sick, criminal or untrustworthy. Reflections about autonomy, tolerance and humanity would interfere with social, economic and scientific progress. Consequently Günderrode, with her absolute demand for professional recognition and love is not taken seriously as a potential partner in marriage; the man she loves marries, instead, a kind-hearted, good-natured woman who fits the conventional understanding of womanhood and who has "das rechte Verhältnis von Selbständigkeit und Hingabe" (KON, 59).

⁶¹'Nun ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an. Ein Brief über die Bettine', in DdA II, 1979, pp 116-155.

Just as Wolf's depiction of Karoline von Günderode defies simplistic stereotypes, so her depiction of Heinrich von Kleist sketches an image of man not consistent with conventional notions of masculinity. A highly sensitive, sentimental artist, Kleist cannot conform to the role ascribed to him by society, which considers him a weakling and an outsider. He desperately seeks fame and glory as an artist, but, having been acquainted during the Napoleonic wars with the human capacity for destruction and being familiar on the basis of his own inner conflicts with the depths of the human soul, he finds it impossible to create literature which would conform to the classical model. The deep contradiction between his desire to see his artistic genius acknowledged and the impossibility of giving expression to his own, subjective experience in his art which could be necessary to achieve this, destroys him. He cannot see a third way, a middle way between the two poles, and aspires "alles zu erreichen oder alles für nichts zu halten" (KON, 108). His ambition, formally the source of his glory and power, turns into a self-destructive force.⁶²

Despite the similarities in the situation of the two main protagonists, there are also significant differences which are due largely to gender roles. Kleist is from the outset identified as the Romantic wanderer who, as a man, is expected to gather life experience and takes the appropriate opportunity. Günderode, the woman, by contrast, is confined to a life of extreme restriction. The passive role society expects her to play is underlined in the narrative by the way she is introduced to the reader: "Die Frau, Günderode, in den engen Zirkel gebannt, nachdenklich, hellsichtig, unangefochten durch Vergänglichkeit, entschlossen, der Unsterblichkeit zu leben, das Sichtbare dem Unsichtbaren zu opfern." (KON, 6)

Bernhard Greiner has referred to Wolf's work as "Schreiben aus der Perspektive des Verlierers",⁶³ which he takes to apply to the more universal and socio-political aspects of her writing as much as to the more personal and private aspects of individual

⁶²See Mechthild Quernheim, *Das moralische Ich: Kritische Studien zur Subjektwerdung in der Erzählprosa Christa Wolfs*, (Würzburg, 1990), p 216.

⁶³See Greiner, "'Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod'", in Mauser (ed.), (1985), p 115.

psychology. Viewed from this perspective, Wolf's aim is never the construction of antithetical frameworks, but rather an attempt to gain access to and an understanding of what has been negated, forgotten and suppressed, either by society and culture as a whole or by the self. Following an idea originally expressed by Walter Benjamin, Greiner calls this approach "Eingedenken".⁶⁴ Applied to *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, Wolf's aim may be interpreted as bringing back into present consciousness the demands for self-realization denied women by the historical development of a patriarchal social system which prevented them from finding "den ganzen Menschen" (KON, 94) and forced men "zur Selbstaufgabe, zur Selbstzerstückelung" (DdA II, 1978, 93). It constitutes also the "Eingedenken" of those aspects of the self which have been suppressed in the adopted identity of a victorious, established self. Greiner likens Wolf's writing to the approach adopted by writers of the Early Romantic period such as Friedrich Schlegel who, with *Lucinde*, refused to regard man and woman as opposites but searched rather for the "volle(n) ganze(n) Menschheit in jedem",⁶⁵ for the woman in man and for the man in woman. This constitutes the element of hope in *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, for example when Günderröde opposes Kleist's talk of the division of human beings into man and woman: "Das meinen Sie nicht, Kleist. Sie meinen, daß in Ihnen selbst Mann und Frau einander feindlich gegenüberstehen. Wie auch in mir." (KON, 105)

However, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* also constitutes the beginning of a distinctive shift in Wolf's work towards questions of individual psychology within the framework of intricate and complex intersubjective relationships. While portraying her protagonists as victims of their age, Wolf also clearly wishes us to acknowledge the self-destructive elements in their own nature⁶⁶, the "Mächte(n), die keinen Zweifel lassen, daß sie uns vernichten können, weil in uns selber etwas, das wir nicht kennen wollen, ihnen

⁶⁴ See Bernhard Greiner, 'Mit der Erzählung geh ich in den Tod', p. 116.

⁶⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*, Kap. 'Dithyrambische Phantasie über die schönste Situation'. Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, (vol. 5, Munich, 1962), p 10. Quoted here from Greiner, p 115.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of this aspect see David Jenkinson, 'Artist and Society in Christa Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends*', in *GDR: Individual and Society*, ed. Ingrid K.J. Williams, Conference Proceedings, Ealing College of Higher Education, (London, 1987), pp 136-142.

entgegenkommt." (KON, 12). Her interest in uncovering these blind spots comes to assume increasing importance for Christa Wolf. Uncovering the blind spots of a society or civilization, according to Wolf, often initially takes the form of self-searching, of "Selbsterforschung".⁶⁷ It is with *Sommerstück* that Christa Wolf conducts this search for the blind spots based on her own, immediate experience.

In *Sommerstück* the process of "Zu-sich-Selber-Kommen" is prevented partly by man and woman living together in marriage and by their different understanding of love. Bella in *Sommerstück*, like Karoline von Günderode, is trapped in an unhappy love relationship in which she suffers because the man she loves fails to 'see' her and cannot love her "wie sie es brauchen würde, gewaltlos und zärtlich und selbstlos und absolut" (SoStck, 134/135). Irene in the same prose work wears herself out in her possessive love for her husband. She wants to know his most intimate thoughts, while he withdraws from her the more she clings to him. Irene suffers because of the absolute love she expects, but through her focus on 'him' as her love object, she also fails to see herself. Her resulting unhappiness and dissatisfaction further erodes her energies and traps her, thereby preventing the realization of her own, individual aspirations in life. She becomes a prisoner of her love; "Liebe als Gefangenschaft" is, after all, the secret motto of the play performed in the narrative, where everyone is asked to play themselves.

Of the female figures in *Sommerstück* Luisa seems especially interesting as the character through whom Wolf expresses the idea that "wonach wir uns sehnen, als Möglichkeit in uns angelegt ist" (SoStck, 160). Luisa has a strong sense of beauty, she loves social gatherings, beautifully laid tables and houses filled with people. She is close to nature, peace-loving and has a deep, intuitive understanding and compassion for the suffering of others. She is especially open to the fears and anxieties of children, and is the only person who understands the fears of the little boy Jonas who literally has to arm himself at all times and withdraw into an imaginary fortress. She alone succeeds in changing his deeply internalized need to suppress his feelings. Because of her easy-going

⁶⁷Jenkinson, 'Artist and Society'.

nature, her true capacity to give and share joy of life and her gift for creating harmony in her environment, she is popular with everybody. But she is loved above all by men, for not only is she beautiful, she also inspires in them the illusion that she needs their protection. Even so, her positive qualities and the potential she has to offer in terms of philosophy and way of life have no status or value in the society in which she lives. Thus she is prevented from becoming conscious of her own potential and power. Her true self remains unknown. Her marriage to Antonis whose love she needs in order to feel secure, traps Luisa in a condition of powerlessness and vulnerability. Antonis, in turn, has categorized her as a childlike, fragile woman who needs his protection, whereby he boosts his own self-image as a strong man and protector and suppresses his fears. Since she accepts this and unconsciously colludes in her situation for the sake of marital harmony, her true potential cannot be realized.

Among the female figures in *Sommerstück* only Ellen, the figure based most strongly on the author herself, gains self-knowledge. Whereas Christa T. had, at the beginning of her marriage with Justus, "sich noch einmal neu geschaffen...von Grund auf, für Justus" (Christa T., 123), Ellen has to make a conscious effort to distance herself from her partner in order to gain a deeper understanding of her self. She is aware that patriarchal structures are part of her suppression and gains self-knowledge by identifying the language and ideology of her society as "fremde Macht" and "Fremdkörper".⁶⁸ But the "Rückzug auf sich selbst" also allows her to identify and question her own inner resistance and psychological barriers to change. Thereby she creates the possibility of finding a new identity in the future. The process of renewal and transformation, the narrative suggests, is inextricably linked to the gaining of self-knowledge through self-questioning.

Ellen's daughter Jenny has acquired an inner independence which permits her to resist the pressure to conform as well as transcending false consciousness in the sense of

⁶⁸For a detailed discussion of this aspect see Ricarda Schmidt, 'The Concept of Identity in Recent East and West German Women's Writing', in Arthur Williams and Stuart Parkes, (eds.), *The Individual, Identity, and Innovation in Contemporary German Language and Literature*, (Oxford/New York, 1990).

'Alltagsmythen'. She critically exposes romantic love and the institution of marriage as 'myths' which objectify women. In contrast to Luisa and the other women of the older generation, Jenny is full of self-confidence, distrustful and critical of her environment and fully independent of men's attitudes to her as far as her own self-image is concerned. Her relationship with Anton is, like Cassandra's with Aeneas, based on deep understanding and trust. But as in the case of Günderrode and Kleist, the love which ties Anton and Jenny is not sexual, a fact explicitly stated by the narrator of *Sommerstück* (SoStck, 149), but a brotherly-sisterly love. Just as Kleist and Günderrode in the one work and Cassandra and Aeneas in the other are unable to share a life together, Anton and Jenny will have to separate. It seems then, that Christa Wolf considers it just as impossible today for man and woman to live together as autonomous subjects in a sexual or romantic love relationship as it was in the past. Man and woman may have to go their separate ways for a time in order to allow both to achieve their "Subjektwerdung".

Anton, like Kleist and Aeneas, does not fit any conventional or traditional notion of masculinity. He has made the conscious decision to reject social success. He is not prepared to compromise his own demands in life for professional success and social recognition at the cost of self-denial. Anton has self-knowledge, which permits him to see that many of the problems of his fellow human beings are rooted in "ihre(r) Unbekanntheit mit sich selbst" (SoStck, 149). Like Aeneas, Anton is "anders" (SoStck, 150), he represents the middle way between the bipolar fixed notions of masculinity and femininity. It is this third way which Wolf considers to provide some hope that bipolar notions about gender and the alienation between the sexes associated with them might at some point in the future be overcome. Anton and Jenny, as the members of the younger generation, suggest that this process has already begun.

A counterpoint to Anton within the narrative of *Sommerstück* is presented in the figure of Clemens, the successful medical professor who has channelled all his energy into professional success and social recognition and who has postponed the fulfilment of his private desires and wishes until his retirement. The price for his success has been self-

denial and self-suppression; any questioning of his way of life and the origin of his increasing frustration would threaten the carefully constructed edifice of his life. In order to feel comfortable he has to avoid self-criticism and self-questioning at all costs and hold on to a fixed identity and to an established and ossified value system. He objectifies women, needing their attention to boost his self-image and to confirm his sense of power and influence. His subconscious frustration and fear manifest themselves regularly in violent outbursts of jealousy and anger and put a considerable stress on his marriage and private life. Clemens exemplifies a particular type of man whom the reader frequently encounters in Wolf's work and whom I have called the "Faust-Typ", standing for a belief in facts, scientific and technological progress and instrumental reason. He measures life with the "grobe Instrumente" of scientific observation, not with the fine tools of intuition and human understanding which Wolf, as a writer, employs to uncover the blind spots in society and culture.

Christa Wolf seems to consider the professional system and a different understanding of love as two factors which cause self-alienation. In her essay 'Krankheit und Liebesentzug' of 1984 she posed a question which Virginia Woolf had already asked in 1938 and which, according to Christa Wolf, has lost none of its topicality today, despite the weakening of fixed gender roles. Virginia Woolf had found that professionally successful men apparently lose "ihre Sinne, ihre Sprache, ihre Gesundheit" and asked whether the qualities they had to develop instead "nicht geradewegs zum Krieg führen". (DdA II, 1984, 289). And when Alfred Nehring questioned Wolf about the filming of her short prose narrative 'Selbstversuch' in 1991, she pointed out that the question "wie es eigentlich zu diesem Gefühlsdefizit, besonders bei den Männern komme" (ID, 113) had been the central problem of her short prose narrative. Her work provided ample evidence for her concern with the question how

ein kleines Kind, ein kleines männliches Kind hindressiert wird auf die Unterdrückung von Gefühlen, und wie stark dann in der späteren Entwicklung als Junge, junger Mann und dann eben als Mann die Selbstverleugnung bis hin zum

Selbsthaß ihm von der Gesellschaft abgefordert wird. (ID, 113)

And it is in this sense that Christa Wolf believes women might, on the basis of their different biological, historical and socio-cultural experience, be able to temporarily offer help. In her conversation with Schoeller in 1979 she pointed out:

Bestimmt wird bei uns nicht der Trend eintreten, daß Frauen gegen Männer eine Front bilden. Es kann eine Periode kommen, in der Frauen den Männern in diesem mit Zahlen nicht zu messenden Bereich, wo es nicht um Produktionsziffern geht - nämlich bei der Frage, wie man miteinander lebt - helfen können. (DdA II, 1979, 419/20).

It is possible, in conclusion, to summarize as follows. Christa Wolf's engagement with the question of femininity and masculinity has become increasingly complex since she wrote her short prose narrative 'Selbstversuch'. It is true that she clearly identifies with her female protagonists and that her criticism is increasingly levelled at a certain representation of masculinity. But to accuse her of simplistic gender stereotyping, of creating a myth of womanhood or of bipolar thinking where matriarchal equates with living and patriarchal with killing⁶⁹ seems to me to be unjustified. I would argue that the extremely complex fabric Wolf has woven with her work reveals rather that she is, with an increasing sense of disquiet, aiming to uncover the blind spots of individual identity and psychology as well as those of societies and civilizations in order to heighten awareness and create space for change from established patterns of thought. This is in her view an essential pre-requisite for a turning back from the path of self-destruction on which European culture and civilization seemed to be headed in the early 1980s. Women.

⁶⁹This was suggested, for example, by Ricarda Schmidt in her discussion of Wolf's *Kassandra*, in 'Arbeit an weiblicher Subjektivität. Erzählende Prosa der siebziger und achtziger Jahre', in Gisela Brinker-Gabler (ed.), *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, (vol. 2, Munich, 1988), pp 459-477, p 475.

on the basis of their different historical and cultural experiences, can play an important role in this process.

3. KASSANDRA: THE CULMINATION OF WOLF'S EMANCIPATION AS A WRITER

3.1 Learning to read the myth: women's writing and historical consciousness

European culture is replete with mythic figures, extending from the heroes of early Greek myth, most notably Prometheus, Odysseus, and Oedipus, to more recent products of Germanic and Romance literature such as Faust and Don Juan. Since the versatility and richness of such mythological material has held a particular attraction for writers across many centuries, one encounters in literature a host of variations on mythological stories and a continuous tradition of working through mythic themes. As I have explained earlier, through myth an author can access an extremely wide and deep framework of suggestive reference, allowing his or her work to be understood in its broadest cultural context. As a result, literary appropriations or transformations of mythological material have provided insights into evolving literary traditions as well as into significant social changes from ancient to modern times. As embodiments of fundamental truths about human nature, myths and their modern re-appropriations provide a rich tapestry of meaning which is virtually incomparable in communicative force and interpretative possibility. Like literature, the myth points beyond the events it describes or the issues it defines to a wider realm of ideas, providing insights also into the more elusive aspects of human experience over the millennia.

With *Kassandra*, Christa Wolf was one of the first prose writers in the GDR to work on myth.¹ Although dramatists like Heiner Müller had used mythological themes since the

¹Of the older generation of GDR authors only Anna Seghers had explored mythological material; *Das Argonautenschiff* was published in the GDR in 1953, and *Sagen von Artemis*, written in exile, was

mid-1960s as parables for illustrating contemporary social problems in the GDR, the Nazi abuse of myth had generally created a barrier to a fresh exploration of such material. It was Franz Fühmann's seminal essay 'Das mythologische Element in der Literatur' of 1974 which performed the crucial task of reinstating myth as a productive medium for GDR prose writers to explore.² Fühmann made the point that mythological material has the capacity to create that distinctive cathartic 'Kunsterlebnis' which leaves the reader in a state of "Bewegtsein, Angerührtsein, Gepacktsein, Ergriffensein."³ According to Fühmann, the myth allows the contemporary author "die individuelle Erfahrung, mit der man ja wiederum allein wäre, an Modellen von Menschheitserfahrung zu messen."⁴ The mythic quality, he explained, needs to be "so erfahren, wie man die [Wirkung] von Kunst erfahren muß. Möge Ihnen Hesiod oder Aischylus oder die Helena-Szene im 'Faust' dann begegnen, wenn Sie sie brauchen, und Sie werden es besser wissen als aus zehn Lektionen."⁵ In the late 1970s Hans Blumenberg also emphasized from a West German perspective the continued relevance of mythological material, arguing that work on myth has uncovered historical patterns which have survived across the millennia: "Die Geschichte sagt, [...] daß es schon immer so oder fast immer so gewesen ist wie gegenwärtig."⁶ Hence the need for a re-engagement with myth increases in times of rapid change or social crisis. Blumenberg suggested, furthermore, that the process of working on myth has uncovered recurring patterns of repressed or unresolved traumata on the one hand, and of unfulfilled hopes and utopian longings on the other.

When Wolf approached the Cassandra material, she was clearly aware of these ideas; but, as her Frankfurt lectures tell us, she conducted a substantial amount of further research in order to establish her particular focus of interest. Her account of her sudden fascination with the Cassandra figure in her first Frankfurt lecture suggests that this

published in 1966. Irmtraud Morgner, like Christa Wolf, turned to myth in the early 1980s with *Amanda* (1983).

²Franz Fühmann, 'Das mythische Element in der Literatur', in Franz Fühmann, *Wandlung. Wahrheit. Würde. Aufsätze und Gespräche 1964-1981*, (Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1985), pp 51-120. For a discussion of the role this essay played in GDR culture, see Dennis Tate, *Franz Fühmann. Innovation and Authenticity*, (Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1995), pp 149 ff.

³Franz Fühmann, 'Das mythische Element in der Literatur', p 56.

⁴Ibid., p 67.

⁵Ibid., p 105.

⁶Blumenberg, (1979), p 41.

mythological material had assumed for her the particular personal significance which Fühmann described in his essay. However, her decision to use this material was clearly not only internally motivated. As has generally been the case with Wolf's prose work, the creative impulse for *Kassandra* was triggered through the subtle interplay of internal motivation and external circumstances, a process she described in her essay on Bettine von Arnim: "Staunen Sie gehörig, wie fein die äußeren Verhältnisse zusammenspielen können mit den innersten Bedürfnissen einer Person?" (DdA II, 1979, 127) In the first part of the thesis, I identified three main areas of concern as having formed the focus of Christa Wolf's attention in the early 1980s: her feminist critique of patriarchal culture and society, her insistence that literature must make a contribution to "Friedensforschung" (DdA II, 1980, 167), and her resolve to continue through writing a process of personal emancipation from deeply ingrained patterns of thought which she likened to a process of mourning and of coming to terms with her more immediate past. My analysis of Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* here will focus on these three aspects in an endeavour to demonstrate the author's achievement of emancipation through the completion of this project.

In male literature, new work on myth can be carried out from within a continuous tradition of literary appropriations and transformations of myth. The woman writer, in contrast, can draw neither on a tradition of women rewriting myths, nor on a tradition of women as historical agents. As a writer by definition is also always a reader, the woman writer, furthermore, is confronted with the problem that the female figures she encounters in mythological material are the creations of men; they have been shaped in accordance with a male-biased conceptual universe and they have been defined in relation to this. In the real, the imaginary and in the symbolic order of our culture, women have been the objects, not the subjects of the other's thought. They have been expected to identify with and adapt to male representations and self-representations of human experience. Adriana Cavarero, an Italian feminist philosopher whose work on mythology has aimed at reinscribing into a masculine symbolic framework authentic representations of the feminine, has described the problems facing women in a male conceptual universe as follows:

a female intellectual worker wishing to make a contribution to the destiny of the West is expected to recognize herself in the blueprint of Prometheus, Odysseus, and Faust, although she does not share their sexual identity. [...] what remains constant is that a woman, thought up by man in his image and un-likeness, lacks a mythic figure that can represent her as a female subjectivity capable of taking shape within her own symbolic order. Instead, she finds herself already reconfigured, and is obliged to recognize herself in the imaginary of the other. [...]The female subject searching for figures of her own comes face to face with stereotypes from the age-old process of deporting the feminine into the destiny of Man.⁷

Feminist scholars like Cavarero have devised strategies which take account of woman's absence in male culture and civilization.⁸ Wolf's approach to the myth, as her extensive reading list in her Frankfurt lectures confirms, has been informed by feminist thought, although by no means exclusively.

When she engaged with the Cassandra material, Wolf discovered that familiar patterns of gender stereotyping were already in place in the literature of ancient Greece. Women appear in the myth "als Verführerinnen, als Gattinnen, Mütter (also natürlich in bezug zum Mann), und eben auch [als] Unglücksprophetin, Cassandra." (FPV, 128) For the greatest part of history, women have not only been excluded from public life and power, they have also been denied subjectivity and an authentic voice in literary traditions since ancient times. Wolf was thus confronted not only with the absence of a female tradition she could draw on, but also with the fact that authentic representations of the feminine in

⁷Adriana Cavarero, *In spite of Plato. A feminist rewriting of ancient philosophy*, translated into English by Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio and Áine O'Healy, (Cambridge, 1995), p 3. The fact that Christa Wolf has quoted Cavarero in her most recent narrative, *Medea*, makes this a particularly interesting connection.

⁸Cavarero, who has worked mainly on mythological material, has taken the bold decision to 'steal' the female figure who has been imprisoned in the male textual framework (the house of the father) in order to set her free in a new, feminine text (the house of the mother) where her subjectivity can finally take shape. Cavarero's ideas are, of course, somewhat more complex than this and I cannot possibly do justice to her theory here. Basing her approach on the figure of Penelopes, the archetypal figure of woman as weaver, for instance, Cavarero identifies inadequacies and inconsistencies in the fabric of the male text which are the holes through which she steals the female figure. The symbolic act of 'unweaving' the male matrix and of 'weaving' an alternative, female 'Gewebe' is central to her argument that women can only escape from the male conceptual universe in which they are trapped if they have understood from within the patterns which the male tapestry has woven.

European culture are still rare. As a woman writer committed to expressing herself authentically, Wolf was concerned to bring to bear her subjective experience on the mythological material, allowing Cassandra to emerge from the misrepresentation she had suffered throughout the centuries in patriarchal texts and traditions.

With Cassandra, Christa Wolf has chosen a female mythological figure who denotes the beginning of woman's absence from history: "In Cassandra ist eine der ersten Frauengestalten überliefert, deren Schicksal vorformt, was dann, dreitausend Jahre lang, den Frauen geschehen soll: daß sie zum Objekt gemacht werden." (FPV, 86) When she embarks on a reading of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* at the beginning of her quest for the historical truth behind the mythological figure, Wolf immediately recognizes Cassandra as a "Gefangene" and as an "Objekt fremder Zwecke" (FPV, 10), suggesting that the mythological figure is not merely a prisoner of the victorious Greeks after the fall of Troy, but that she has been imprisoned and objectified also in the text of the Greek poet. Cassandra's object status within Aeschylus's *Oresteia* is underlined, furthermore, by the fact that Wolf, as a female reader, feels alienated by his portrayal of the figure. The words Aeschylus has Cassandra utter just before she enters Agamemnon's palace at Mycenae to face her death, for instance, provoke Wolf's spontaneous protest: "Nie hätte sie gesagt: Auch drinnen kann ich/Agamemnons Los beweinen. - Agamemnon - der letzte in der Reihe der Männer, die ihr Gewalt antaten (der erste war Apoll, der Gott) - ihn beweinen? Da müßte ich sie schlecht kennen." (FPV, 15) Other indignant reactions to Aeschylus's text - such as "Auf wessen Seite steht eigentlich dieser Aischylos? Oder versucht er das Kunststück, einem jeden gerecht zu werden" (FPV, 12), and "Was will sie denn: unsterblich sein? Als Frau? Woran erinnert sich der Grieche dunkel, wenn er solche Frauen schafft?" (FPV, 18) - underline the point that Wolf as a female reader feels decidedly uneasy about the portrayal of the figure in the male text.

These initial responses to ancient Greek literature form the starting point for Christa Wolf's radical feminist critique of patriarchal culture in her Frankfurt lectures. Guided by the overarching question, "Wer war Cassandra, ehe irgendeiner über sie schrieb?" (FPV, 127), Wolf undertakes a comprehensive examination of the patriarchal network of literary

traditions which has imprisoned and objectified the mythological figure Cassandra for thousands of years. As Anna Kuhn has suggested, Wolf's critique of some of the major literary traditions in European culture, from ancient to modern times, may be viewed as a feminist "re-vision" in the sense suggested by Adrienne Rich: "Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: its is an act of survival."⁹ In the literature of ancient Greece Wolf identifies the historical origins of deep-seated patterns in patriarchal culture which have survived all historical ruptures to the present day. The objectification of women in male art and literature, Wolf suggests, is not merely a result of women's exclusion from public life and power, but also of complex psychological processes of repression, of an "unaufhörliche[] Verdrängung weiblicher Kultur, weiblicher Lebensansprüche [...]." (DdA II, 1982, 209) In her feminist analysis of Kleist's *Penthesilea*¹⁰ as well as in her Frankfurt lectures, Wolf attributes this continuous repression of the feminine to men's deep-seated fears of women as the 'other'. Wolf traces these fears, which have been deeply buried in the collective memory of our culture and civilization, back to the origins of our civilization when matriarchal societies were superseded by patriarchal culture. With its emphasis on conflict and domination, patriarchal culture based its progress on the exploitation and domination of all nature, a process which found its expression in the symbolic order by the replacement of the mother or of female earth goddesses by the Greek gods. This 'matricide' which lies at the beginning of our culture, Wolf believes (and here she echoes the ideas of feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigaray and Adriana Cavarero), is one of the blind spots which patriarchal culture has been unwilling to attack ever since. The antithetical portrayal of women in literature is one way in which this continuous repression of the symbolic 'mother' has manifested itself. Women have tended to be either demonized or idolized (with Medea or Clytaimnestra as an example of the former, and the beautiful Helena as an example of the latter), a phenomenon which may, from a psychological perspective, be explained as the

⁹See the chapter on *Kassandra* in Kuhn, (1988), p 178. She quotes Rich from her essay 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', in *College English*, (34/1, October 1972), pp 18f.

¹⁰See 'Kleist's *Penthesilea*', in DdA II, 1982, pp 204-220.

projection of fears and anxieties about the suppression of the symbolic 'mother' on the one hand, and of man's unfulfilled yearnings for a return to an original harmony with nature on the other.¹¹ The appropriation and re-appropriation of literary traditions from ancient to modern times has perpetuated rather than exposed these patterns of repression. Taking the view that Greek culture provided an appropriate model for the realization of the classical ideals of "eine edle Einfalt und eine stille Größe" (DdA II, 1982, 207), the Weimar classicists, for instance, appropriated Greek drama without questioning "wie weit die [Überlieferung] vom Bedürfnis eines Siegevölkeres, einer Klasse innerhalb dieses Volkes geprägt war, was alles sie also ausschließen, verdrängen, verteufeln mußten." (DdA II, 1982, 207) Whereas Goethe and Schiller still undertook the "Gang zu den Müttern" with a considerable degree of awe, contemporary culture has retained only the fear of woman: "Schauder ist zusammengesetzt aus Ehrfurcht und Furcht. Den Heutigen, denke ich oft, ist nur die Furcht geblieben." (FPV, 138) Even recent exponents of male European culture such as Thomas Mann and Karl Kerényi are, as Wolf suggests, not entirely free of such repressions: "Eine untergründige Angst vor der Bedrohung durch 'die Mütter' - auch bei Mann-Kerényi scheint sie durch [...]." (FPV, 102) In view of such persistent historical patterns, Wolf, as a woman writer with a feminist consciousness, considers it essential to question not only all traditions which relate to the Cassandra myth, but all literary traditions in European culture which have created alienation.

Whilst Wolf has reservations about Thomas Mann on account of the fact that he reproduced particular patterns of patriarchal thought, her Frankfurt lectures emphasize, as Colin Smith has observed, that Mann's psychological reading of myths offered important opportunities for literature.¹² A "Psychologisierung des Mythos", Mann had suggested,

¹¹Illuminating analyses of the role of female images in male culture have been provided by Inge Stephan, "'Bilder und immer wieder Bilder...'. Überlegungen zur Untersuchung von Frauenbildern in männlicher Literatur', in *Die verborgene Frau. Sechs Beiträge zu einer feministischen Literaturwissenschaft*, Literatur im historischen Prozeß, edition 6, (Hamburg, 1988), pp 15-34, and by Rosemarie Zeplin, 'Romanfrauen und ihre Schöpfer. Männliche Projektion und weibliche Imagination', in *Zeichen der Zeit*, (11/1985), pp 269-276.

¹²Smith, pp 255 ff. I am indebted to Colin Smith's study for ideas relating to Wolf's adoption of Thomas Mann's approach to mythology and to Wolf's reservations about the manner in which some strands of Western feminist thought have re-interpreted mythological material.

might provide a means of humanizing myth, "den Mythos den faschistischen Dunkelmännern aus den Händen zu nehmen und ihn ins Humane 'umzufunktionieren'." (FPV, 104)

In reclaiming myth for contemporary literature, Wolf is concerned to strike a balance between a critique of patriarchal culture and uncritical acceptance of the more extreme readings of this material by representatives of some strands of Western feminist theory. Her undisguised criticism in her Frankfurt lectures of the two American feminists, Helen and Sue, who visit Crete in order to prove their "These, daß auf Kreta die Frauen den Ton angaben und daß dies den Menschen gut bekommen war" (FPV, 45), makes the point that this is not the feminism she identifies with. In Wolf's opinion, a feminist recourse to mythology which searches for "eine Insel der Seligen außerhalb der Koordinaten ihrer Zeit" (FPV, 57), would constitute escapism and would only perpetuate the very antithetical patterns of thought she seeks to overcome: "Die Literatur des Abendlandes, lese ich, sei eine Reflexion des weißen Mannes auf sich selbst. Soll nun die Reflexion der weißen Frau auf sich selbst dazukommen? Und weiter nichts?" (FPV, 84)¹³ Wolf is far from entertaining such sentimental ideas about matriarchal cultures in ancient times as those put forward by some strands of Western feminist thought. Her more balanced view also takes into account darker aspects of these cultures, such as the practice of human sacrifice. Wolf's observations allow us to perceive, furthermore, that this matriarchal order had no concept of individual identity, a factor which creates a fundamental contradiction to women's quest for identity. Any real changes to bipolar notions about gender, Christa Wolf insists, need to be based on self-knowledge, which means taking account of the contradictory experiences women have actually gone through in patriarchal culture and society, even if this means embracing uncomfortable truths. This process, as her Cassandra figure has understood, involves finding the courage to attack one's own self-image: "Das schwierigste nicht scheuen, das Bild von sich selbst ändern." (K, 25) Wolf clearly distances herself from feminist positions which ultimately substitute a "Männlichkeitswahn" by an equally dangerous "Weiblichkeitswahn" (FPV, 115). What Wolf seeks to promote, rather, is the development of personal maturity and autonomy:

¹³Wolf is referring her to Sarah Kirsch's poem 'Ende des Jahres' which she quotes in her third Frankfurt lecture.

[Es bringt uns, RR] der Fähigkeit zur Reife nicht näher, wenn die Errungenschaften vernünftigen Denkens, nur weil Männer sie hervorgebracht haben, von Frauen zugunsten einer Idealisierung vorrationaler Menschheitsetappen über Bord geworfen werden. [...] Es gibt keinen Weg vorbei an der Persönlichkeitsbildung, an rationalen Modellen der Konfliktlösung, das heißt auch an der Auseinandersetzung und Zusammenarbeit mit Andersdenkenden und, selbstverständlich, Andersgeschlechtlichen. Autonomie ist eine Aufgabe für jedermann, und Frauen, die sich auf ihre Weiblichkeit als einen Wert zurückziehen, handeln im Grunde, wie es ihnen adressiert wurde: Sie reagieren mit einem großangelegten Ausweichmanöver auf die Herausforderung der Realität an ihre ganze Person. (FPV, 115-116)

Wolf's approach to the female mythological figure is historically concrete: "Mein Anliegen bei der Cassandra-Figur: Rückführung aus dem Mythos in die (gedachten) sozialen und historischen Koordinaten." (FPV, 111) In order to establish these historical coordinates, Wolf draws on a variety of sources illuminating ancient history, among them Robert von Ranke-Graves' *Griechische Mythologie*¹⁴ and the archaeological studies of Heinrich Schliemann. Wolf shares with the authors of these works the view that "die griechische Frühgeschichte kein Mythos ist - richtiger: daß die Mythen 'Wahrheit' spiegeln." (FPV, 116) In her Frankfurt lectures Wolf tells us repeatedly that the mythological figure Cassandra is to be understood as a historical figure, not as an imaginary creation of Homer or Aeschylus. She seeks to formulate questions "die Cassandra aus Mythos und Literatur herauslösen können", insists "es gab sie!" (FPV, 144), and emphasizes that her goal is "zu zeigen, wie die historische Cassandra, von der ich ausgehe, und ihre historische Umgebung durch Ritual, Kult, Glauben und Mythos gelenkt werden, während für uns das *gesamte* Material 'mythisch' ist." (FPV, 119) Wolf's historicization of the mythological figure suggests that women need to unearth their historical roots as autonomous beings inside material history, not by going "aus der Zeit." (K, 138) This had also been Bettine von Arnim's understanding, as the latter explained in a letter to Karoline von Günderrode:

¹⁴Robert von Ranke-Graves, *Griechische Mythologie*, (Hamburg, 1984).

'Drum schien mir die Geschichte wesentlich, um das träge Pflanzenleben Deiner Gedanken aufzufrischen ... Sei mir ein bißchen standhaft, trau mir, daß der Geschichtsboden für Deine Phantasien, Deine Begriffe ganz geeignet, ja notwendig ist. - Wo willst Du dich selber fassen, wenn Du keinen Boden unter Dir hast?' (DdA II, 1978, 89)

Within these material co-ordinates of time and space, however, a fresh understanding of what we have come to accept as 'reality' and 'reason' needs to be developed. The complexity and the totality of human experience, Wolf insists, cannot be reduced to instrumental reason or to scientific facts. The myth captures this new perception of reality which Wolf aims at promoting through literature:

Den Mythos lesen lernen ist ein Abenteuer eigener Art; eine allmähliche eigne Verwandlung setzt diese Kunst voraus, eine Bereitschaft, der scheinbar leichten Verknüpfung von phantastischen Tatsachen, von dem Bedürfnis der jeweiligen Gruppe angepaßten Überlieferungen, Wünschen und Hoffnungen, Erfahrungen und Techniken der Magie - kurz, einem anderen Inhalt des Begriffs 'Wirklichkeit' sich hinzugeben. (FPV, 57)

In learning to read the myth and in updating it for the contemporary context, however, women writers must not fall into the trap of either re-creating patriarchal discourses or of regressing into self-deceptive escapisms into romantic phantasies of a pre-Hellenistic, idyllic matriarchal order.¹⁵

Although Christa Wolf returns with *Kassandra* to the origins of European culture and civilization, her immediate concern remains the illumination of the present. One aspect which fascinated Wolf about mythology was its potential to illuminate historical patterns, the

¹⁵In her essay 'Der weiße Kreis', Christa Wolf has re-emphasized the point that any escapism into romantic phantasies constitutes a dangerous deflection from the very serious deadlock European culture and society seems to have arrived at: "Zu den frühesten Vorfahren, die, mag sein, friedlich in ungegliederten Verhältnissen lebten, führt kein Weg zurück. Es gibt die leere Stelle nicht, in die hinein sich ein Paradies entwerfen ließe, und die alten Paradiese würden uns Heutigen eher kleine Höllen sein. Rückzüge und Auswege dieser Art sind uns versagt, zur Zeit probieren wir Seitensprünge, Winkelzüge, hinhaltende Manöver und täuschen uns und andere." (DdA I, 1985, 459).

"Wiederkehr des Gleichen." (K, 141) As 'Modelle von Menschheitserfahrungen' and as the first written documents providing insights into ancient history, Greek myths, Wolf discovered, had already excluded the authentic experiences of women as autonomous individuals. The stories transmitted to us across the millennia are stories about the heroic deeds of men, a "Geschichte als Heldengeschichte." (FPV, 117) As a result of women's exclusion from public life and power, European culture and civilization lacks a historical consciousness of women's authentic experiences, a factor Wolf considers to denote "diejenige Schwachstelle der Kultur, aus der heraus sie selbstzerstörerisch wird, nämlich ihre Unfähigkeit zur Reife." (FPV, 115) Women's (hi)story, Wolf explains, has yet to be recorded: "Geschichten von ihr, über sie kennen wir, doch ihre Geschichte - eine Geschichte unglaublicher Anstrengung und Tapferkeit, aber auch unglaublicher Selbstverleugnung und Entsagung gegenüber den Ansprüchen ihrer Natur - wäre noch zu schreiben." (FPV, 145)

With *Kassandra*, Christa Wolf has aimed at making a contribution to the process of unearthing women's authentic experiences in European history in order to allow them to become visible as 'Subjekte'. The development of a historical consciousness which is based on the subjective experiences of individuals within historically concrete socio-political and ideological frameworks has been a recurrent theme in Wolf's work. In an interview in the late 1970s she explained:

I believe that literature can take as its framework, say, a Marxist view of history without itself being an illustration of that view. Instead - and this is my own opinion, which many will not share - it should re-create these historical processes in a highly individual way as they function in people, and not merely illustrate them.¹⁶

In *Kassandra*, as in her previous narratives, it is the 'Erinnerung', the process of remembering one's own history with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of it, which structures the narrative. The portrayal of the discovery of an inner truth, Wolf has explained, is what she understands by 'realism' in art: "In irgendeiner Form werde ich immer wieder

¹⁶McPherson, 'Christa Wolf in Edinburgh', p 8.

dazu gedrängt, mich zu erinnern, oder eine Figur, die mit mir in einer Verbindung steht, sich erinnern zu lassen. Nur das kann ich für realistisch halten, das ist meine Art, Realismus zu produzieren."¹⁷

Kassandra is aware that it is her name which will go down in history, together with the stigma the victorious Greeks have attached to her: "Ich, die Schreckliche. Ich, die wollte, daß Troia untergeht." (K, 14) Of her inner truth and of the totality of her emotional experiences, however, nothing will remain:

So Wichtiges wird nie ein Mensch von uns erfahren. Die
Täfelchen der Schreiber, die in Troias Feuer härteten,
überliefern die Buchführung des Palastes, Getreide, Krüge,
Waffen, Gefangene. Für Schmerz, Glück, Liebe gibt es
keine Zeichen. Das kommt mir wie ein ausgesuchtes
Unglück vor. (K, 89)

Women's literature, Wolf believes, can play a role in filling this void. With *Kassandra*, the author seeks to uncover the historical truth of women's authentic experiences in European culture and civilization. In Wolf's narrative, the mythological figure tells her story in her own voice, not as the object of the literary text, but as its subject: "Mit meiner Stimme sprechen: das Äußerste. Mehr, andres hab ich nicht gewollt." (K, 6). The protagonist's painful process of remembering her life is neither linear nor chronological, but emotionally determined. In this way Wolf's narrative provides a historical perspective which Sonja Hilzinger has described as a "Geschichtsbetrachtung von unten". This perspective, which illuminates history against the grain, Hilzinger suggests, "könnte von Frauen, die seit dieser Zeitenwende zu den Unterdrückten gehören, getragen sein."¹⁸ Wolf's recourse to a period in the development of our civilization which marks the beginning of woman's absence from patriarchal historical writing is, by implication, also a way for the author to appreciate that her history is gendered and that her life is interwoven with the lives of other women in both past and present. The fact that Kassandra begins to 'see' herself as both a 'Subjekt' and as an

¹⁷Documentation: Christa Wolf, p 109.

¹⁸Sonja Hilzinger, *Kassandra. Über Christa Wolf*, (Frankfurt/Main, 1984), p 9.

'Objekt' within complex historical processes through the support of the community at Mount Ida, furthermore, suggests that intersubjectivity and open, democratic processes of communication play an important role in the creation of a historical consciousness which overcomes alienation. In the myth Wolf finds preserved oral traditions which capture the essence of human experience along with the particular magic woven by the individual 'author' of a story. Wolf's narrative suggests that these traditions, which have stayed as closely as possible to real life, can provide appropriate models for contemporary women's writing, provided they are passed on by a narrator who has personal integrity as well as the ability to transcend false consciousness. When Cassandra remembers her story and the story of her people she has acquired these qualities. In the face of death, she has liberated herself from all false allegiances as well as from any personal need to protect a false image of herself: "Mein Hang, mich zu rechtfertigen, sollte sich, so kurz vor mir selbst, erledigt haben." (K, 6) She has undertaken the painful task of gaining self-knowledge which Wolf considers a precondition for the process of 'Zu-sich-selber-Kommen', and she has learned to unmask the 'false myths' of the palace as mechanisms through which Troy's male rulers legitimize their destructive causes and exercise their abuse of power. In the hour of her death, Cassandra has a momentary vision of the process through which the writing of women's history might begin. She wishes to be sent

einen Schreiber, oder, besser noch, eine junge Sklavin mit scharfem Gedächtnis und kraftvoller Stimme. Verfüge, daß sie, was sie von mir hört, ihrer Tochter weitersagen darf. Die wieder ihrer Tochter, und so fort. So daß neben dem Strom der Heldenlieder dies winzige Rinnsal, mühsam, jene fernen, vielleicht glücklicheren Menschen, die einst leben werden, auch erreichte. (K, 93)

The historical co-ordinates which determine Cassandra's fate do not permit her wish to be granted, and Cassandra knows this, but her vision has been preserved in Wolf's narrative as a utopian element which can be made productive by women writers today.¹⁹ With her

¹⁹The fact that Wolf at one stage planned to use the Cassandra material for a 'Hörspiel' in which Cassandra passes on her story to her daughter underlines the point that Wolf considers writing which is

Frankfurt lectures, in which Wolf explores a variety of personal literary forms, the author has endeavoured to put these ideas into practice. Inextricably intertwining the threads of her own experiences in the contemporary context with those of the mythological figure, Wolf's method of appropriating history ensures authenticity, subjectivity and contemporaneity.

Authenticity and subjectivity are also ensured in Wolf's narrative through the particular way in which Cassandra remembers important episodes of her conflict-filled life. Of the period before she embarks on the journey to herself, that is, before she has distanced herself from the self-alienating manipulations of men like Panthoos, Cassandra has only a faint memory: "Meine Erinnerung an jene Zeit ist blaß, ich hatte keine Gefühle." (K, 32) Once she has acquired self-knowledge and once she has begun to liberate herself from the object-status imposed on her in the palace, however, Cassandra has an "Angst-Gedächtnis. Ein Gefühls-Gedächtnis." (K, 120) This refuses to retain precisely those facts which have traditionally formed the basis of history as it has been recorded by men. "Wie oft hast du gelacht", she explains to Aineias,

daß ich dir, wenn du wieder mal zurückgekommen warst, nicht den Bericht über die Ereignisse erstatten konnte, den du erwartetest. Wer wen auf welche Weise umgebracht, wer in der Hierarchie am Steigen oder Sinken war, wer sich in wen verliebt, wer wem die Frau gestohlen hatte - du mußt es bei anderen erfragen. Ich wußte es natürlich, daran lag es nicht. Wer nicht in die Ereignisse verstrickt ist, erfährt am meisten. Doch ohne meinen Willen nahm mein Gedächtnis diese Tatsachen einfach nicht ernst genug. Als seien sie nicht wirklich. Nicht wirklich genug. Als seien es Schatten-Taten. (K, 121)

Hence, Wolf's insistence in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* that the emotional and psychological circumstances of the individual, the "Spuren, die die Ereignisse in unserm Innern hinterlassen" (Chr.T., 170), deserve just as much attention as those phenomena more readily accepted as significant social facts, is now more radically stated. In view of the deadlock European culture and civilization has arrived at, Wolf seeks to promote the

based on these ideas to provide a model for an ethically sound and democratically based literature. See Hörnigk, (1989), p 206.

development of a historical consciousness in which the emotional and psychological reality of the individual, his/her entire 'Gefühls- und Erfahrungswelt', are predominant. In this way, we might again be able to focus our attentions on life, not on destruction, war, and death. Women's writing, Wolf has emphasized, can make a contribution to this process:

Der heutigen Nekrophilie, die sich in Stahl, Glas, Beton manifestiert [...], etwas entgegensetzen wie 'das lebendige Wort'? [...] Für den Zorn des Achill, für den Konflikt des Hamlet, für die falschen Alternativen des Faust würde es vielleicht ein Lächeln haben. Es hätte sich in jedem Sinn 'von unten' an sein Material heranzuarbeiten, das, wenn man es durch ein anderes Raster ansähe als bisher, doch noch bisher unerkannte Möglichkeiten offenbaren mag. (FPV, 125)

As a writer and as a woman in quest of her own history and identity, Wolf clearly disassociates herself from an institutionalized culture and history which creates alienation.

Picking up the ancient motif of learning through suffering preserved in mythological material, Wolf's narrative conveys the full horror and pain experienced by individuals caught up in historical processes controlled by destructive political systems and competing ideologies. An emotionally honest confrontation with the horrors of both our past and present history, Wolf seems to suggest, might trigger the very processes of mourning and the empathy for the suffering of others which could provoke fundamental changes in deeply ingrained patterns of thought. Wolf regards the honest confrontation of our repressed fears and inner horrors as a process which is potentially liberating, as Cassandra's experience suggests. Her process of remembering her past is also the pursuit of "die Geschichte meiner Angst. Oder, richtiger, die Geschichte ihrer Entzügelung, noch genauer: ihrer Befreiung." (K, 41) Fear, Wolf's narrative suggests, can be a productive emotion which promotes self-knowledge. It is the biggest fear of all, the fear of death, which prompts Cassandra to delve ever more deeply into her past: "die Angst die Angst die Angst [zwingt mich] zu denken." (K, 82) Fear, moreover, is the emotion which provides a link between Cassandra, the female mythological figure, and all individuals who have been objectified and suppressed, "sie gehört mit allem und allen Unterdrückten zusammen." (K, 41) By seeking to uncover the historical

truth behind the Cassandra myth, Wolf's narrative provides a model for an emotionally honest historical perspective which, in breaking with patterns of suppression and with the projection of fears and anxieties on to an 'other', an enemy, seeks to overcome alienation and to promote genuine maturity. Wolf's narrative thus contributes to the writing of a history of women which is also "die Geschichte einer der Kehrseiten unserer Kultur." (FPV, 145)

3.2 Re-writing the myth

In Christa Wolf's narrative, the previously peripheral mythological figure Cassandra moves into the foreground. Her story, which had never been written before, is thus finally told from the perspective not of the victors of the Trojan Wars, but from that of its losers as well as from that of women as second-degree losers (as the objects of objects). It is clear that Wolf was instantly enthralled by the figure of Cassandra and responded to her with a profound sense of recognition, combining the subjective authenticity of her own experience with the intersubjectivity of her identification with Cassandra. She intuitively felt that Cassandra had shared the 'Grundmuster' of her own experience and that she could therefore project that experience on to the mythological figure: "Ich hatte eigentlich gar keine andere Wahl, eine andere Figur zu nehmen, sondern ich war von dieser Figur ergriffen, weil ich vorher und auch während des Schreibens fand, daß ich soviel von dem, was ich selbst erfahren habe, auf sie projizieren könnte."²⁰ The crucial link between the author and the mythological figure is Cassandra's quest for identity against the current of decline and disintegration of a society embarking on the destructive course of war. It is here that the dimension of contemporaneity and identification between the author and her chosen figure lies. Cassandra's painful quest for self-knowledge and autonomy, Wolf tells us in her third Frankfurt lecture, is the basis on which she has appropriated the mythological figure: "Besteht ihre Zeitgenossenschaft in der Art und Weise, wie sie mit Schmerz umgehen lernt? Wäre also der Schmerz - eine besondere Art von Schmerz - der Punkt über den ich sie mir anverwandle, Schmerz der Subjektwerdung?" (FPV, 89) While the nature and purpose of the Frankfurt lectures clearly precluded a discussion of the work's more intimately personal and painful themes, the fictional framework of the *Kassandra* narrative allows this dimension -

²⁰Documentation: Christa Wolf, p 108.

the dimension of authorship - to be perceived. Already in the Frankfurt lectures Wolf wanted to do much more than to convey her intellectual understanding of the importance of Cassandra. Her detailed account of her journey to Greece, which traces the story's genesis and depicts the process through which the literary Cassandra takes shape in the author's mind, also defines the emotional and sensual dimension of that journey, helping to overcome the temporal distance which separates past and present experience. Wolf's fascination with the quality of the light on the Greek landscape exemplifies this process, underlining the point that the link she establishes between her own, contemporary experience and that of the historical figure goes beyond conventional approaches to mythological material: "Von den Erzählern aber, die über sie geschrieben haben und die alle nicht dabeigewesen sind, hat keiner dieses Licht erwähnt." (FPV, 43) In Wolf's narrative, this inner, emotionally and sensually determined dimension of her identification with Cassandra is predominant. The author's account of her fascination with the mythological figure who instantly takes her captive - "Sie, die Gefangene, nahm mich gefangen, sie [...] besetzte mich." (FPV, 10) - furthermore invites her readers to engage with Cassandra in her literal, as opposed to her metaphorical, significance, allowing her story finally to be heard: "Der Zauber wirkte sofort. Ihr glaubte ich jedes Wort, das gab es noch, bedingungsloses Vertrauen. Dreitausend Jahre - weggeschmolzen." (FPV, 10)

Once the narrator has provided a minimalist framework on the first page of the text, the narrative perspective switches to Cassandra herself and she comes across as someone who combines self-knowledge and integrity. On the threshold of death, she can be trusted to be honest. She is neither a tragic nor a heroic figure according to the conventions of Greek myth; she has no interest in preaching to her reader or in trying to prove a point. She is a woman and a human being who, no longer caught up in the tangled web of events, can now understand the essence of what has happened to her and to her people. The only remaining imperative for her is to bear witness: "Ich will Zeugin bleiben, auch wenn es keinen einzigen Menschen mehr geben wird, der mir mein Zeugnis abverlangt." (K, 27) The closeness to death has not threatened her fundamental affirmation of life, and she intends her testimony to be a source of support to the living, not an admission of defeat. What makes her testimony

unique is that she has experienced the historical conflicts and the transformations of her era in an intensified form in her own life.

The specific socio-political context of Cassandra's life is the city state of Troy at the time of its self-destructive war with Greece. In the Frankfurt lectures, Wolf describes Troy as a state in transition from matriarchy to patriarchy (FPV, 144), and she is at one stage tempted to see it as "ein Modell für eine Art von Utopie." (FPV, 83) In the narrative, however, Trojan society is presented differently. Cassandra's Troy is without doubt a patriarchal, authoritarian society with static social hierarchies.²¹ It is ruled exclusively by men, with the exception of the high priestess Herophile, Queen Hekuba and Cassandra herself; there is no suggestion that this is a new state of affairs. Despite the fact that old women like Cassandra's wet-nurse Parthena still pass on ancient stories about a symbolic order in which female goddesses played a role, the metaphysical realm of Troy has clearly been dominated by male gods. With the arrival of the Greek priest Panthoos on Trojan soil, the last vestiges of this older system of beliefs have been removed, and a monotheistic symbolic order with Apollo as the dominant god has been established. Although these older, matriarchal goddesses have been resurrected by the community at Mount Ida, Troy's symbolic order reflects the patriarchal structure of its history. It is true that women in Troy enjoy greater freedom and respect than they do in Greece, where they are brutally objectified and abused. But the choices women are allowed to make are confined largely to decisions about marriage and sexual partners, at least until Priam forces Cassandra to marry Eurypilos in order to obtain his military support once defeat has become likely. The cruel practice of the annual defloration rites and the self-assurance with which the royal princes boast about their sexual conquests with the benevolent approval of the palace, however, leave no doubt about the fact that women in Troy have no self-determination, but are the objects of men's desires. In the public domain, they have no power whatsoever, and their social role is

²¹This discrepancy between the lectures and the narrative has tempted some critics to come to the false conclusion that Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* grossly oversimplifies complex historical processes. See, for instance, Ricarda Schmidt, 'Myth in Contemporary Women's Literature', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes, and Roland Smith (eds.), *Literature on the Threshold. The German Novel in the 1980s*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1990), pp 253-262, p 254.

restricted to the realm of reproduction on the one hand, and to the provision of care and services in the palace world on the other.

It is evident already before the threat of war, moreover, that Cassandra's Troy is by no means the friendly, harmonious and contented Minoan civilization as which Wolf had at one stage been tempted to see it. Troy is a fortified city state surrounded by a wall, and it has a history which is by no means as free of bellicosity as its citizens would like to believe:

Aber wie hatten sie so schnell vergessen können, was doch auch sie auf dem Schoß ihrer Mütter und Ammen in sich aufgenommen hatten: daß die Kette der für unsre Stadt unheilvollen Ereignisse sich in grauer Vorzeit verlor, Zerstörung und Aufbau und Wiederzerstörung, unter der Regentschaft wechselnder Könige, glücklos die meisten.
(K, 43)

People's gullibility and lack of historical awareness have allowed them to believe that a new era, a "Goldene[s] Zeitalter" (K, 43), has dawned with Priam's ascension to the throne. Their unwillingness to question the authority of their king makes them blind to his personal weaknesses and lack of leadership, the very qualities which ultimately contribute greatly to Troy's descent into war. There are, however, far more horrifying "Leiche[n] im Keller" (FPV, 60) of Troy's apparently benevolent ruling élite. The existence of the practice of "Knabenopfer" (K, 41) which King Priam lacked the moral strength to abolish himself, and his intention to sacrifice his illegitimate son Paris uncover a recent history far more barbaric than Cassandra could have imagined in her worst nightmares. It is evident, consequently, that Trojan society bears within itself at least some of the seeds of its own destruction well before the ascendancy of Eumelos finally transforms it into a police state.²²

Of all this Cassandra knows nothing until her own increasing inner tension with the actions of the palace make her seek out the "Neben-, ja Gegenwelt" (K, 56) of the Skamander community, in search of answers to her questions. There is thus from the beginning a fundamental contradiction between her desire for the priesthood and her

²²David Jenkinson has provided a particularly succinct analysis of this aspect in 'Loyalty and its limits', in Williams and Parkes (eds.), (1990), pp 245 ff.

blindness to the realities of Troy and her own situation there: "Ich sah nichts. Mit der Sehergabe überfordert, war ich blind. Sah nur, was da war, so gut wie nichts." (K, 33) In her retrospective and increasingly self-critical analysis, which reveals more and more painful truths, Cassandra seeks understanding of the role she has played in the complex sequence of events which led to the downfall of Troy. An early question which emerges is that of why she wanted the gift of second sight. One of the answers she is able to provide is that she hoped it would be a means of escaping from the passive, objectified position imposed on women in Trojan society. The utterly humiliating experience of the defloration rite fills her with the determination to find a personal alternative to the false choices that are on offer: "Ich erfuhr zwei Arten von Scham: die, gewählt zu werden, und die, sitzenzubleiben. Ja, ich würde Priesterin werden, um jeden Preis." (K, 20) As the favourite daughter of King Priam who has spent many happy hours during her childhood days listening to the discussions of her parents, Cassandra, furthermore, has developed a keen interest in politics, and she has come to expect to play a role as responsible and admirable as that she believes her father to be fulfilling. Deeply ambivalent in her feelings towards her mother, whose distanced behaviour towards her she misinterprets as lack of concern and love, Cassandra identifies from early childhood with her father, whose narcissistic need for her attentions give her the illusion that she is wanted: "Hekabe die Mutter hat mich früh erkannt und sich nicht weiter um mich gekümmert. Dies Kind braucht mich nicht, hat sie gesagt. Dafür hab ich sie bewundert und gehaßt. Priamos der Vater brauchte mich." (K, 15) As one of two daughters in a family dominated by the activities and values of men, Cassandra idolizes not only her father, but also her seven brothers whose emotional coldness towards her she remains oblivious to. Her office thus fulfils also the function of hiding from herself the painful realization that her emotional needs are, in fact, not being met in the palace world. She fills this inner void with a longing for status and recognition, unaware that the image she forges of herself is not only idealistic and self-alienating - "umgänglich, bescheiden, anspruchslos [...] aufrecht, stolz und wahrheitsliebend" (K, 14 f.) - but also self-deceiving, as her more honest assessment eventually reveals: "Unwissenheit, [...], Bequemlichkeit, [...] Hochmut, [...] Feigheit, Faulheit, Scham." (K, 26)

Kassandra's longing for individuation and recognition is carried over from her childhood days into her later life. She is accustomed to thinking of herself as "die Ausnahme", and she is unwilling to be regarded as one of the common people: "[Ich wollte, RR] mich unter kein gewöhnliches Dach mit allen zerren lassen." (K, 18). Kassandra protects herself effectively from the more painful truths of her desire for a high office by rationalizing her role as one which allows her to realize herself and be of use to society at the same time: "Das Glück, ich selbst zu werden und dadurch den andern nützlicher - ich hab es noch erlebt." (K, 15) When she re-appraises her life, however, she realizes that she was essentially acting a part: "Ich spielte die Priesterin." (K, 32) In fact, with the benefit of hindsight, she is able to acknowledge that it was in the period following her elevation to her high office that she was at her most self-alienated: "Getragen von der Achtung der Troier, lebte ich scheinhaft wie nie." (K, 33) Blinding herself to the realities of her situation through the self-deception that she is free, her need to hide the truth that she is "in Wirklichkeit: gefesselt" (K, 28), increases her sense of self-importance, as a result of which she both loses touch with ordinary people and mistrusts the Skamander community, not realizing that its values will support her struggle for self-emancipation in due course. Her self-imposed duty to keep up appearances, coupled with self-censorship - "Verboten war es mir nicht [...]. Ich verbot es mir selbst, nachdem ich Priesterin war" (K, 33), make her fall ever further short of her own idealized image of herself, and she eventually has to face up to the humiliating realization that she, the 'seer', is among the last to understand the manipulations of the palace: "Alle wußten es." (K, 28) In her unquestioning loyalty to her father and to Troy, she even puts aside her inner reservations about the injustice of Priam's refusal to return Helena to the Greeks, publicly supporting his position. Unfortunately, her endeavours to keep intact both her "Wunsch- und Sehnsuchtsbild" of herself and of her family increase her dependence on the palace, making it much harder for the people in the community at Mount Ida to trust her and take her into their confidence.

Once Kassandra recognizes that the actions of the palace are, in fact, leading Troy into a war for which it must take a considerable share of the blame, her conflict of loyalties becomes tragic, since she is faced with the impossibility of deciding between her family and

her office: "daß ich zu wählen hatte zwischen meiner Herkunft und dem Amt." (K, 13)

Overlooking the possibility of a third way, offered by the Skamander community, Cassandra is trapped between false alternatives. Because she fears that Troy will be defeated in the impending war, the tension between these two poles eventually threatens to destroy her. In order to remain true to herself and to her office, she needs to find the courage not only to attack her own self-image, but - a task she finds at least as painful - she also needs to destroy the cherished notions she has harboured above all about the men in her family, most notably her father. In the process of self-discovery she receives invaluable and loyal support from the women in the Skamander community, and Cassandra gradually finds the strength to distance herself from her father and to see him in a more sober light. This, it turns out, is a painful, but ultimately liberating process, since it is in the Skamander community that she also begins to see her mother more sympathetically: "Sie hat mich ernst genommen. Der Vater hat nur Trost bei mir gesucht." (K, 44) Nevertheless, Cassandra realizes that the palace - the house of the father - which for so long had been her "heimatlichste Ort" (K, 45), has irreversibly descended into self-destruction and a savage war with an even more barbaric enemy. Since she has not yet been able to switch loyalties to the Skamander community, Cassandra feels spiritually and ideologically homeless, an emotional strain of such magnitude that she finally collapses.

The process of severing her ties to all that she has cherished forces her to confront herself in the most profound and self-threatening way, only to find that she as Cassandra, as a person and as a woman, does not yet exist: "Ich war auf mich zurückgefallen. Doch es gab mich nicht." (K, 69) The "fremde Stimme" (K, 46) which had, in her worst moments of foreboding, begun to force its way out from the depths of her innermost self, is now fully released. Cassandra finally recognizes it as the voice of the genuine seer, her true self, rather than that of the inauthentic and proud person who, as a member of the ruling élite, had become partly responsible for the destructive forces which were to bring about the downfall of the society she loved. The battle between the two warring parts of herself, the "Zwei Gegner auf Leben und Tod" (K, 70), which now ensues marks the beginning of Cassandra's most painful quest, the journey to herself as a process of 'Subjektwerdung'. On this difficult

journey, during which she suffers three fits of madness, Arisbe plays a crucial role, supporting her and urging her again and again not to give in to the defence mechanisms her psyche has erected, which tempt her to succumb to new forms of self-alienation by constructing 'Feindbilder'. Cassandra's biggest blind spot which has prevented her from seeing "die wirklichen Verhältnisse der Gegenwart" (FPV, 96), has been, as Wolf defined it in her Frankfurt lectures, her blindness to herself, her utter self-estrangement. This lack of self-knowledge, the narrative suggests, is the root cause of her conflict of loyalties and it is also what has made her vulnerable to the manipulations of others. In fact, this inability to see ourselves is posited in the narrative as one of the fundamental causes of the self-destructiveness which has produced the seemingly endless cycle of conflict and war: "Das ganze blinde Volk stürzt sich in den Graben, ertränkt sich, bildet die Brücke für die wenigen Überlebenden, die der Kern des neuen Volkes sind. Ameisengleich gehn wir in jedes Feuer. Jedes Wasser. Jeden Strom von Blut. Nur um nicht sehn zu müssen. Was denn? Uns." (K, 49)

The process of 'Subjektwerdung' is linguistically expressed in the narrative through Cassandra's changing understanding of the term 'wir'²³. The 'wir', the identification with an 'other', whether this be an individual, a group of individuals or a cause, Cassandra realizes in retrospect, is what has prevented her from finding herself: "Durchsichtig, schwächlich, immer unansehnlicher wurde mein Wir, an dem ich festhielt, unfühlbarer daher für mich mein Ich." (K, 108) Cassandra's change of loyalty is expressed through her growing uncertainty about using the pronoun 'wir'. Since Trojan society was inextricably linked in Cassandra's mind with her father, the King, she was incapable of discovering an alternative to the double bind of resisting as well as collaborating: "Schweren Herzens kam der Teil von mir, der königstreu, gehorsam, übereinstimmungsbesessen war, jeden Abend in die Burg zurück." (K, 108) Her inability to tell the truth once she has realized that Helena is in fact not in Troy, that her presence was merely invented as a ploy to defend the honour of the palace, is one of the most painful insights Cassandra has to face up to:

²³For an extensive discussion of this theme in Wolf's *Kassandra*, to which I am indebted, see Paul, pp 235 ff.

Denn warum schrie ich, wenn ich schrie: Wir sind verloren!, warum nicht: Troer, es gibt keine Helena! Ich weiß es, wußte es auch damals schon: Der Eumelos in mir verbot es mir. Ihn, der mich im Palast erwartete, ihn schrie ich an: Es gibt keine Helena!, aber er wußt es ja. Dem Volk hätte ich es sagen müssen. Das hieß: Ich, Seherin, gehörte zum Palast. (K, 79/80)

The narrative follows the process through which Cassandra gradually disentangles herself from the bonds which tie her to the intrigues of the court as it gradually descends into war. Her strengthening association with the community at Mount Ida, particularly her growing attachment to the alternative father figure, Anchises, and the alternative mother figure, Arisbe, supports her in this process. While Cassandra remains trapped within her inner contradictions for almost the entire duration of the war, her loyalties gradually switch from the palace to the women at Mount Ida. It is Penthesilea's cruel death which first evokes a new sense of 'wir', one which refers specifically to the suffering of women. It is a recognition that the wars embarked on by men reduce all women to victims: "Wir fühlten es, wir Frauen alle. Was soll werden, wenn das um sich greift. Die Männer, schwach, zu Siegern hochgeputscht, brauchen, um sich überhaupt noch zu empfinden, uns als Opfer." (K, 137) It is the solidarity and empathy of women which helps Cassandra to overcome her deepest moments of despair when she suffers the final humiliation of imprisonment. It is also in this community that Cassandra finally discovers the 'wir' she can fully identify with. Although historically doomed to be destroyed by the war, this community has established a utopian alternative between "Töten und Sterben" - "Leben" (K, 134). In the final days of the war, Cassandra finds here the happiness which springs from an ability to live fully in the present. The narrative holds out the possibility that at some stage in the future, this alternative might be more widely embraced. As a utopian vision of a possible 'house of the mother', the Skamander community values life above all else, subscribing to values such as community, solidarity and empathy. The precondition for its creation, as Arisbe explains, is an ability to honestly face up to ourselves:

Du meinst, Arisbe, der Mensch kann sich selbst nicht sehen. - So ist es. Er erträgt es nicht. Er braucht das fremde Abbild. - Und darin wird sich nie was ändern? Immer nur die Wiederkehr des Gleichen? Selbstfremdheit, Götzenbilder, Haß? - Ich weiß es nicht. Soviel weiß ich: Es gibt Zeitenlöcher. Dies ist so eins, hier und jetzt. Wir dürfen es nicht ungenutzt vergehen lassen. (K, 141)

Throughout the narrative, the Skamander community is associated with the symbol of the willow branch. It is a bed of 'Weiden' which Cassandra is given when she longs for Aineias during the extended periods of his absence. It is a willow branch which Cassandra loosens from her prison walls, and it is a willow branch which she takes with her on her final journey. This, I would suggest, is a symbolic token of Wolf's hope that we, as (male and female) readers today, might pick up this branch in order to begin to weave the fabric from which the 'house of the mother' might in the longer term be created.

In the face of death, Cassandra is momentarily able to overcome her need for an 'other' on to whom she can project the darker sides of her own nature. This marks the point at which she reaches true maturity which is also the moment of her most painful admission that the brutality which has been associated throughout the narrative with Achilles, the beast, is also a part of herself: "'Wir' sag ich, und von allen Wir, zu denen ich gelangte, bleibt dies dasjenige, das mich am meisten anficht. 'Achill das Vieh' sagt sich um so vieles leichter als dies Wir." (K, 135) This final 'wir' clarifies the fact that women are by no means free of the self-destructive and barbaric potential released in its most savage forms during this war. Although Cassandra is able to empathize with women like Penthesilea, Clytaimnestra or her sister Polyxena, who are driven to various forms of destructive and self-destructive behaviour, she takes the knowledge that the war "[trieb] Mißgeburten [heraus]" in women and men alike to her death as one of her most painful insights.

Wolf's Cassandra figure has been widely regarded in studies of Wolf's literature as either a 'Heldin' or a 'Widerstandsheldin'.²⁴ I have endeavoured to show in my analysis that

²⁴Sigrid Weigel describes Cassandra as a "vorbildliche Heldin". See Weigel, 'Vom Sehen zur Seherin. Christa Wolfs Umdeutung des Mythos und die Spur der Bachmann-Rezeption in ihrer Literatur', in

these views of Cassandra are not justified. Cassandra's inner dichotomy, her deep conflict of loyalties, and the difficulties she faces before she is able to speak the truth, in my view preclude such an evaluation. Although she undergoes a profound learning experience, she does so only with the persistent and committed support of more 'heroic' figures such as Anchises and Arisbe, without whose guidance and wisdom she would most probably not have overcome her self-alienation. It is also the support of the Skamander community which prevents her from falling into utter despair or apathy. It is only with very considerable reluctance and in the last few hours before her certain death, that she is able to confront the more painful truths about her desire to hold on to her office even after she knew she could not fulfil it in its true sense. Only in the hour of her death does she find the courage to address the questions which strike at the very core of her being, leading to uncomfortable realizations such as the fact that her claim to priesthood was, in effect, a desire for power: "Priesterin werden, um Macht zu gewinnen? Götter. Bis an diesen äußersten Punkt habt ihr mich treiben müssen, um diesen schlichten Satz aus mir herauszupressen." (K, 60) Only with the greatest difficulty does she face up to her own authoritarian tendencies and to her craving for conformity, to the "Eumelos in mir" (K, 79), which impeded her emancipatory endeavours for so long. Wolf's narrative technique provides a double perspective on this process. We are told Cassandra's life in retrospect, from the point where she gains genuine self-understanding and maturity. But we also experience the full complexity of her struggle to achieve this consciousness and inner calm in the preceding years of contradiction and self-alienation, while she is still entangled in the web of events. Cassandra herself, despite the understanding she gains of the objectification of women in both Trojan and Greek society, also does not have the feminist consciousness of the author. She responds empathetically and directly to the suffering of women as she experiences it, not from an intellectual perspective.

Drescher (ed.), (1989), p171. Wolfgang Emmerich sees her as an "unnahbare[] Heldin" in his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, (Leipzig, 1996), p 344. Therese Hörnigk believes that Cassandra turned into a "Widerstandsheldin" against the author's intention, see Hörnigk (1989), p 218. Ricarda Schmidt even accuses Wolf of having created a figure whose self-destructive idealism corresponds to her society's external violence in her article 'Myth in Contemporary Women's Literature', in Williams, Parkes and Smith (eds.), (1990), p 258.

As a 'Schlüsselerszählung', Wolf's narrative is without doubt also a deeply revealing account of her quest for identity and emancipation. As the first part of this thesis has shown, Wolf was frequently confronted with the conflict of how to realize herself through her art while remaining committed to a society whose history she had helped to shape. By the early 1980s, she had finally succeeded in emancipating herself personally as well as aesthetically from the demands of a political régime she had recognized as fatally flawed as early as the mid-1960s. The successful aesthetic experiment which the *Kassandra* project represents is the culmination of her achievement of emancipation from restrictive literary traditions and aesthetic conventions and it establishes her as one of the great women writers of contemporary world literature. Even as she was winning this personal struggle against self-alienating dependencies, she remained committed, however, with a profound sense of responsibility, to the moral task of defending the interests of her fellow citizens in the GDR. *Kassandra*, in this respect, was not only a test of her loyalties, but also an exploration, within the fictional framework of her narrative, of her ability to tell the truth. In her third Frankfurt lecture, she has addressed this issue:

Er, sagt A., sei *eine* Art Mensch während der Arbeit, in seinem Institut; eine andre Art Mensch in der Versammlung; und eine dritte Art Mensch 'privat', abends, wenn er nach Hause komme. Und er benutzte auch in seinen drei Leben, die nicht miteinander zusammenhängen, verschiedene Arten von Wörtern: die wissenschaftlichen, die politischen, die privaten - die er für die eigentlich menschlichen halte. Was wir beredeten, was wir uns wünschten, sei Utopie: An welchen Teil dieses gespaltenen Menschen wollten wir uns wenden mit unsrer Vision vom Frieden, die doch auch Mut fordern würde? Angst - ja, bestenfalls. Denn schon Angst sei - wenn es sich nicht um die neurotische Angst vorm Nichts handle - eine Äußerung, hinter der eine Person stehe. A. sieht nur, daß die Person verschwindet. - Das aber, wirft E. ein, betreffe doch auch uns, 'frei Schaffende': anders denken als reden, anders reden als schreiben: Sie für ihren Teil, da sie erkannt habe, daß Zensur und Selbstzensur kriegsfördernd seien; da sie sich klargemacht habe, daß wir die Zeit nicht haben, unsre 'eigentlichen' Bücher auf später zu verschieben - sie habe aufgehört mit dem Reden und Schreiben mit gespaltener Zunge ... (FPV, 109)

Kassandra denotes a significant stage in Wolf's striving for self-honesty, the ability to tell the truth and in her quest for autonomy. In the highly autobiographical works which followed this narrative, Christa Wolf explored personal forms of writing with renewed determination to overcome self-censorship. These narratives also continue the process of coming to terms with her more immediate past to which Wolf was now even more committed than before. With *Kassandra*, however, Christa Wolf has reached the critical turning-point in her struggle to end the practice of "Reden und Schreiben mit gespaltener Zunge."

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