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*Cry Wolf? Encounter Controversy:  
Christa Wolf's Legacy in Light of the Literature Debate*

Stephani Richards-Wilson

As Christa Wolf approaches her eightieth birthday this year, she can be certain of her place in history. Despite unexpected and often painful setbacks, uncertainties, and controversy, she has led a productive life and literary career. While one might not understand her political commitment to Marxism or engagement with the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), her resiliency in overcoming trauma and adversity is nonetheless admirable. Throughout her lifetime, Wolf has been confronted with having to make difficult choices that affected her own self-development as a writer, her friends and family, the literary establishment, and her readership. In this article, I will examine some of the choices Wolf made during and after the Literature Debate of 1990-1991 and how they affected her legacy. I intend to explore Wolf's response to the polemic she sparked in June of 1990 with the publication of *Was bleibt*.

As the GDR's most influential writer and one of its leading intellectuals, Wolf has reached global audiences and secured world fame. She has been elected to memberships in academies of art and literature in several countries, received several honorary doctorates, and has been the subject of more reviews and studies devoted to her achievements and perceived failures than any other living German author (Resch 5). While Wolf struggled with censorship and often challenged the regime through her writing and rhetoric, she nonetheless enjoyed privilege and affluence unavailable to the common East German worker, including unrestricted travel, access to Intershops, a country home in Mecklenburg, and a fair amount of state subsidies. Loyal yet critical, she had made an ideological investment in a morally bankrupt political system, replete with elitism, an extensive spy system, terror, and corruption.

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall in November of 1989, Wolf had come to be respected by major literary critics and had won prestigious awards in both the East and West. While she was a controversial public figure, reviewers rarely disparaged her literary efforts or the quality of her mature work (Resch 5). Wolf had been seen inside and outside the GDR as a representative of resistance and was viewed as a courageous writer by the West (Mayer-Ischwandy 815). Her ill-timed and ill-considered decision to publish *Was bleibt* in 1990, however, shifted the perspective of the literary establishment in West Germany and fueled a heated controversy about the moral responsibility of the East German intelligentsia.

As the GDR came to an end and the psychological and social tensions became apparent during the rapid German reunification process, the debate about the role GDR writers and artists played in confronting, supporting, or prolonging the ruthless regime was already coming to a head, at least among literary critics. A scant

100 pages, Wolf's *Was bleibt* served as a pretext to a much larger discussion about the function of the intellectual and the status of literature in postwar Germany. The debate that started with the two Germanys could also be seen as the launch of a larger discussion of global concern, namely the problematic role of the intellectual in modern/postmodern society (Gratz 17). For Irene Heidelberger-Leonard, both the Historian Debate of 1986 and the Literature Debate dealt with the problematic relationship between contemplation and action and between the ideal and reality in a German context (70).

With regard to the Literature Debate, both East and West German writers were blamed for *Gesinnungsästhetik*, or politically correct aesthetics that pushed moral and political considerations into the foreground of literary endeavors. With the publication of Wolf's novella, critics called for a return to a pure aesthetic as in the Neoconservative Revolution of the 1920s (Mayer-Iswandny 821). In an article published in November of 1990, literary critic Ulrich Greiner mentions this plea to return to the pure aesthetic and move into a new literary phase, an appeal spearheaded by Frank Schirrmacher in his article entitled "Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik" (Greiner 209). Greiner asserts that the controversy was not simply about a generational conflict between right-wing and left-wing paradigms. At the very core was the question of how writers in both the East and West became embroiled in a cultural battle that was difficult to end. He writes, "Nein, die Frage lautet, wie es den Literaturen von DDR und BRD bekommen ist, daß sie einen *Kulturkampf* (Schütte) gefochten haben, und wie hoch der Preis ist, den sie dafür zu entrichten hatten" (Greiner 211).

Specifically East German writers were being implicated as having cooperated with the socialist state. After all, they had chosen to remain in the GDR rather than go into exile and had accepted prizes, salaries, and pensions from the state (Fox 14-15). By 1987, Wolf was disillusioned and disappointed in the socialist state, but she nonetheless accepted the highest honor from the GDR Academy of the Arts, namely, the National Prize First Class. She did, however, give the prize money to three young writers who could use it (Resch 157-58). Noteworthy is the fact that Wolf did not accept every award she received; she refused the Wilhelm-Raabe Prize from the City of Braunschweig in 1972 (Resch xvi).

While GDR writers could be "intimidated, bought, muzzled, imprisoned, or expatriated," many of them, including Wolf, remained in the republic until the bitter end, convinced that their literary contributions mattered (Fox vii). Discrediting Wolf implied discrediting those like her, who opted to stay until the demise of the GDR, despite having to write in a hostile environment. The Literature Debate expanded into a discussion about culpability, the responsibility of artists and intellectuals, and the roles of ideology, morality, and aesthetics in both German states (Sørensen 17). In the GDR, it was a question of who should be held accountable for sanctioning a political system that endorsed terror, torture, and shoot-to-kill orders for those trying to escape its military-assured borders.

While the full extent of the corruption and terror might not have been entirely known at the time, Wolf was certainly familiar with the silencing, censorship, intimidation and imprisonment of intellectuals. As a member of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) for 40 years, she witnessed and experienced first-hand communist regime-style tactics. She knew about the individuals who challenged party discipline or became *personae non gratae* in the GDR: Hans Mayer, Ernst Bloch, Walter Janka, Wolf Harich, Robert Havemann, Sara Kirsch and Wolf Biermann (Fries 95). Unbeknownst to the Western world at the time, she and her husband had been objects of constant and intense surveillance for years (Resch 164), and yet she remained in the country. Although Wolf's surveillance was the topic of *Was bleibt*, when Wolf later gained access to her *Stasi* files, she expressed shock at having been strictly surveilled for such a long time (Van Heurck 257; *Auf dem Weg* 198-99).

From a Western democratic perspective, it is difficult to understand why anyone would voluntarily choose to remain in a repressive political system or to believe that it could be reformed into a utopian ideal. For Wolf, her friends and family—including her two daughters and father—were important considerations in choosing to stay, but they were not her only reasons (Resch 8; Romero 110; Koch 41). Wolf herself often alluded to the importance of her family and friends in the GDR, as evidenced by her published correspondence with numerous friends, and she deeply mourned the deaths of Heiner Müller and Stephan Hermlin later in the 1990s (*Hierzulande* 97; 105).

However, in an interview with Hanns-Bruno Kammertöns and Stephan Lebert of *Die Zeit* in 2005, Wolf discusses the expatriation of Wolf Biermann in 1976 and how she and her husband had discussed leaving. She states that at the time, they thought that if they left the SED party, they would have to leave the country (Kammertöns). One wonders what is implied in that statement as there were many prominent East German writers and artists such as Christoph Hein and Heiner Müller who made a living without being party members. Yet in a diary entry from 1994, when Wolf reflects on the Biermann affair, she recalls that her husband was expelled from the party and regrets that she did not quit the party alongside him, for they had both signed the petition protesting Biermann's expatriation. She writes, "...daß wir damals—zu Recht oder nicht—gedacht hätten, wenn ich jetzt ausgetreten wäre, hätten wir die DDR verlassen müssen. Und daß ich lange Zeit nicht gewußt habe, ob ich richtig gehandelt hätte" (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 526).

Complicating matters from a politically correct perspective, Wolf had always hovered between opposition, resistance, and accommodation, and could not easily be categorized. Her part-time dissident stance, veiled criticisms of the regime, perceived ambiguity between autonomy and adherence to the party line, and periodic silence contributed to the literary and political storm that engulfed her in 1990. Was she a strategic self-serving opportunist, window-dressing for the ruling Socialist

Unity Party or an honest victim of circumstance with seemingly good intentions—a courageous idealist striving for a reformed socialist utopia by working from within?

Claudia Mayer-Iswandy maintains that Wolf resisted and affirmed the East German state at the same time and that attempting to categorize Wolf is counter-productive (815). Gertrude Postl also cautions against labeling Wolf in either-or-designations and asserts that Wolf wrote from an “in-between” place and that her approach of pointing the finger at problems cannot be reduced to one type of political system (96-98). Postl writes: “To talk about her in terms of ‘supporter of the system’ versus ‘enemy of the system,’ of ‘communist’ versus ‘anti-communist,’ can do nothing but totally miss the point of her writing” (98).

Moreover, the repressive mechanisms of GDR society forced all artists to make ideological compromises (Eigler 80), and what the Wolf case demonstrates is that the acrimonious debate left little room for objective and rational discussions about guilt and responsibility (Schoeps 267). Given Wolf’s previously respected and heroic stature, West German literary critics stood to benefit from her fall from literary favor and advance their own agendas by sensationalizing her poor judgment in publishing *Was bleibt* during the reunification process (Romero 104). Controversy sells newspapers in a market-driven economy; and as Gail Finney emphasizes, people wrote to newspapers all over Germany on behalf of Wolf (108). Günter Grass and Walter Jens also came to Wolf’s defense. Unless one had lived under the constraints of a repressive regime, one had no right to pass judgment on those who had.

Most female scholars such as Claudia Mayer-Iswandy, Christiane Zehl Romero, and Anna Kuhn maintain that gender played a role in the attacks on Wolf. Mayer-Iswandy emphasizes that even Wolf stressed the gender aspect by using the term *Hexenjagd* (824). Wolf had also referred to German reunification as a witch’s cauldron (*Auf dem Weg* 196). Her references to witches might be more based on her propensity to draw on fairy tales than on gender-specific labeling, although Wolf was acutely aware of pejorative language and injustices due to her gender. While the timing of the publication and subject matter of *Was bleibt* certainly acted as a catalyst to the controversy, Wolf did appear to bear the majority of the criticism, unlike Volker Braun, Heiner Müller, or long-time president of the GDR Writer’s Union, Hermann Kant (Romero 108). Karl-Heinz Schoeps maintains, however, that Kant and the others eluded such harsh criticisms by being smart enough to stay out of the limelight as the GDR came to an end (269). Wolf may have invited criticism when she decided in November 1989 to publish *Was bleibt* and when she took the stage that same month to give a speech, along with other prominent artists, to a half million people in the largest unofficial GDR demonstration ever, preceding the Wall opening five days later (Fox 14).

Focusing on Wolf was most likely the combination of a number of variables, including the fact that Wolf was the most successful author in postwar Eastern Europe and a woman in a male-dominated industry. Yet, it should also be noted

that despite government imposed cultural policies, the GDR had accorded women unprecedented access to writing and publishing (Romero 109-10). She could create a comfortable space to write, as long as she toed the party line most of the time. Wolf had commanded unparalleled respect and was a prolific writer, despite barriers. Western critics who criticized her negatively rarely did so publicly, and the few who did, such as Marcel Reich-Ranicki and Chaim Noll in the late '80s, provoked a strong reaction from the public (Mayer-Ischwandy 815).

After the release of *Was bleibt*, the same critics did an about-face and accused Wolf of cowardice and opportunism for not publishing it sooner. Written in 1979, this autobiographical novella is about a woman writer who is observed by the secret police or *Stasi*. It reflects the narrator's inability to completely break with the regime and her fear and anger about being surveilled. Critics saw the delayed publication as Wolf's attempt to elicit sympathy as a *Stasi* victim, releasing it when it was safe to do so, namely after the Honecker regime had collapsed. Wolf Biermann, however, pointed out that the critics chose to attack Wolf when it was likewise "safe" to do so (Finney 106-07). Western critics such as Ulrich Greiner of *Die Zeit* also found fault with the story's banality and what some viewed as the trivial nature of the oppression suffered by the main character, compared to GDR victims who endured real terror, torture, and imprisonment.

For Greiner, *Was bleibt* was more than a mere embarrassment. It displayed gross insensitivity towards GDR citizens whose lives were not just inconvenienced but completely destroyed by the socialist state (Drake 27). Wolf's novella could have been seen as a courageous act of resistance had she published it sooner. Greiner also called Wolf a privileged *Staatsdichterin*, a loyal state poet in the service of the SED, making *Was bleibt* "pathetically comic" (Finney 106; Tate 220). Wolf categorically denied that the state saw her as a state poet (*Auf dem Weg* 196; Koch 49). Schoeps notes, however, that it was Marcel Reich-Ranicki, the most powerful and revered literary critic in West Germany, who in 1987 first referred to Wolf as a state poet (266). Lennart Koch also sees the start of the debate beginning in 1987 (16).

Yet it was Reich-Ranicki's positive review of Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, published in 1968, that served GDR functionaries as a pretext to suppress/attack Wolf (Schoeps 266). Markus Joch notes this irony as well and maintains that Wolf's reputation within the party sank as a result of Reich-Ranicki's enthusiastic review (228). As for *Was bleibt*, Reich-Ranicki criticized Wolf for delaying the publication of the story and for taking so long to withdraw from the SED party (Fries 98). Moreover, Karl Heinz Bohrer criticized the story in *Merkur* as *Gesinnungskitsch* and hoped that the times of quasi-religious adoration of writers like Wolf were gone (Schoeps 266).

Frank Schirrmacher of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* also accused Wolf of a lack of courage for failing to speak out during the East German uprising of 17 June 1953. He stated that the publication of *Was bleibt* in 1990 simply revealed a guilty conscience and demonstrated that Wolf had never realized she lived

in a totalitarian system and was incapable of grasping complex political structures (Schoeps 265; Postl 92; Sørensen 23). However, Joch observes that when Wolf published *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Schirrmacher said nothing. He likewise was silent when Wolf spoke at the Eleventh Plenum in 1965 and came under attack for insisting that artists be given more freedom (Joch 228).

Given that Wolf previously had been praised for her literary endeavors by these very same Western critics, Postl posits that she was the first GDR author measured by a newly established standard that combined ethics and aesthetics (93). Marilyn Sibley Fries states that Reich-Ranicki's condemnation of Wolf's delayed response was inappropriate, as Wolf emphasized in her works and interviews that she needed time to work through a crisis (98). Further, as Dennis Tate observes, the *Stasi* had spied on Wolf and her husband between 1968 and 1980, collecting 42 volumes of information (227), and yet the reason for the surveillance mentioned in the novella never even came up in the debate. Her critics appear to have exaggerated and manipulated Wolf's intentions and story, and made little effort to distinguish between Wolf, the public and private images of Wolf, and Wolf's characters.

Margit Resch states that *Was bleibt* records the experience of millions of East Germans who were spied on, which at the time were unknown to most people in the West (168). Resch applauds Wolf's critical self-analysis and self-revelation in the story and believes that it does not present Wolf as a victim of *Stasi* practice, but rather her lack of initiative to disengage from an abusive regime (164). She maintains that viewing the story as a solicitation of sympathy is misreading Wolf's motivations. Finney supports this perspective and notes that Wolf had remarked early in the controversy that her novella seemed incomprehensible in the West but was understood without effort in the East (107-08).

But what does Wolf have to say about the controversy surrounding *Was bleibt*? In *Christa Wolf: Ein Tag im Jahr 1960-2000 (One Day a Year 2007)*, Wolf published her diary entries written on September 27 each year from 1960 until 2000. For the diary entry of September 27, 1990 she writes:

Die Veröffentlichung von *Was bleibt*, das nun manche als einen Versuch lesen, mich selber unter die in der DDR *Verfolgten* einzureihen, andere als Beleg für meine *familiäre* Verquickung mit dem Regime der DDR als *Staatsdichterin*. Muß man böswillig sein, um dieser Lesart zu verfallen? Oder einfach ahnungslos? Kann man einen Text so mißverstehen? Hätte ich ihn jetzt nicht herausgeben sollen? Ich schwanke zwischen verschiedenen Meinungen, aber eigentlich weiß ich immer noch nicht, was richtig ist- oder richtig gewesen wäre. Merkwürdigerweise bringt die Art und Weise, wie die Wiedervereinigung betrieben wird, vorher sehr DDR-kritische Leute dazu, sich jetzt gegen die undifferenzierte Verdammung zu wehren. (In der NZZ las ich, daß man Reagans *Reich des Bösen* nun auch in der DDR ausmachen könne!) Neulich sagte mein Kollege Tr. zu mir: Er würde sich jetzt eher auf die Zunge beißen, als ein öffentliches

Schuldbekennnis abzulegen. Soviel ich sehe, hat er keinen Grund zu Schuldbekennnissen. (467-68)

Caroline Drake notes that one of the first public opportunities Wolf had to defend herself was at the East-West writers' conference in Potsdam in June 1990 where the debate expanded into a discussion about censorship. Wolf referred to the censorship of East German writers by West German critics who did not appear to understand or appreciate their contributions. Ulrich Greiner replied that it was not censorship she would need to acclimate herself to in the new republic, but rather freedom of opinion which includes criticism (Drake 27). As time passed, the controversy became so embroiled that there were attempts to rescind the Geschwister-Scholl-Prize that Wolf had received in 1987 for *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages (Accident: A Day's News 1989)* (Resch 164).

Before further exploring Wolf's reaction to the controversy as reflected in her actions and works that followed in later years, there is one noteworthy observation shared by Finney and Schoeps that has to do with Wolf's novel *Sommerstück*, published a year before in the spring of 1989. Finney's main thesis is that this work is an indirect comment on the guilt Wolf felt for not publishing *Was bleibt* sooner. Schoeps maintains that Wolf dealt with guilt and responsibility in this work long before the western literary establishment raised these issues (266).

But what about Wolf herself? From a personal perspective, it first should be noted that Wolf has not always enjoyed the best of health but despite her setbacks persevered and survived the crisis. She suffered a heart attack in 1965 (Resch 49), often could not sleep, had a brush with death in 1988 when her appendix burst, which led to peritonitis and a series of major operations (Tate 220), lost her father in 1989, and had her first hip operation in 1994 (Böthig 176). In an interview with Volker Hage and Mathias Schreiber of *Der Spiegel* in 2003, Wolf explains that she was often sick, physically reacting to conflict in her life (Hage). In fact, she used notes from a hospital stay in the 1980s to write her novella *Leibhaftig* published in 2002 (*In the Flesh 2005*). In this work, which begins with the word *verletzt* or injured, Wolf deals with the GDR past and describes the inner dialogue of a seriously ill woman lying in a hospital bed in the summer of 1988. The themes of pain, sickness, and suffering of women similar to Wolf can be seen in several of her works after the Literature Debate.

Moreover, Wolf's personal setbacks are part of her corporal and psychological response to the debate as well as her legacy. In October of 1991, Wolf presented at the German Cancer Society Congress. She began her lecture by stating that while she had not suffered from cancer, she had survived a life-threatening illness. As previously mentioned, the Literature Debate was part of a bigger discussion about the role, if any, of the intellectual in postmodern society. Wolf suggests that she questioned her role and possible self-deception. She argues:

Hängt das weitverbreitete Unvermögen, mit der Wahrheit einer schweren

Krankheit umzugehen, mit der eingefleischten (welch ein Wort!) Gewohnheit zusammen, uns über uns selbst, über unsere Rolle, über die Gesellschaft, in der wir leben, zu täuschen und täuschen zu lassen? Und damit, daß wir Krankheit nur als Einschränkung, nicht auch als Anstoß zu tieferer Nachdenklichkeit sehen können? Auf menschliche Weise einer Schwäche, einem Zusammenbruch, einem Sinnverlust, einem Versagen und einer Niederlage zu begegnen, wird uns Konkurrenten nur in Sonntagsreden gelehrt. (*Auf dem Weg* 122)

After the German reunification of October 1990, Wolf had a difficult time and lost some of her prestige, although she appeared to have retained much of her readership. Similar to many of the other prominent writers in the GDR, she had not supported reunification and sought a “third way.” Western critics again took Wolf to task for not supporting reunification. When the two countries merged, the Western part had difficulty accepting Eastern customs, what they perceived to be a lax work ethic, and the GDR’s initial refusal to accept responsibility for Nazi atrocities (Resch 16). Jeffrey Herf notes that Wolf warned of a possible estrangement between West and East Germans in her speeches and essays of the early 1990s (40). Wolf’s concerns in this regard are clearly evident in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou: Texte 1990-1994* (*Parting from Phantoms* 1997). Before publishing this collection in 1994, however, Wolf began work on *Medea. Stimmen Roman* in 1991 and published it in 1996, yet not without further controversy in the interim.

In 1993, Wolf made public her earlier cooperation with the *Stasi*. Access to *Stasi* files, however, began in 1992 (Böthig 176). Again, Wolf endured sharp criticism from the German press for having worked for the secret police as an *Informeller Mitarbeiter* (“Margarete”) or informant between 1959 and 1962 (Böthig 176). Claiming to have forgotten that episode in her life did not help matters (Wolf, *Parting from Phantoms* 259; Koch 34). Wolf began to distrust her voice as a writer because she now distrusted her memory (*Auf dem Weg* 201).

Critics called into question Wolf’s intentions, moral integrity, and solidarity with the oppressed masses in light of her collaboration with the *Stasi*. While one might be quick to note Wolf’s lack of initial transparency with regard to this questionable period of her life, it should be noted that in June of the same year, she published *Akteneinsicht. Christa Wolf. Zerspiegel und Dialog* (ed. Hermann Vinke) which includes her *Stasi* informant’s file, excerpts from her victim’s dossier, newspaper and magazine articles, and personal correspondence. The documentation included in this work includes the sharp criticisms Wolf endured in the press. Several pages are dedicated to the controversy about whether or not she should return the Geschwister-Scholl Prize (215-229). Inge Aicher-Scholl assured her not to give it the slightest thought (223). Wolf, however, wrote to the appropriate official in München in March of 1993 that she could not return the Geschwister-Scholl Prize money as she had donated it to a young woman in Chile to cover her hospital costs. The woman

had been doused with gasoline and set on fire by soldiers of the right-wing Pinochet dictatorship (Wolf, *Akteneinsicht* 229).

Moreover, between September 1992 and July 1993, Wolf was a research fellow at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in Los Angeles, California (Resch xvii; Böthig 176). In her diary entry of September 27, 1993, Wolf explains why she had temporarily left Germany to accept the fellowship. Wolf states that she went to speak at the Stauden Gallery in Germany, accompanied by Hermann Vinke who had edited *Akteneinsicht* a few months prior. She writes:

jemand wollte wissen, wofür denn meine Entfernung nach Amerika gestanden habe, ob das eine Flucht gewesen sei. Ich poche auf mein Recht, zu reden, wann ich wolle, auch zu schweigen, ich wehre mich gegen die Anwalts-Rolle, die sie mir wieder zuteilen wollen, sehe ein, daß sie zum Teil recht haben, zähle aber auf, was ich und andere dennoch gesagt und geschrieben haben, ohne daß es groß wahrgenommen wurde, erinnere, wie immer bei solchen Gelegenheiten, daran, wie viele Jahre nach den Napoleonischen Kriegen Tolstoi *Krieg und Frieden* geschrieben hat, plädiere für die Besinnungspause, die man auch Schriftstellern zugestehen muß. (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 522)

At the same speaking engagement at the Stauden Gallery, Wolf was asked about her development since the news broke about her involvement with the *Stasi*. She was clearly shaken by the whole ordeal, but she also confesses to her human frailty and thin skin in confronting it publicly. She writes in her diary entry of the same day, September 27, 1993:

Jemand fordert mich auf, meine Entwicklung seit der Einsicht in die Akte, besonders meine IM-Akte, zu beschreiben. Ich versuche, so offen wie möglich über die verschiedenen Stadien zu sprechen, über den ersten Schock, den Schrecken über mich selbst, die Verzweiflung über die Unmöglichkeit, in der allgemeinen Stasi-Hysterie auf eine Differenzierung in der Öffentlichkeit rechnen zu können, auf die Gefahr, mich mit der Charakterisierung, die ich dann in der Öffentlichkeit erfuh, zu identifizieren, auf die Therapie durch Schreiben und das allmähliche Wieder-Herausfinden aus der Depression bis zu dem jetzigen Zustand, da ich glaube, ich könne diese Episode, die immer ein Wunder, auch ein dunkler Punkt bleiben werde, aus meiner Entwicklung heraus erklären. Während ich rede, merke ich, daß ich mir doch zu viel zugetraut habe, daß ich doch noch zu dünnhäutig bin für derartige. (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 522–3)

However, there is yet another diary entry that sheds light on Wolf's reaction to the Literature Debate and her experience through her writing. As previously mentioned, Wolf began writing *Medea* in 1991 and published it in 1996 (*Medea: A Modern Retelling* 1998), making it her first longer piece of fiction since *Was bleibt*. In her diary entry of September 27, 1996, Wolf describes a reading at the

Marie Women's Center in Marzahn, which was involved in advising unemployed women, a vulnerable population. Wolf, who through her literary success had to confront the male establishment in both East and West, writes:

Wir sprechen von der Sündenbockproblematik in *Medea*, ziemlich lange von der Ausübung männlicher Macht über die Jahrtausende hin und darüber, welche Art Männer geeignet sind, zur herrschenden Klasse aufzusteigen, und welche Art Frauen; was mit Frauen passiert, wenn sie auch aufsteigen wollen; wie sie mit der *negativen Auslese* fertig werden, der sie begegnen, hochneurotischen Personen in neurotisierenden Strukturen, die einen Realitätsverlust beinahe erzwingen. (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 572-73)

The discussion about scapegoating, gender, and male power can be found in the secondary literature about Wolf's *Medea* as well. Wolf's positive reinterpretation of this maligned female figure from Greek mythology could be seen as Wolf's imaginative response to the male establishment that harshly criticized her during the Literature Debate. In terms of Wolf's legacy, however, it is important to note that while *Medea* was received with mixed reviews, it became one of Wolf's most commercially successful works (Joch 225; Romero 132). Sørensen states that Wolf had once said that the two Greek figures she had written about, Cassandra and Medea, were quite different characters, but had one thing in common—they were indestructible women (122). Wolf appears to be the same.

Other scholars such as Schoeps and Sørensen see Wolf's experimental text *Nagelprobe* as providing another imaginative response to the critics who took aim at Wolf during the Literature Debate (Schoeps 268; Sørensen 85). In this piece from 1991, Wolf focuses on the actual and metaphorical uses of nails, including torture throughout the ages. One paragraph is indeed noteworthy as it relates to Wolf's poor timing of *Was bleibt*. Wolf writes:

Oder manche treffen den Nagel auf den Kopf. Manche treffen immer jeden Nagel auf den Kopf. Oder sie treffen unfehlbar jeden Kopf. Unfehlbar immer jeden anderen Kopf, denke ich. Manche sind unfehlbar, sage ich. Neidisch? frage ich mich (*Auf dem Weg* 158).

Wolf's actual responses to the Literature Debate and subsequent *Stasi* controversy, however, can be found for the most part in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*. She does not directly address the discussion about *Gesinnungsästhetik* and East German writers, but does state in a speech given in 1991 that literature had done the work of the press. She writes, "Aber was ist inzwischen mit der Kunst? Der Posten ist vakant, den sie so lange besetzt hielt. Diese Entlassung aus einer Dauer-Überforderung erleichtert, aber ich beobachte auch Irritationen: Die Arbeit der Presse muß die Literatur nicht mehr machen..." (*Auf dem Weg* 20). As for the future, she states that literature must illuminate the blind spots of the past, something she had tried to do. She adds, "Kurz: Die Literatur wird leisten müssen, was sie immer und überall

leisten muß, wird die blinden Flecken in unserer Vergangenheit erkunden müssen und die Menschen in den neuen Verhältnissen begleiten” (*Auf dem Weg* 21).

Wolf never said that literature and/or writers were actually supposed to do something about those blind spots. In *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*, she recognizes there is often a cleft between contemplation and action, including her own, and that intellectuals are different from the masses who, according to Wolf, adjust to reality (*Auf dem Weg* 76-80). This is relevant to the Literature Debate and the role of the intellectual in postmodern, industrialized society. For example, the East German intellectuals helped organize the mass demonstration before the fall of the Wall. Yet the masses did not heed their call to establish an alternative to reunification, and their warnings were basically cast aside in the rush for material goods in the West. As for Wolf’s actions, she explains her reasons for remaining in the GDR in a letter of September 1991 to Wolfgang Thierse who had suggested a tribunal to judge the former East Germans. It is clear in this instance that Wolf saw a connection between her contemplation and action in the GDR. In contrast to the opportunists, she is referring to herself when she writes:

Die anderen hingegen, die wußten, daß sie nicht *gerecht*, nicht *schuldlos* hier leben können, trotzdem nicht weggingen, weil sie den Widerspruch aufrechterhalten und Leuten helfen wollten und sich an unlösbaren Widersprüchen in einem Dauerkonflikt aufgerieben haben—die zerfleischen sich jetzt wieder, die sind natürlich Zielscheibe der westlichen Medien und sehen sich (wieder) ausgegrenzt und lahmgelegt. Mag sein, daß ein solches Tribunal deren Schuldgefühle noch verstärken und ihre Lähmung endgültig machen würde... (*Auf dem Weg* 81)

Furthermore, Wolf states to Günter Grass in a letter of March 1993 why she did not provide her reasoning to the Western media after the Biermann affair or explain that she had tried to resign from the party, and again she references her desire to remain in the GDR to make a difference. She did not want her words misconstrued or manipulated by the West, and she offers the same reasoning in her correspondence to Efim Etkin the same year when she explains how the *Was bleibt* scandal reduced her to silence (*Auf dem Weg* 260-61; 196). Wolf had thought that she could actually influence others to work towards a reformed, democratic socialist state.

As Christa Wolf nears the end of her life and her career, she can rest assured that her work has made a difference; for better or worse people have taken notice. Some will always wonder why she had not thoroughly questioned the legitimacy of the GDR, why she did not speak up when the Soviet Union invaded former Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, or why she had not written with a more pointed pen in defense of the victims who fell during the dictatorship, victims who were trying to obtain the self-realization she had always emphasized in her writings, for herself and others. Her lack of voice with regard to the aforementioned invasions is

one reason why I disagree with Postl's assertion that Wolf's finger pointing at problems cannot be reduced to one political system. Wolf made no secret of voicing her objections to America's involvement in the Vietnam War (see *Ein Tag im Jahr* and *Kindheitsmuster*).

As for Wolf's legacy, several biographical works have been dedicated to Wolf since the Literature Debate of the 1990s, restoring her international reputation as a major literary force with which to reckon. Yet she is also deserving of criticism. Wolf is aware that both she and the GDR were full of contradictions and acknowledges them generally throughout *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*. Unfortunately, she rarely goes into details. There are some blind spots, however, that would be of interest to illuminate, which perhaps are dealt with more extensively in the twelve-volume biographical work edited by Sonja Hilzinger.

In his review of *Parting from Phantoms*, for example, Jeffrey Herf discusses Wolf's insistence that she had good intentions in supporting the GDR and states that she ignores the bad intentions of the founding generation of East German Communists. For him, one glaring blind spot is Wolf's silence regarding Jewish matters in the former GDR. He asserts that her SED party membership made her complicit with the East Germans' "despicable and morally inexcusable" policies regarding Jewish matters, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel, giving concrete examples (38-40). Clearly, if one looks for a blind spot, one will find it.

I maintain that Wolf's blind spot related to religion and spiritual matters is a significant one that is related to her legacy. Throughout her works, Wolf touches on various themes including gender issues, patriarchal power, the environment, war and peace, and the self-realization of the individual. As Resch points out, however, there is one dimension Wolf never dealt with: the spiritual realm (170). Wolf talked about developing the whole human being—the ultimate goal of all GDR economic, scientific, cultural, and political efforts (Resch 29)—but she neglected the spiritual dimension, something that many individuals rely on, especially during times of crisis.

Moreover, there are no spiritual reflections in Wolf's diary entries in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, which covered 40 years of her life, and those related to Christianity in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* are negative, almost mocking of those who attempt to practice it (314-37). In Wolf's times of crisis, she quotes and relies on Goethe instead. In answer to Herf's criticisms, this might explain why Wolf has little if nothing to say about religious matters, such as the GDR's offensive position towards the Jews and Jewish state. Wolf, however, would not consider her lack of attention to the spiritual realm as a blind spot.

In her interview with *Die Zeit* in 2005, Wolf explains how she came to abandon organized religion in the Christian tradition (*Kammertöns*). She did the same when interviewed by Günter Gaus in March 1993 about her collaboration with the *Stasi* (Von Heurck 249). After the Second World War, when everything she had believed in had crumbled, she searched for something to believe in and

eventually arrived at socialism. Christianity “didn’t work” for her. What is unclear, however, is how Wolf could have strived for so long toward a socialist utopian ideal in the material, temporal world, especially having witnessed first-hand man’s brutality towards one another both in the Third Reich and Communist dictatorships.

While Wolf spoke of contradictions in the former GDR, the locus of her utopian efforts, she also used the word *unlösbar* (*Auf dem Weg* 73-74). In abandoning her Christian upbringing, she apparently abandoned the notion of a utopia situated in the next world, and yet the alternative she pursued as an informed member of the interpreting, educated class had repeatedly proven to be both a cruel illusion and an unattainable goal found no place on earth. This alternative was not situated in the former GDR, and by 1995 Wolf appeared to have realized it might not reside anywhere else in this world either. In her diary entry of September 27, 1995, she comments on the morning television news and the war in Bosnia. Wolf alludes to the difficulty of changing human behavior, past and future, and writes:

Ich stelle mir vor, wie die Menschen da noch viele Jahre elend leben werden, wie vieles unwiederbringlich zerstört wurde; am Nachmittag habe ich in dem Text für den Luchterhand Verlag, der den Inhalt des Medea-Manuskripts beschreibt, den Satz geschrieben: *Die Erzählerin läßt durchscheinen, daß sich die Verhaltensweisen der gesellschaftlich lebenden Menschen nicht geändert haben, seit Geschichte überliefert wurde.* Und daß diese Verhaltensweisen sich auch nicht ändern werden, könnte ich hinzufügen. (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 544)

Yet Wolf is quick to quote Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of John 8:7, when questioned about her own moral lapse. When interviewed by *Der Spiegel* in 2003 about being an informant for the *Stasi*, she replied, “Ich neige zu Schuldgefühlen. Aber von einzelnen Fehlentscheidungen abgesehen, habe ich mich, glaube ich, mir gemäß verhalten. Wer keine Fehler macht, werfe den ersten Stein” (Hage). Another biblical reference can be found in Wolf’s essay entitled, “Im Stein.” As in *Leibhaftig*, Wolf deals with a health issue in this essay, also written from 1994-95 after the Literature Debate and published in 1996. The narrator is semi-conscious during an operation and talks about her pain and fear, but she also plays with the word *Stein* and includes the same bible quote. “Wer unter euch ohne Schuld ist der werfe den ersten Stein” (*Hierzulande* 92). Ironically, Wolf ends this essay in a Christian vein that emphasizes suffering. She writes, “Leben bedeutet Schmerz. Aber das weiß ich doch schon lange, dachte ich...” (*Hierzulande* 96).

At the same time, however, Wolf disregards the most significant aspect of Christian doctrine, namely reconciliation. Her repeated allusions to shame, guilt, self-indictment, and self-reproach that permeate *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* ring hollow because she always stops short of specifically apologizing or asking for forgiveness. When she and Hermann Vinke went to the Stauden Gallery in 1993 for a reading, someone brought up the topic of her collaboration with the *Stasi* and

reconciliation with victims of the former regime. Wolf notes the following in her diary which explains her point of view on the topic and how she answered:

Also sage ich, als das Stichwort *Versöhnung* gefallen ist, es könne keine Versöhnung geben, ohne daß man die Tatbestände kenne, und noch während ich es sage, frage ich mich, ob ich das wirklich denke oder ob ich es nicht nur gelesen habe. Dies ist eines aus der übrigens wachsenden Zahl von Themen, zu denen ich keine feste Meinung habe, ich möchte hören, ob die Leute eine Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer Vergangenheit überhaupt wollen (aber kann man sie eigentlich *wollen*, wenn sie peinlich und schmerzlich ist, oder ist es einer der typisch deutschen protestantischen Rigorismen, anzunehmen, nach Schulbekenntnis und Reue werde Vergebung und Katharsis folgen—bisher ist es in der Geschichte immer anders gelaufen) ... (*Ein Tag im Jahr* 292-93)

For Wolf, the notion of reconciliation is a *Wunschtraum* or Protestant wishful thinking. She alludes to this in her concluding essay on Germany in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*. To emphasize this point, I refer to the English translation. Wolf maintains:

Of course, you can always, or usually, find people who need self-examination even more than you do. I expect you realize I am not talking about criminal acts. Nor can I believe, unfortunately, that the majority of those who cooperated informally with the *Stasi* will search out the people they had under surveillance and confess their misdeeds to them. To believe that would be Protestant wishful thinking. They would probably rather go on living with the burden on their souls, or they will try to relieve the burden by defending what they did, or they will cling to the ideological suppositions that made them prone to such activity in the first place. (*Parting from Phantoms* 301)

In one respect, Wolf is right that most people (East Germans) will not seek out those they had harmed. But for someone who spent her entire life working towards a utopian ideal on earth, she fails to realize that reconciliation is no less “wishful thinking” for others. Moreover, her lack of specificity with regard to her own behavior leaves the reader wondering how she would categorize herself in the classifications she has delineated.

Twenty some years ago, Wolf mourned the failed socialist experiment and was considering what remained. At this point in time, and similar to the East German writer in *Leibhaftig*, one wonders if Wolf is considering what is next. Having experienced fascism, socialism, and now democracy, all on German soil, has she shifted her perspective in hopes of finding a better world in another life? Given that Wolf wrote about suffering in the metaphors of nails and stones after the loss of her utopia, is it possible that Wolf’s choice of words is indicative of an unconscious longing for an eternal home in a spiritual dimension—a peaceful place where

polemics, patriarchy, and conflict no longer hinder self-realization? After all, she ends *Nagelprobe* with a very short piece from Ernst Bloch entitled “Principle of Hope,” in which hope is associated with crucifixion, the crux of Christian faith. In her interview with *Die Zeit*, Wolf commented, “Böll hat zu mir gesagt, wer einmal Katholik war und wer einmal Kommunist war, der wird das nie wieder los” (Kammertöns). One can only guess if Wolf now agrees as she approaches yet another uncertain change in her life.

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