

The Difficulty of Saying "I": Translation and Censorship of Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*

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"Sometimes I write a letter, simply to be able to look at myself in the mirror," admitted Christa Wolf in an interview with Therese Hörnigk in 1987 (*Im Dialog*, 65).¹ Her comment reflects not only the author's disillusionment with the potential for social change in the GDR as well as a sense of superfluousness as critical commentator of society's ills, but also an awareness of the problematic consequences of her choice to refrain from open opposition to the SED regime by not leaving the country. The *Literaturstreit* of 1990 has underscored Wolf's position as tacit supporter, perhaps even collaborator of the discredited SED-regime, and drawn attention to the many privileges and benefits she and her colleagues had reaped from their silent cooperation. Two events in particular made Wolf the primary target of this debate, whose ultimate goal it was to question the existence of a *littérature engagée*, a literature that successfully combined political correctness with artistic merit: Wolf's appeal "Für unser Land" of 3 November, 1989, in which she urged her compatriots to reconsider their decision to leave for the West, and the publication of *Was bleibt* in the summer of 1990. Without question, Wolf displayed an untimely degree of naiveté by publicly expressing her rekindled hope in East Germany as the locus of a communitarian, humanist, and anti-materialist society.² By presenting herself as spokeswoman for a second socialist experiment she provoked critics to cast her in the role of intellectual representative of the discredited idea of socialism in general and of the SED regime in particular. Similarly, her decision not to publish *Was bleibt*—the account of her surveillance by the secret police in 1979—until 1990, confirmed the suspicion that Wolf had, throughout her literary career, deliberately withheld criticism that would have jeopardized her special status as representative, yet critical GDR author, and agreed to compromises in order to continue to be able to publish in the GDR.

It is true that Wolf accepted a small but significant change in the East German edition of *Kassandra* in order to facilitate its simultaneous publication in both Germanies.³ It is also true that she did not openly oppose the exclusion of several of her colleagues from the Schriftstellerverband (Writers' Union) in 1979, but rather withheld her

vote and expressed her concern about this measure only behind the scenes in an unpublished letter.⁴ Neither did Wolf protest the firing order at the German-German border, nor did she take an unmistakable stand towards the Soviet military interventions in either Czechoslovakia or Afghanistan. In fact, her brief commentary published on the front page of *Neues Deutschland* on 4 September, 1968, reads more like an acclamation than a critique of the government's decision to send troops into the rebellious city of Prague. At the same time, Wolf's literary work leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that this event had severely shaken the author's loyalty towards her state. In fact, the disclosure of Stalin's crimes at the XX. Party Congress in 1956 had already undermined her faith in the East German brand of socialism: "My own blind beliefs vanished. From then on I wanted to stand by my experiences. And I would refuse to let anyone talk me out of them, repress them, or deny them. Otherwise I never would have been able to write a single line" (Im Dialog, 42).

In her poetical essay "The Reader and the Writer" (1968), Wolf defines the task of the fiction writer as giving the most detailed, differentiated, and truthful rendition of experience. From the beginning, Wolf was wary of narrow interpretations of her texts in the context of Cold War politics—implying a right and a wrong, a for and against, a them and an us—superimposed on her work in East and West. Wolf did, however, join initiatives of writers that transcended the German-German conflict and focused on the world wide issues such as nuclear disarmament and the preservation of world peace.⁵ Wolf's commitment to and identification with the fundamental anti-fascism of the East German state—however much this may have been self-proclaimed—motivated her to steer a course of compromise between GDR repression and Cold War ideologism. She refrained from directly supporting or criticizing the SED regime on those occasions where her publicized opinion would have forced her emigration to the West.

Her decision to remain in the GDR can by no means be interpreted as unqualified support for the SED government; it is, however, evidence of her vision of an economic and social alternative to the capitalist West.⁶ While the prerequisite for such an alternative had been met by the GDR's socialist economic structure, with both sexes equally involved in the production process, Wolf was convinced that women's different historical experience had to be recognized and validated to assure the success of such a social experiment. Consequently, as a writer, she explored specifically female ways of constituting the fictional self, bringing her in conflict not only with advocates of Socialist Realism but also with Western supporters of a rigorously male-defined modernism.⁷ The primary focus on Christa Wolf in the 1990 *Literaturstreit* was thus

undoubtedly influenced by the unusual fact that a woman writer had attempted to express a female subjectivity in her texts and had found a world wide audience for it.⁸

In my contrastive analysis of *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963) and its English translation (1965), I will read Wolf's first book-length work as an initial attempt at a "socialist modernism." The continued value of this and subsequent works by Wolf lies in the accuracy and complexity with which she probes human behavior under adverse historical circumstances. As I will show in this article, even a text like *Der geteilte Himmel*, which on a surface level reads like a political vote for the socialist experiment in the GDR as well as the writer's support for the division of Germany, eludes the binary opposition of East/West, them/us which critics have used to categorize Wolf's work. The hybrid nature of the text serves as example of Wolf's sincerity as a writer, evidence of her personal integrity, as well as her relentless commitment to a social alternative.

Frank Schirmmacher's article "Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten"—presumably a review essay on the occasion of the publication of three works by and about Christa Wolf—marked the beginning of the 1990 *Literaturstreit*. Its subtitle "Auch eine Studie über den autoritären Charakter" alerts the reader that the review focuses on the assessment of Wolf's character, rather than on a critical evaluation of her work. Schirmmacher directly links her early text *Der geteilte Himmel* to her political intervention in 1989 with the appeal "Für unser Land":

Christa Wolfs erstes Buch "Der geteilte Himmel", handelt von der Republikflucht und davon, daß es anstrengender und schwieriger, aber auch ehrenvoller und süßer ist, im sozialistischen Vaterland auszuharren. . . . Nahezu dreißig Jahre später taucht dieses Erklärungsmuster wieder auf. Anfang November 1989 verspricht der Appell Christa Wolfs denen, die in der DDR bleiben, "kein leichtes, aber ein nützliches und interessantes Leben", "keinen schnellen Wohlstand, aber Mitwirkung an großen Veränderungen," den "Aufbau einer wahrhaft demokratischen Gesellschaft"—kurz: all das, was sich schon Rita im "Geteilten Himmel" versprach.

Christa Wolf's first book *Divided Heaven* addresses the issue of defecting to the West. She argues that it is more demanding and difficult, but also more honorable and sweeter to hold out in the socialist fatherland. . . . Almost thirty years later, that same rationale shows up again. In the early days of November 1989, Christa Wolf's appeal promised those who decided to stay in the GDR "not an easy,

but a useful and interesting life, no rapid wealth, but the opportunity to bring about important societal changes, the building of a truly democratic society," in short: everything Rita had already promised herself in *Divided Heaven*.

In order to find confirmation for his reductionist reading of *Der geteilte Himmel*, Schirmmacher looks toward a political statement made almost 30 years after the publication of the literary text. Reading the text exclusively for its ideological message, he ignores not only its socio-historical context, but its artistic merits and problems as well. Creating a mixture of text and author, fiction and biography, politics and art, Schirmmacher's polemical critique evokes the discussion sparked by Wolf's text immediately after its publication in the GDR.

In their review of *Der geteilte Himmel* on 31 August, 1963, critics Dieter Allert and Hubert Wetzelt joined forces to question the ideological reliability of its young aspiring author. Wolf's text had already elicited some unfavorable criticism at that point. Reviewers had been concerned that Wolf had deviated too vehemently from the prescriptions of Lukácsian Socialist Realism, which required the writer to employ the perspective of omniscient narrator consistently, providing the reader with a partisan [parteilich] depiction of the most progressive social class of his/her time. Allert and Wetzelt set themselves apart from their colleagues by focusing their criticism not on the literary inadequacies of the text, but rather on the ideological ambivalence of the author:

Christa Wolf spinnt an einigen Stellen und Figuren den Faden dekadenter Lebensauffassung in unserer sozialistischen Entwicklung, und das hinterläßt beim Leser das Gefühl, daß hier eine noch zwiespältige Autorin versucht, unvereinbare Ideologien miteinander zu verbinden.

With her depiction of some characters, Christa Wolf weaves a thread of decadence into our socialist development. This suggests to the reader that an ambivalent author is trying to combine two contradictory ideologies.

Like Schirmmacher, who argues that Wolf's authoritarian character prevented her from realizing "that she was living under a totalitarian regime," Allert and Wetzelt come to the conclusion that Wolf is not a convinced Marxist and is therefore unable to produce progressive literature for a GDR audience. Unlike Schirmmacher, however, the East

German critics were not convinced that *Der geteilte Himmel* unequivocally advocated GDR socialism.

While Allert and Wetzelt's attack on Wolf's character was refuted decisively, it took some time before her first book was accepted into the ranks of GDR national literature. Dieter Schlenstedt's article, which sums up the 1963 debate on Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*, still reflects some of the initial apprehensions about the ideological indecisiveness of the text:

Die Symbole und motivischen Beziehungen in der figurengebundenen Erzählung ermöglichen der Autorin, einen weiten Bezug herzustellen, ohne dabei die Individualisierung ihrer Helden und der Sprache ihrer Erzählung einzubüßen. Sie bringen aber zugleich den Mangel an Deutlichkeit hervor, der auch damit verbunden ist, daß die überschauende Erzählfunktion in der Erlebniswelt Ritas verschwimmt. . . . Dies legt der Objektivierung der Figuren Grenzen auf. (102)

The symbols and motifs within the story allow the author to create a wide context without sacrificing the individualism of her characters or her style. At the same time, they are at the root of the narrative's lack of clarity, which is connector to the fact that the author's comprehensive perspective is blurred by Rita's experience. This technique limits the degree of objectivity with which the characters can be described.

Wolf's subjective narrative technique is deemed responsible for the wavering of positions that Allert and Wetzelt had interpreted as a sign of the author's ideological unreliability. Schlenstedt, however, is able to integrate Wolf's text into the concept of progressive socialist literature, arguing that its deficiencies merely reflect a transitional stage of GDR society [Übergangsgesellschaft]. Schlenstedt still expresses discomfort with Rita's blurred perception, which informs the unfolding of the narrative. Disturbed by the protagonist's lack of firmly established ego boundaries, he puts his finger on the very feature that underlay the initial criticism of ideological ambivalence, i.e. the excessive femininity of the text, and its deviance from an essentially masculine concept of Socialist Realism.

The debate about *Der geteilte Himmel* in the GDR was clearly motivated by the desire to see a talented and promising young writer like Christa Wolf on the side of socialism. Despite the fact that the debate

extended the limits of acceptable socialist fiction, Wolf was disappointed about the direction it had taken:

Man muß sich zwingen, sich damit zu konfrontieren, daß es eben verschiedene Auffassungen darüber gibt, was Kunst ist, was Kunst heute bedeutet und welche Funktion sie in unserer Gesellschaft hat. Das muß man dann auch in der Diskussion sagen, und man darf keinen Schritt zurückweichen, auch wenn man selbst—das ist die große Schwierigkeit dabei—im Laufe der Zeit sieht, was alles wirklich zu kritisieren wäre. Aber diese Kritik kommt nicht, sondern es kommt Kritik, gegen die man sich nicht nur um seiner selbst willen bis zuletzt verteidigen muß, und zwar, indem man den Kampf aufnimmt: nicht, indem man sagt: Freunde beruhigt euch; es ist alles da, es ist alles parteilich, es ist alles positiv. Man muß im Gegenteil sagen: Nein, es ist etwas anderes da, als ihr wollt, weil wir über Parteilichkeit und das Positive und über das Glück und andere Dinge verschiedener Meinung sind. (Hörnigk 95)

You have to force yourself to confront the fact that there are different ideas about the nature of art and its purpose in our society today. And you have to speak up about that in the discussion, and refuse to step aside, even if you yourself—and that is what's so difficult—in the meantime have become aware of what needs to be criticized. But you don't get this kind of justified criticism. Instead you receive the kind which you have to fight and defend yourself against. Not by saying: friends, don't worry; everything's there, everything is politically correct [parteilich], everything is positive. On the contrary. You have to say: No, it's different, because we have different opinions about what is politically correct and positive, because we disagree on the nature of happiness and many other issues.

Wolf dismissed the criticism of *Der geteilte Himmel* as regressive, demanding a more constructive criticism that would relate to her text as being a fictional reminder of society's larger goals and provide the author with helpful feedback. The discussion of Wolf's first book-length publication signaled to her that her concept of fiction was ultimately irreconcilable with the official need for artistically constructed affirmation, and that a publicly reached consensus only facilitated the repression of fundamental differences of opinion.

The reception of *Der geteilte Himmel* in the West was no less dominated by ideological interests. A text by a then unknown literary figure like Wolf elicited interest among West German critics, exactly

because of its critical perspective on GDR society. Reviewers welcomed *Der geteilte Himmel* as a sign of a political liberalization of GDR society that permitted writers to modify the rigid specifications of Socialist Realism and move away from the artificial *Schwarz-weißmalerei* of previous depictions of East German life. Wolf's attempted literary modernism and her critical assessment of the shortcomings of actually existing socialism permitted them to cast the author in the role of dissident. While some critics were concerned about the welfare of Wolf, who might have to answer for the favorable reception of her courageous work in the West, others warned their readers about her skillful writing, which merely provided a new packaging for the same ideological message (Neumann, Brandt). The contradictory assessment of Wolf's world view by critics in East and West demonstrates that her work resisted a snug fit with any of the ideological categories critics held available for the evaluation of texts coming from the GDR. It is thus not surprising that East German critics were disappointed about Rita's failure to prevent her lover's flight to the West, while West German critics in turn found Rita's motivation for not following him unconvincing.

While the West read *Der geteilte Himmel* as seismograph for a possible and necessary criticism in the GDR, East German critics had difficulty accepting socialist reality as described by Christa Wolf and made every attempt to smooth out the contradictions brought to the surface by her text. Nevertheless, *Der geteilte Himmel* eventually emerged from the 1963 debate as a model for a national GDR literature. Its innovative and subjective narrative perspective and its undisguised, but constructive criticism of East German society were regarded as progressive forms of writing that would accelerate the building of true socialism. Such a positive evaluation, however, was quickly revised during the subsequent phase of conservatism of the mid-sixties. The English translation—commissioned by the state-owned publishing house "Seven Seas" two years later—eliminated the very features of the text that had destabilized ideological readings in the East.⁹ The English translation is thus the most obvious attempt of adjusting Wolf's text to the masculine aesthetics of Socialist Realism. The following comparative discussion of original and translation explores the tensions between Wolf's ambition as a writer to undermine binary oppositions and the conflicting tendency towards closure evident in the translation. The concurrent existence of two contradictory texts under the name of Christa Wolf perhaps most blatantly illustrates the problematic aspect of attempts by GDR writers to eschew ideological categories and the interpretative distortions inflicted on GDR literature under the influence of Cold War criticism.

Christa Wolf began working on *Der geteilte Himmel* during a time when the Bitterfeld Movement exerted its most immediate influence on writers in the GDR. Like many of her colleagues, Wolf answered the call of cultural officials to teach creative writing to factory workers in exchange for a direct exposure to the working world. Transferring her experience of industrial production to the realm of fiction, however, presented an unforeseen challenge:

Ich sehe die Manuskriptanfänge durch, die auf meinem Schreibtisch übereinanderliegen. Die Langwierigkeit des Vorgangs, den man schreiben nennt, erbittert mich. Aus der reinen Brigadegeschichte haben sich schon ein paar Gesichter herausgehoben, die ich besser kenne und zu einer Geschichte miteinander verknüpft habe, die wie ich deutlich sehe, noch viel zu simpel ist. . . . Es ist merkwürdig, daß diese banalen Vorgänge, 'dem Leben abgelauscht,' auf den Seiten eines Manuskripts ihre Banalität bis zur Unerträglichkeit steigern. Ich weiß, daß die wirkliche Arbeit erst beginnen wird, wenn die Überidee gefunden ist, die den banalen Stoff erzählbar und erzählenswert macht. (22)

I'm looking over the many beginnings of my manuscript lying on my desk. The lengthy struggle of the writing process frustrates me. A few faces have emerged from the simple brigade story, faces that I'm beginning to know better and therefore have connected with a story line. I can see clearly that the plot is still much too simple. . . . How strange that the processes of everyday life become almost unbearably banal on the pages of a manuscript. I know that I can only begin to really work on the story, once I have found a larger context which makes the story worth telling.

The chronicle of the everyday life of a brigade lacked the psychological depth Wolf needed to successfully create fiction. It was her encounter with Anna Seghers that ultimately provided Wolf with the framework for her own narrative: the division of Germany. Seghers, in writing her own novel on this subject, *Die Entscheidung* (1959), had been motivated by the desire "to show how the division of our time, which splits the world into two camps, influences every single aspect of life, even the most private and intimate: love, marriage, work are no more exempt from the great decision than politics or commerce" (Dimension, 256). Written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, *Die Entscheidung* illustrates the logical steps that lead the protagonist to

make a choice for one political system, a focus that is shared by the English translation of Wolf's text.

Wolf's interest as a writer, however, lies in the description of the process of division and separation. Early on in the story, Rita muses: "Die beiden Hälften der Erde paßten ganz genau ineinander, und auf der Nahtstelle spazierten sie, als wäre es nichts," expressing the perfect harmony which dissolves during the course of the narration (16). The translation reverses the intent of the original, presenting the separation of the lovers as an inevitable consequence of the ideological division of the world: "The two halves of the world did not quite fit into each other, and they had walked along the seam as if it had not been there, she thought" (11). Through narrative technique and symbolism, Wolf achieves a degree of depth that is lacking in both Seghers' text and the translation. Thus she comes much closer to Seghers' self-assigned task of exploring the psychological dimensions of the division by giving up the unambiguous concept of reality that informs the other two texts.

Wolf's most significant strategy for expressing the psychological dimension of her plot is revealed by her narrative technique. Playing with different points of view, Wolf calls attention to the artificiality of fictional totality, the notion that a writer can transform the fragmented nature of human experience into smooth fictional realism. Literature should offer many versions of truth, looking at the experiential evidence from as many different angles as possible. This technique of switching from one narrative perspective to another is employed throughout *Der geteilte Himmel*, but it is most evident, and perhaps most unsettling in the prologue and the first two chapters of the book:

In jenen Augusttagen des Jahres 1961 erwacht in einem kleinen Krankenzimmer das Mädchen Rita Seidel. Sie hat nicht geschlafen, sie war ohnmächtig. . . . Sie kommt von weit her. Sie hat noch undeutlich ein Gefühl von großer Weite, auch Tiefe. Aber man steigt rasend schnell aus der unendlichen Finsternis in die sehr begrenzte Helligkeit. Ach ja, die Stadt. Enger noch: das Werk, die Montagehalle. Jener Punkt auf den Schienen, wo ich umkippte. Also hat irgendeiner die beiden Waggons noch angehalten, die da von rechts und links auf mich zukamen. Die zielten genau auf mich. Das war das Letzte. (9)

In those late August days in 1961, a girl called Rita Seidel woke up in a small ward in a hospital on the outskirts of the city. She had not been asleep; she had been unconscious. . . . She comes from far away and still has a vague sensation of depth and distance. But one quickly

emerges from the infinite darkness into the limited light. O yes, the city. More exactly: the factory, the assembly-shop. The exact spot on the tracks where I collapsed. So someone must have halted the two railroad cars that were coming at me from both sides. They were aimed directly at me. That was the last thing she remembered.

In this passage, Wolf uses the tools of narrative technique like a camera. In what could be read as an establishing shot, she provides the setting for her narrative, describing Rita in her hospital bed. She then zooms in on the location of the accident, changing from the omniscient point of view to Rita's subjective perspective in this flashback. This change of perspective conveys a sense of dramatic immediacy and lends the subsequent narrative a subjective angle. At the beginning of chapter two, Wolf reverses her strategy, changing from what appears to be an autobiographical beginning to an omniscient author, destabilizing the reader's confidence in the narrator as bearer of truth.

In the prologue, on the other hand, the shift from the descriptive "sie" to the inclusive "wir" alludes to a common experience shared by author, reader, and protagonist, encouraging the reader to add his/her own associations to the historical events represented in the text.

Die Leute, seit langem an diesen verschleierte[n] Himmel gewöhnt, fanden ihn auf einmal ungewöhnlich und schwer zu ertragen, wie sie überhaupt ihre plötzliche Unrast zuerst an den entlegensten Dingen ausließen. . . . Also kehrten wir zu unserer alltäglichen Arbeit zurück, die wir für Augenblicke unterbrochen hatten, der nüchternen Stimme des Radiosprechers lauschen und mehr noch den unhörbaren Stimmen sehr naher Gefahren, die alle tödlich sind in dieser Zeit. (7)

The unaccustomed brilliance struck people as incongruous and almost unbearable in those uneasy days. . . . So we returned to our daily work - abandoned for a brief spell while we listened to the impersonal voice of the radio announcer and to the silent voices of imminent danger, all fatal in that period. (1)

The English translation does render the address to the reader in the prologue, establishing a sense of socialist community between reader and writer. However, it does not show the above-mentioned changes from subjective to objective perspective, nor does it reflect the difference in tense employed in the original. Adjusting the text to the parameters of Socialist Realist fiction, in an effort to restore a sense of closure to it, the

translation consistently uses the simple past tense and relates all events from the perspective of an omniscient narrator:

In those late August days in 1961 a girl called Rita Seidel woke up in a small ward in a hospital on the outskirts of the city. She had been unconscious, not asleep. . . . She had come a long way back and the feeling of distance and depth remained with her, although she emerged quickly out of darkness into this sparse light. She remembered the city, then the works and the workshop and the exact spot on the tracks where she had fallen. Someone must have halted the two railway wagons which had been gliding towards her from either side, otherwise she would certainly have been crushed between them. That was the last thing she remembered. (2)

Wolf's original text conveys a sense of emotional agitation, a feeling that the protagonist is still very much torn between too different worlds. The translation, on the other hand, emphasizes the rescue operation, giving the reader the sense that the protagonist has already successfully overcome her traumatic experience.

Wolf's experimental narrative technique had been of great concern to critics in the GDR. It was felt that the inner monologue Wolf had so carefully and convincingly introduced in her text prevented a realistic depiction of the totality of socialist reality as it was or should be experienced by most (Wirth, Kurella, 27). Another argument against Wolf's intricate narration involved the concern about the accessibility of the text [Volkstümlichkeit]:

Der manchmal sehr rasche Wechsel der Zeitebenen und des erzählenden Subjekts, auf den der Leser nicht immer vorbereitet wird, droht Ungeübte hier und da zu überfordern. (Heise 149)

The sometimes very rapid change of perspective catches the reader off guard and places too high a demand on the inexperienced reader.

Evidently, most critics considered Wolf's subjective narrative technique to be in conflict with the principles of Socialist Realism.

Translator Joan Becker brought Wolf's text back to the expected literary form by replacing the changing point of view by an omniscient narrator. Beyond restoring the omniscient author, the translation further modifies those passages of the text that contest and even ridicule the notion of fictional totality. When Rita picks up Manfred at the bus station, he likens her to a heroine in a Russian novel: "The little brown girl with

the brown fur cap. Like in a Russian novel" (9). His comment encourages Rita to continue pretending that both of them are fictional characters:

Wir lassen den Roman einfach ablaufen. . . . Zum Beispiel sagt die Heldin jetzt zum Helden: "Komm, wir steigen in den blauen Bus ein, der da gerade um die Ecke biegt. Dann bring ich dich nach Hause, und du kommst mit mir zu meinen Leuten, die noch keine Ahnung haben, daß es dich gibt und die dich kennenlernen müssen, damit sie dich zur Weihnachtsgans einladen können. Genug Handlung für einen Tag?" (16)

"Well, we can let the story go on," said Rita. "How about this? 'Come, we'll take the blue bus which is just coming round the corner,' the heroine said to the hero. 'I'll take you home and then you'll come with me to meet my family, who still don't know you exist, or that they have to get to know you so that they can invite you to share our Christmas goose. Is that enough for today?' " (10)

The sarcastic overtones of the original are carefully edited out in the translation.

In a similar effort of constructing fictional totality, the passage describing Rita's reflection about a painting in her hospital room is altered to convey a different understanding of the relationship between reality and artistic representation:

Sie merkt, daß das Bild sich bei jedem Tageslicht verändert, und das gefällt ihr. Sie weiß: Das gibt es. Das stimmt. (26)

Then she noticed that the picture changed with every change in the light, and that pleased her. She felt this was real. (22)

While the German original posits that a represented object changes with the perspective of the viewer, the English translation presumes that the art object indeed reflects reality.

The omission or modification of several other sentences, particularly at the beginning or end of chapters serves a similar purpose of anchoring Wolf's text in Socialist Realism. Changing direct to indirect questions, the translation provides the narrative with a more definite political standpoint and eliminates a significant strategy that Wolf employs in order to open up the narrative and reflect the ambivalence of Rita's experience. The sentence "Habe ich denn genug anzufangen gewußt mit seiner Wahrheit?" which concludes chapter eight not only

posits the existence of several subjective "truths" but also emphasizes Rita's empathy with Manfred (36). The translation—"Looking back, she wondered whether she had done all she could to keep him, to throw off those ugly memories"—not only provides a sense of closure, but reduces the existentialist statement of the original to an almost banal reference to Rita's possible lack of helpfulness (38). Similarly, the exclamation ending chapter twenty-two, "Dieser harte Druck unausgesprochener Selbstvorwürfe!" (136) is replaced with the following sentence: "She was oppressed by the feeling that she had not done enough to help Manfred" (140).

Rita is cast as part of a collective of committed socialists whose task it would have been to prevent a wavering fellow citizen from leaving the GDR. By emphasizing Rita's concern about her failure to fulfill that role, the translation fills in the sense of a socialist collective that critics had missed in the original. At the same time, it de-emphasizes Rita's own indecisiveness as well as the centrality of her individualization in the text. The personal pronouns "I" or "me" are virtually absent from the translated text. The omission affects those passages that suggest that the project of socialism may in fact endanger the development of an individualized consciousness (9-10, 99).

In her description of Rita's transition from adolescence to adulthood, Wolf, however, only apparently creates a conflict between content and form which is resolved in the translation. Until the very end of the text, Rita is presented as one who resists the process of hardening that she sees taking place around her. This hardening is attributed to the political polarization of her entourage and to the imminent threat of a military confrontation with the West: "Morgen würde der erste wärmere Wind aus Westen alle Konturen auflösen und härtere hervortreten lassen" (22).¹⁰ The text associates hardness with ideological rigidity and the elimination of femininity. It is Frau Herrfurth whose bitterness has let her develop almost masculine facial features. And it is she who has separated herself entirely from the experiment of socialism, ultimately facilitating Manfred's flight to West Berlin (34). Similarly, Rita is struck by Manfred's stiffened back—which signifies his resignation to a life of skepticism and alienation—as she steps into his study at the beginning of her visit to West Berlin.

However, Wolf, is careful not to stereotypically associate such behavior with the West. At one point, she specifically draws a parallel between Frau Herrfurth and Mangold: "Rita wondered why she had never noticed how much alike Mangold and Frau Herrfurth were; was it possible for people to fight for quite opposite things in the same narrow-minded, selfish, nagging way?" (125). Rita herself attempts to avoid the

development of such strong ego boundaries that will armor her with a shield of indifference, making her insensitive and closed to new experiences and ultimately incapable of envisioning a societal alternative:

Heute erkennt Rita sich selbst kaum noch in dem tapsigen Wesen, das sich da ahnungslos zwischen den Menschen bewegte. Dieses grüne Ding, dem jeder die Nestwärme anroch, hat sich in etwas mehr als einem Jahr in eine blasse, großäugige Frau verwandelt, die lernt mühsam, aber für die Dauer, dem Leben ins Gesicht zu sehen, älter und doch nicht härter zu werden. (31)

Today Rita has trouble recognizing herself as the clumsy creature that was unsuspectingly moving around among people. In only a little more than a year, this immature thing that still smelled from the warmth of its nest had transformed itself into a pale woman with big eyes. This woman was slowly learning the long-lasting lesson of being able to look life straight in the eyes, of becoming older without becoming harder.

This passage, which emphasizes Rita's desire to reach maturity without losing the openmindedness and empathy of youth, is edited out in the translation, reducing an entire passage to one sentence: "Rita could hardly believe she had once been such a naive little girl up from the country" (28).

To be sure, Wolf's text ultimately does arrive at the point where Rita throws off her illness and reaches a state of maturity which provides her with an unfragmented, hence masculinized view of reality (190). The subjectivity of the text can thus be attributed to the "sick state of mind," as the translation puts it, which Rita finally overcomes. Rita eventually accepts the fact that she has to bury part of herself in order to gain this sense of self confidence (99). It is exactly the process of working through the events that threatened her sense of self, the surmounting of the feeling "Die zielen genau auf mich" that provides Rita with an objective perspective, with the ability "die Dinge beim richtigen Namen zu nennen" (190). Wolf's narrative experiment eventually has to yield to the parameters of her chosen genre: the initiation story. Wolf's interest in subjectivity, her focus on process rather than on result does not sufficiently evade the sense of closure inherent in the *Bildungsroman*. The translation resolves this contradiction between narrative technique and form, restoring the genre's characteristic sense of closure.

I would like to argue, however, that Wolf's choice of a female protagonist introduces femininity as a significant catalyst for a future-

oriented society. As I have shown earlier, the process of maturation described in *Der geteilte Himmel* involves a certain amount of masculinization against which Rita rebels, but which she ultimately accepts by identifying with Meternagel. Throughout the text, Wolf makes implicit references to women's equality under socialism. Manfred's petit bourgeois attitude toward women in the work place contributes significantly to Rita's estrangement from him. Her desire to continue in her profession as a schoolteacher greatly affects her decision to return from West Berlin. Wolf, however, does not limit herself to listing the professional advantages for women in the GDR. Through her characterization of Rita as a self-asserted, sexually mature woman, she insists on the importance of a feminine element in GDR society.

Rita's decision to remain in the GDR is motivated by her understanding of female self, which strikes a balance with the hardening that results from adulthood and social integration. Rita's newly-won confidence is most apparent in a passage in chapter thirteen, which describes her excursion with Manfred on the occasion of her twentieth birthday:

“Kannst du nicht schneller?” fragte sie. Manfred gab Gas. “Mehr!” forderte sie. Sie wischten in eine Kurve, dann lag eine gerade Strecke vor ihnen, eine Apfelbaumallee. “Mehr!” Manfred war ein ungeübter Fahrer. Er saß verkrampft am Steuer, mißtrauisch gegen sich selbst, er schwitzte, regte sich auf und horchte gespannt auf die Geräusche des Motors. “Mehr!” rief Rita. Höher wurde der Ton der vorbeisirenden Apfelbäume. “Hast du noch nicht genug?” “Mehr!” rief Rita. “Mehr, mehr!” Sie fing seinen Blick auf und gab ihn zurück, herauffordernd, rüchhaltlos. Ein neuer Ausdruck war in ihrem Gesicht, den kannte sie selbst noch nicht. Dieses Gesicht verdankte sie ihm, und sie zeigte es nur ihm, heute und immer. Sie war ihm gewachsen. Plötzlich begriff Manfred den Doppelsinn dieses Wortes. Seine Augen wurden heiß, er griff nach ihren Fingern und presste sie. (63)

“Can't you go faster?” she asked. Manfred stepped on the gas. “More,” she demanded. They entered a curve, then they had an even stretch of road ahead of them, lined by apple trees. “More!” Manfred was not a very skilled driver. He was sitting behind the steering wheel, cramped up and doubtful of his own abilities. He was sweating, annoyed, listening intently to the sound of the engine. “More!” shouted Rita. The sound of the apple trees zooming by became higher and higher. “You still can't get enough?” “More!” shouted Rita, “More, more!” She caught his glance and returned it,

challenging him without reservations. A new expression was on her face, one that she didn't know yet herself. She owed that face to him, and she showed it only to him, today and forever. She was his equal. Suddenly, Manfred understood the double meaning of this word. His eyes became hot, he reached for her fingers and pressed them.

Traditionally, the male protagonist of the *Bildungsroman* reaches manhood through his encounter with a mature woman effecting his sentimental education which leads to a suitable marriage. Wolf reverses the gender roles of the initiation story, showing Rita's acquisition of a new sense of sexual self through her encounter with Manfred, whom she then decides to leave. Her newly acquired sense of self gives her the strength to give up her love for Manfred and opt for a life in the GDR which is more fulfilling to her. That she is able to make such a decision shows that she has undergone a process of growth from naive country girl to mature woman. Her decision to stay in the GDR is thus motivated at least as much by the promise to live her own life—rather than one defined by a man—as it is the result of political conviction.

By omitting the passage quoted above, the English translation emphasizes the political aspect of her decision. It does so by emphasizing Rita's encounter with Ernst Wendland—a young party representative—who, unlike Manfred, shares her faith in the success of the new political system. By omitting the above mentioned scene, the translator tips the balance between female self-assertion and political conviction that Wolf had sought to establish in the text. Casting Rita exclusively as future wife for Wendland, who needs a mother for his two little boys, the translation tames her sexuality and projects her exclusively as future member of an ideal socialist family, embodied by the Schwarzenbachs, where the woman combines the role of nurturer with that of worker.

The cut in chapters thirteen and fourteen also reflects the "new morality" of the mid sixties. In 1965, Erich Honecker declared at the 11th Plenum of the SED: "Our state is a clean place. We have firm criteria for ethics, morals, decency, and good behavior" (Emmerich, 167). While this tirade was mainly directed at authors like Wolf Biermann, Manfred Bieler and Heiner Müller, whose works were considered pornographic, the 11th Plenum marked the end of a brief period of cultural détente in general. In the years immediately following the construction of the Berlin Wall, writers enjoyed a hitherto unknown degree of freedom of literary expression. In this relatively relaxed political atmosphere of the early 60s, Christa Wolf seized the opportunity to present her readers with a first practical example of her vision of fiction. Attempting to reconstruct Rita's process of remembering, she first introduces the subjective fourth dimension, which becomes characteristic of her later work.

The relative ease with which the translation makes the text conform to the expectations of cultural politicians, however, only apparently compromises the subversive character and the honesty of *Der geteilte Himmel* and supports the argument that Wolf only slightly transgressed the limits of permissible innovation.¹¹ The fact that Wolf pursues and further develops exactly those elements of the text that aroused criticism and provoked censorship is ample evidence of her integrity as a writer. In "Juninachmittag," published in an obscure collection of short stories in 1965, Wolf creates the prototype for her "poetics of everyday life," prefigured in the prologue of *Der geteilte Himmel*. In *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, which came under heavy attack in 1968 and was subsequently withdrawn from the East German market, Wolf employs the technique of subjective remembrance without inhibitions. In "Selbstversuch" (1974) and *Kassandra* (1983), she insists on the importance of the female element for the success of the socialist experiment.

While Wolf had still publicly fought for her poetics in 1964, she completely withdrew from the sphere of cultural politics only a year later, devoting herself entirely to reflecting, describing, and recording her experience of living in the GDR. Her decision to remain there under increasingly repressive circumstances was by no means exempt from this process. The central topic of *Was bleibt* is not only the author's surveillance by the Stasi, nor is it her status as victim of a repressive regime. It is rather an attempt to come to terms with her own lack of courage, and an expression of her conviction that her continued literary productivity would give expression to the critical voices in her country, and support those forces that ultimately toppled the SED regime. This document of Wolf's sincerity and painful self-evaluation is described by Frank Schirrmacher as "sentimentaler Kitsch."¹² In his attempt to devalue the text, he uses the very terminology that has traditionally been used to discredit texts by women writers. Wolf's supposed lack of clarity is interpreted as conscious ideological ambivalence motivated by personal interest. In retrospect, it may be difficult for us to understand Wolf's misconceptions about the inherently totalitarian nature of GDR socialism. However, Christa Wolf found and maintained her own voice in the GDR. *Der geteilte Himmel* and her subsequent works attest to that.

Notes

1. All translations are my own, except those specifically attributed to Joan Becker's English translation of *Der geteilte Himmel*.
2. Andreas Huyssen discusses the reasons and implications of this anachronistic position shared by so many intellectuals in East and West in: Andreas

Huyssen, "After the Wall: The Failure of German Intellectuals," *NGC* 52 (Winter 1991: 109-43).

3. Wolf's suggestion for unilateral disarmament of the Warsaw Pact nations was eliminated in the first East German edition of *Kassandra*, but included in all subsequent editions.

4. This letter was reprinted in Joachim Walter's report on the meeting of the Schriftstellerverband on June 7, 1979. Joachim Walter, "Das Tribunal," *Spiegel* 52 (23 Dec., 1990): 152-53.

5. See the two speeches entitled "Berliner Begegnung," and "Haager Treffen," in: *Die Dimension des Autors I*: 438-45.

6. Im Dialog, 85, 117.

7. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana UP, (1986) 46-47.

8. I am adopting Christiane Zehl-Romero's argument, who in her discussion of *Was bleibt* suggests that the attacks on Christa Wolf were largely motivated by her gender: "Insofern es Christa Wolf gewagt hatte, Probleme der Politik, Geschichte und Moral aufzunehmen und zu fragen, was spezifisch Frauen zu deren Lösung beitragen könnten, steht auch der hinter dieser Fragestellung verborgene Anspruch—nämlich, daß Frauen auf Grund ihrer über Jahrtausende anders verlaufenen Sozialisation Neues und Wertvolles einbringen könnten, sobald man ihnen Mitspracherecht gewährte—zumindest zur Debatte." Christiane Zehl-Romero, "Was bleibt," *GDR-Bulletin* 17 Spring (1991): 1.

9. "Seven Seas" was a subsidiary of "Volk und Welt," and the official publishing house for English translations in the GDR. Founded in 1957, a time when Western publishers showed little or no interest in literature coming from a socialist country, the company pursued two main goals: to keep alive the works of American and other English speaking "progressive" authors like W.E.B. DuBois, who were forgotten or neglected in their own countries, and to acquaint English and American readers with German literature, and in particular with new East German literature that emphasized anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-war themes.

10. Tomorrow, the first warmer winds from the west would dissolve all contours and harder outlines would emerge.

11. It is striking that Joan Becker's translation was reprinted by a US publisher and marketed as a student reader for high schools and colleges. While the preface by Jack Zipes provides the reader with the socio-historical background of the text, it does not mention the discrepancies between translation and the original. Charlotte Koerner was the first to draw attention

to the differences between the German and the English text which she discusses as a striking example of the difficulty of adequate translation. Christa Wolf, *Divided Heaven* Ed. Jack Zipes, Chicago: Adler's Foreign Books, (1979). Charlotte Koerner, "Divided Heaven by Christa Wolf? A Sacrifice in Message and Meaning in Translation," *German Quarterly* 57.2 (Spring, 1984): 213-30.

12. On the subject of women writers, sentimentalism and literary value, see: Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism*, Indiana UP, 1991: 1-16.

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