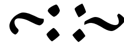
# ⁓ INTRODUCTION ⁓



GERALD A. FETZ AND PATRICIA HERMINGHOUSE

In the course of a literary career that spanned over fifty years, Christa Wolf was awarded many of the most prestigious literary prizes available to writers in the two German states, as well as prizes and honors bestowed by other countries in Europe and abroad. She was also mentioned repeatedly as a likely nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature. With her literary works now translated into over thirty languages around the world, some of them in new translations, Wolf's works are read, taught, discussed, and debated extensively, beginning with her first publication *Moskauer Novelle* (1961; Moscow Novella) and continuing into the present, more than ten years after the publication of her final novel, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (2010; *City of Angels or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*, 2013). However, as recent studies of Wolf suggest, many aspects of her work still invite further exploration.

The scholars whose essays comprise this collection pursue such new lines of inquiry into Wolf's oeuvre. As their essays attest, Wolf was an experimental writer who employed shifting poetological forms, which themselves often became themes in her works. The essays presented here were selected for their unique approaches, which offer new ways of reading and understanding Wolf's topics, issues, and texts. They also explore the relevance of these works for contemporary readers and provide evidence for the claim that Wolf's legacy as an exceptional writer of fiction and non-fiction endures.

## Patterns of Memory

A major focus of the volume is Wolf's understanding of and engagement with memory in its positive (remembering) and negative (forgetting) manifestations. Attention to patterns of memory is evident in virtually all of her literary works, where memory functions as both a versatile narrative strategy and, not infrequently, as a complex and multifaceted theme itself. Together with

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personal experience, memory forms a major component of Wolf's approach to writing, which she termed "subjective authenticity."[1]

Dwelling on the past, however, was discouraged by East German political and cultural authorities, who were almost singularly focused on building a socialist future. Their future-oriented ideology espoused the false notion that the past, especially the Nazi era, was no longer of interest or relevance for postwar East Germans, asserting that, as an avowed anti-fascist state, the GDR (in contrast to the Federal Republic) did not bear any responsibility for remembering and working through that dark period of German history.

Initially, Christa Wolf appeared to accept these rationalizations. She repressed much about her life and that of her parents between Hitler's ascent to power in early 1933 to the end of World War II in 1945. That perspective shifted, however, when Wolf, her husband, and one of their daughters traveled to the town (now in Poland) where she had spent her first fifteen years, before the family fled westward as the Red Army approached. This 1971 trip and the surprising memories she recovered in her birthplace showed Wolf the consequences of such forgetting. She subsequently sought to work through her newly gained insights, including embarrassment and shame for having supported the Nazis as an enthusiastic member of the *Bund deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls). By articulating a willingness to reflect on her past, she began to understand that she had not allowed herself to know who she was as a girl and how this still affected her identity twenty-five years later. Wolf's experiences in coming to terms with these repressed memories play a key role in her second novel, *Kindheitsmuster* (1976; *Patterns of Childhood*, 1980).

As she illustrates clearly in many of her subsequent novels and stories, this experience led Wolf to reject completely the claim that, unlike West Germans, East Germans had no reason to confront the Nazi past and engage in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Indeed, that life-changing trip led Wolf not only to embark upon the long, arduous, and important process of remembering and working through the Nazi period, but also to develop an increasingly complicated and ambivalent relationship to the GDR. She gradually became skeptical of its promise to create a humane form of socialism, as the country increasingly pursued an inhumane and authoritarian reality. The trip to Poland and the subsequent process of writing *Patterns of Childhood* laid the groundwork for Wolf's profound recognition of the central role of memory as the focus of her creative work.

## Last Words: The Trauma of the Forgotten

In the essay that opens this volume, "'Faraway So Close': Transcultural Memory as Christa Wolf's 'Last Word,'" Silke von der Emde traces the

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evolution of Wolf's concept of memory in her major works over almost fifty years, from the early *Moskauer Novelle* to *City of Angels or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*. Von der Emde points out how Wolf's concept and practice of remembering became more complex, dialogic, and feminist throughout her writing career until, in that last major novel, memory discourse ultimately moves beyond personal experiences and national concerns to global and international experiences that involve, extend, and deepen the concept of memory itself. "By displacing her memory work to Los Angeles," von der Emde asserts, "Wolf deterritorializ[es] German memory by bringing it into dialogue with non-GDR and even non-German perspectives." Not least among these are the community of diasporic German-Jewish refugees in Los Angeles; the Black housekeeping staff of Wolf's hotel (especially the migrant Ugandan Angelina); and even an extinct Native American tribe of Anasazi desert inhabitants. Drawing upon recent theoretical insights in the memory research of Daniel Levy, Natan Sznaider, Michael Rothberg, and Andreas Huyssen, among others, von der Emde demonstrates the possibilities that inhere in such a multi-vocal, transnational approach to memory discourses.

In his essay, "Fetishism or Working Through? Concerning the Role of Dr. Freud in *City of Angels or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*," David Bathrick expresses surprise at another neglected aspect of the novel: the last five words of its title. Addressing the psychoanalytical implications of a narrative voice that explains its epistemological focus, Bathrick cites the famous lines of the narrator: "It's about memories, about how we remember … And somehow I could have forgotten *that*." Bathrick interrogates the trauma of the forgotten that was unleashed when, after gaining access to her Stasi file in 1992, Wolf was compelled to remember her collaboration with the East German secret police, who enlisted her as an informant (*inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* or IM) in the years 1959–62, just as she embarked upon her writing career. Citing the narrator's assertion at the end of *Patterns of Childhood* that memory functions to make it "impossible to avoid the mortal sin of our time: the desire not to come to terms with oneself," Bathrick calls attention to the numerous instances in Wolf's final novel that reference the moral and religious dimensions of remembrance. Amid the crisis caused by the narrator's attempt to understand how she could have forgotten her brief, youthful phase as a Stasi informer, her friend Sally challenges her wishful attribution of the fetish-like power of the overcoat to protect and comfort her: "On the contrary, said Sally. It's there to take your self-defense mechanisms away from you." At this juncture, Bathrick—referencing Eric Santner's work on "narrative fetishism"—juxtaposes the prescribed narrative of anti-fascism in the GDR, which functioned to absolve people from reflecting on their own complicity in beliefs and practices that were the legacy of Stalinism, with the situation in postwar West Germany, where the well-known paradigm of

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the "inability to mourn" described the difficulty in commencing a process of *Trauerarbeit* and "coming to terms" with the legacy of National Socialism. In the strikingly different environment of the Los Angeles Getty Institute, however, Wolf's narrator finally attains the strength to open herself to new experiences and different perspectives, enabling a form of historical witnessing that does not depend on the protection of a fetishistic raincoat.

In her essay, "Who's Afraid of Christa Wolf or The Overcoat of Dr. Freud: Memory and Its Discontents," Martina Kolb also remarks on how little detailed attention critics have expended on interpretations of that eponymous "Overcoat of Dr. Freud." She points out that Wolf had indeed seen this coat in a 1992 exhibition at the London Freud Museum shortly before she departed for California. In the novel, Wolf's narrator reports hearing a Getty colleague's account of how he had lost a coat of Freud's given to him by the widow of the architect Richard Neutra, a story from which she derives a title for the novel she began to write in Los Angeles. Grounding her analysis in Freudian theory, Kolb examines the function of this phantasmic coat described as "an imaginative fabrication rather than a material presence" in the realm between remembrance and repression. Like Bathrick, Kolb reads the coat as the narrator's fetish. Materially absent but verbally present, the coat functions as the narrator's interlocutor in what suddenly emerges as the all-consuming struggle in her life to understand her forgotten collusion with the Stasi. In addition to fetishism, Kolb draws on other Freudian concepts including the uncanny, transference, and repetition, to trace what she terms "the phantasmagoric scope of Freud's coat." Ultimately, her analysis demonstrates the ways in which Wolf dismantles the complex fabric of memory and oblivion in her final novel.

## Subjective Authenticity: Christa Wolf Writes of Her Times

Memory plays a critical role not only in Wolf's plots and storylines, but also in the aesthetic form and narrative style of her texts. This style was criticized initially by GDR officials, making the process of publication approval for her work in the late 1960s and 1970s tedious and protracted. The officials condemned her modernist form as decadent and antithetical to the official doctrine of socialist realism, which insisted on simple, chronological storylines and didactic themes. Wolf accepted some features of socialist realism in her first literary work *Moskauer Novelle*, but she clearly rejected its precepts in *Der geteilte Himmel* (1963; *Divided Heaven*, 1965), moving even further from the doctrine in her subsequent novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968; *The Quest for Christa T.*, 1971).

By 1965 Wolf had already grown genuinely skeptical with regard to the notion of socialist realism, and she spoke out as a "candidate member" of

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the Central Committee of the SED at its 11th Plenary Session that year, advocating for more open and experimental forms of writing. Wolf asserted that "art is not possible without taking chances, that means, art must ask questions that are new, that the artist believes to see, even those for which he cannot yet find an answer, a solution."[2] Perhaps unsurprisingly, her assertions and suggestions were completely rejected. In response, Wolf doubled down in the pursuit of her own alternative vision, which she termed "subjective authenticity," an approach that aims to give literary expression to social reality by intertwining personal experience with historical developments. In addition to memory work, Wolf's subjective authenticity also entails a deep engagement with time. Wolf challenges her readers to cease conceiving of time as a chronological and natural truth. That challenge forces us to think critically about how her complex notion of time also affects our reading and understanding of the content and meaning of her works.

Intertwined with Wolf's challenge to time is her critical focus on space, including the displacement that was a facet of her early life. In "The Notion of *Heimat* in Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood*," Marijke Mulder addresses the important but neglected concept of *Heimat*, which she sees as constitutive of self-understanding in Wolf's work. Mulder begins her essay by reading *Heimat* as a highly ambivalent concept that offers security while also posing a threat to the individual and proceeds to examine the complicated experience of Nelly, the protagonist of *Patterns of Childhood*, when she travels to her original *Heimat*, Landsberg an der Warthe, in the part of Germany that was ceded to Poland after World War II. Despite the significant time lapse since she was last there, the city—now the Polish Gorzów—still seems in some strange way to be her real *Heimat*. As Mulder argues, this encounter with her original *Heimat* affects and changes Nelly, altering her sense of time. Mulder identifies three phases of memory work in the protagonist/narrator's attempts to revisit her relationship to *Heimat*, beginning with the "breakdown of her resistance" to undertaking an actual journey to the locus of her childhood. During her sojourn there, which comprises the second stage of the memory project, her emotional sense of connectedness to that place is reawakened as she encounters the sights, sounds, and smells of her childhood and re-experiences the sense of belonging that Mulder identifies as the basic experience of *Heimat*. For the adult narrator, however, displacement from the place that she can never again refer to as her real *Heimat*, due to the "ideological corruption" of the word by Nazi propaganda, creates an ambivalence with which, in a third stage, the narrator struggles as she undertakes to write an account of the journey. In the process, as Mulder notes, Wolf "shifts the objective from an account of a simple visit to her hometown to a more honest self-examination that no longer denies the complexity of the *Heimat* sentiment or its positive

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qualities. … For her the novel appears to serve as a vehicle for exploring the question, 'How did we become what we are today?'"

In "Writing the Self: Literary *Vergegenwärtigung* in Christa Wolf's *Patterns of Childhood* and *City of Angels or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud,*" Mark Lauer works through the lens of recent memory research to investigate how Wolf uses her own lived experiences repeatedly in her writing. He explores Wolf's difficulty in addressing her own past in the first person and her changing point of view on what constitutes the present time. Lauer introduces a new perspective on Wolf's writing through the term *Vergegenwärtigung* (bringing into the present) to understand Wolf's literary technique of (re) creating the self through texts. For Lauer, the question of how we became the way we are leads to a somewhat different understanding of the dynamics of memory discourse. He traces Wolf's desire to find a new way of writing that "takes into account the changing ways of an individual's being in the world … the desire to find the right voice to adequately address the different layers of reality." Lauer refers back to Wolf's early essay "The Reader and the Writer" (1968) and to her 1974 interview with Hans Kaufmann, in which she insists on a "fourth dimension" of modern prose, the dimension of the author ("Subjective Authenticity"). Even in *City of Angels,* one still encounters reflections on how memories are derived from layers of time, reality, and experience. As the protagonist puts it:

> Sometimes I wish I knew how the layers of time through which I have traveled, that I penetrate so easily in my thoughts, are actually arranged inside me: as actual layers, each one stacked carefully on top of the other? Or as a chaotic mass of neurons from which a power we do not understand can draw out whichever thread we want? (267)

This concept of the stacked layers of reality is already evident in Wolf's entry for the year 1970 in her collection of autobiographical writings *Ein Tag im Jahr, 1960–2000* (2003; *One Day a Year,* 2007), when Wolf mulls over the "technical problem that arises again and again when I write prose: how do I bring the stacked layers of time of which 'reality' consists safely over into my linear writing style?" (146). Lauer concludes that *Vergegenwärtigung* is a particularly apt way of describing this process of recalling past memories from the perspective of an ever-changing present.

In "The Heterochronic Narrative of Christa Wolf," Heike Polster also delves into *Patterns of Childhood,* but she approaches that work in a further innovative way by engaging the term heterochronic to analyze Wolf's multi-leveled narrative style with regard to time. Polster interrogates how heterochronicity operates as both a narrative and a temporal model for understanding Wolf's *Zeitgenossenschaft* (contemporaneity). Exploring the three time levels of narrative in *Patterns* as well as in several of the poetological

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writings, Polster posits contemporaneity as the paramount contention of Wolf's literary texts; she highlights the fluid ways in which Wolf couples the question of temporality (What *is* this thing called time?) with an aesthetic practice of portraying it (How does one *tell about* time?). Describing Wolf as "a writer of time itself, a teller, indeed, about time," Polster challenges readers to consider the significance and complexity of time as a significant feature of Wolf's works.

In "Subjective Authenticity as Realism: Christa Wolf and Georg Lukács," Robert Blankenship asks whether Wolf's notion of subjective authenticity really does reflect a complete rejection of socialist realism, as most scholars have claimed. By comparing several features of both narrative formulas, he suggests that Wolf's realism focuses largely on the mediation of experience and on engagement with literary history, elements that Lukács also emphasized. Blankenship poses the question: should it be surprising that Wolf's subjective authenticity did not reject all aspects of Lukács's version of socialist realism? After all, Wolf studied Lukács's writings on socialist realism "obsessively" while at the university and wrote in that vein in her earliest work, especially *Moskauer Novelle*. To be sure, Blankenship does not claim that Wolf's narrative style and topics aligned with socialist realism, and he explores her rejection of Lukács's more dogmatic demands for realism as well as her non-Lukácsian subjective, personal, feminist, and critical approaches to writing literature. At the same time, Blankenship offers an important reminder of the influence of Anna Seghers, and of other less dogmatic forms of socialist realism as they were espoused by Benjamin Bloch and Theodor Adorno, on Wolf's style and oeuvre.

## Christa Wolf in the Public Sphere

In several of her most autobiographical works, Wolf alludes to how she lived in the world outside of her fiction writing, describing how she thought about, engaged in, and often struggled in the public sphere as an activist, a voice of truth, and a defender of individuals and groups she regarded as victims of the GDR government. Gradually, because she participated in several cultural and social organizations, she gained a reputation as an important intellectual and trustworthy moral voice.

Wolf addressed her concerns and worries about the extensive damage to the natural environment in the GDR and around the world, as well as the danger of potential wars, violence, nuclear weapons, and nuclear power of every kind. Following the nuclear explosions in Chernobyl, Wolf wrote a semi-fictional, but realistic and personal book about the local and global dangers of nuclear power, *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages* (1987; *Accident:*

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*A Day's News*, 1989). Wolf was an accessible writer for interested fans of her literary works, she often gave readings and lectures, and her ideas about culture, society, and politics made her a sought-after speaker, the GDR equivalent of a public intellectual, who offered East Germans insights and information that were not made public in the official press. Just as Wolf did not shy away from controversial and even forbidden topics in her fictional works, she often made such topics the subject of her many essays, articles, speeches, and participation in both private and public events. While Wolf's fictional oeuvre consists of a large number of individual works, her non-fiction writings added up to some dozen collections that became popular with her followers.

In her essay "To Be Recognized Again: Memory, Amnesia, and Sincerity in Christa Wolf," Christine Kanz offers an insightful overview of the controversies surrounding Wolf in the last decades of her life. Issues of memory are central to Kanz's account of Wolf's lifelong pursuit of self-understanding, the relentless process of self-examination through which she—often through a fictionalized narrator—struggles "to understand who the person was that she had been … and what the reasons were for her selective amnesia." While the insistent self-questioning and attempts to recuperate repressed memory in *City of Angels* most often elicit comparison with *Patterns of Childhood*, Kanz reminds us that the search for integrity was already central in *The Quest for Christa T.* The epigraph to that novel poses the decisive question, "This coming-to-oneself—what is it?" For the narrator, as for her deceased friend Christa T., Kanz points out, "it becomes obvious that … language and writing are the only means available to them to counter confusion and fear," to resist and speak with a "true voice." In the immediate post-Wall period, however, Wolf's long-standing reputation as a writer who stood for truthfulness and personal integrity suffered attacks, especially in the overwhelmingly negative reviews of her 1990 work, *Was bleibt* (*What Remains*, 1993), in which a well-known writer, again a stand-in for the author herself, describes the frightening experience of being under constant observation by the Stasi. At issue was the fact that, although Wolf had written the text in 1979, she did not publish it until 1990, which led some conservative critics in West Germany to accuse her of opportunism and attempting to cast herself as a victim of the bygone regime.

Two years later, during Wolf's research stay at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, an even worse scandal broke with revelations that from 1959 to 1962 she had occasionally cooperated with the Stasi as an informer. The fact that she had not provided any useful information to the Stasi and that her "services" were terminated after only a few encounters was not enough to protect her from another round of media defamation, made worse by her avowal of having absolutely no memory of a cooperation

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with the Stasi. Having forgotten, as Kanz points out, is the trauma at the heart of Wolf's challenging final novel.

Daniela Colombo begins her essay "'This Is No Longer My World': The Multiple Alienations of Christa Wolf" by asserting that Wolf's oeuvre was shaped significantly by her own biography and reflects a constant re-examination of her own history and her failures to remember. Colombo notes Wolf's personal conflict between her desire to conform and her frequent need to oppose and resist. Wolf was forced to address serious questions about her complicity with the Stasi and personal responsibility vis-à-vis the failures and corruption of the GDR government. Colombo investigates how and to what extent those conflicts led to Wolf's various forms of alienation, and how she often became a stranger to herself and to the societies in which she lived before and after the demise of the GDR. Colombo delves into those contradictory needs and actions as Wolf initially remembered them during the visit to Poland in 1971. Colombo also addresses Wolf's ambivalence toward the GDR regime. Although Wolf became and for many years remained a member of the SED, she was simultaneously quite critical of the fact that the GDR leaders were taking the country in the direction of increasingly brutal authoritarianism. As Colombo notes, by becoming more aware of her various ambivalences, Wolf also became cognizant of how alienated she often felt, toward herself and the GDR. Colombo leads her readers through Wolf's writing about alienation from *Patterns of Childhood* through *What Remains* up to *City of Angels*. The essay contributes to our understanding of Wolf's development over time, aided by memory and her willingness to confront her past, an understanding that invites readers of her work to be alert to the various ways in which Wolf writes about her own ambivalences and alienations.

In "'Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter': Christa Wolf's Contested Role as Spokesperson for Generations of Readers and Women Writers," Janine Ludwig explores the ways in which Wolf earned the status of "perhaps the most influential 'voice' of her times."[3] Ludwig traces the important influence Wolf exerted in the GDR, noting that she was regarded by many as a "public intellectual" and "moral instance" in a "surrogate public sphere," and that her fiction often reflected her public concerns. Ludwig discusses Wolf's strong commitment to women's rights and issues of gender, as well as how she introduced to the GDR a feminist form of modernism that is visible in many of her novels and stories. Ludwig also delves into Wolf's interest in long-neglected women writers from the German Romantic era and the fact that virtually all of her protagonists are women. Ludwig also points out how Wolf's public speaking and writing, as well as her fiction works, influenced many other writers in the GDR, especially women.

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## Christa Wolf in Dark Times: Illness, Anxiety, and Trauma

Throughout her adult life, Christa Wolf was plagued by a number of illnesses, some of which required surgery and hospitalization. Frequently, when she was under significant stress from having been harshly criticized or when she internalized political developments in the GDR, she also suffered physically and became ill. Unsurprisingly, illness, anxiety, and trauma became frequent themes in her works. Novels including *The Quest for Christa T., Leibhaftig* (2002; *In the Flesh,* 2005), and *City of Angels* portray dark times when the autobiographical protagonists face, suffer, and attempt to work through their trauma in order to regain emotional and physical health. Although the stories in each of these novels were personal for Wolf, they are also sufficiently universal as to be relevant for readers of widely varying backgrounds.

In "'To Follow the Trail of Pain': Coming to Terms with the Past in Christa Wolf's *In the Flesh,*" Deborah Janson examines the pain experienced by the protagonist, a stand-in for Wolf, as she lies ill in an East Berlin hospital just before the GDR collapses. As the protagonist dreams, she re-enacts "scenes that reflect the disillusionment, guilt, embarrassment, and despair she suffered as a result of her involvement in party politics." Janson analyzes how this embodied memory process helps the protagonist heal and articulates the new way that Wolf uses "literary analogies, dream images, and memory scenes to follow the trail of pain that was part of her intellectually rich and socially engaged life." During her illness and hospitalization, the protagonist is able to work through her "pain, confront the failures of the GDR government, her own stubborn reluctance to criticize it more boldly, and her decades-long naïve hope that somehow the GDR would transform itself into a kind of socialist utopia." Finally, Janson points to a change in Wolf's attitude about the relationship between author and protagonist. Wolf had previously asserted that the author and the protagonist in her works should not be regarded as one, but in a piece she wrote in 1993, she admitted that they had perhaps sometimes been just that. She wrote: "When will I—or will I ever again—be able to write a book about a distant, invented character? I myself am the protagonist, there is no other way, I am exposed, have exposed myself" ("Berlin" 244).

In "Deliberating the 'ängstliche Margarete': Coping with Anxiety in Christa Wolf's *City of Angels or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud,*" Ivett Guntersdorfer offers yet another interpretive approach that goes beyond the prevailing Freudian model to gain an insightful reading of that novel. The orthodox psychoanalytic approach to the narrator's anxiety is well represented in conversations with the psychologist Peter Gutman, the protagonist's closest friend at the Getty Research Institute. Guntersdorfer, however, identifies a little-noticed turning point at the center of the novel, just after the narrator's exchange with her friend Sally, who warns her against using Freud's coat as a defense

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mechanism. Their conversation is followed by a dream in which the narrator pictures herself unloading freight from the top of a moving, dilapidated freight truck, only to find that the truck bed itself is totally empty. Awakening, she poses the self-critical question, "What am I doing here?" (153). Referring to insights developed in the field of cognitive psychology, which focuses on mental processes—such as *angst*, anger, escape—that people employ to cope with or master stressful situations, Guntersdorfer identifies this moment as the cognitive turn after which the narrator finally settles down to the writing of her story and commences the process of moving beyond the *angst* that had marked her stay at the Getty Institute. As the protagonist grows calmer, Guntersdorfer identifies a final coping strategy, escape, in the narrator's mental progression toward emotional understanding: a kind of magical thinking, or what one of the real-life pioneers of cognitive psychology, David L. Gutmann, calls "magical mastery." While the protagonist's friend, David Gutman, does not appear to be a stand-in for the real Dr. Gutmann, the sequence of mysterious and seemingly irrational events that Wolf depicts in the last half of the book validates Guntersdorfer's use of cognitive psychology as an interpretive approach to understanding the novel.

In her essay "Coming Full Circle: Trauma, Empathy, and Writing in 'Change of Perspective' ('Blickwechsel,' 1970) and 'August' (2011)," Friederike Eigler compares these two stories written forty years apart in order to explore how they complement but also differ from one another. She challenges several reviewers who claimed that "August" was basically a sweet gift to Wolf's husband and places this work in the context of Wolf's overall oeuvre, pointing out that the title character, August, also appears in an often-overlooked passage from *Patterns of Childhood*, and in the early short story "Blickwechsel" ("Change of Perspective"), where he plays a significant role. Eigler asserts that for Wolf, who had experienced "fleeing from her home into the unknown at the end of World War II, the sudden loss of home remained 'unbeschreibbar' (indescribable)" until she returned to those events in "August," a short, final book written just before her death in 2011. Eigler concludes that both "Change of Perspective" and "August" can be read as meta-fictional commentaries on the role of creative writing and memory in the shadow of World War II and its aftermath.

## Christa Wolf and the Visual Arts

The final cluster of essays collected here addresses Wolf's active participation in the creation of films, her strong personal connection to non-literary forms of art, and her impact on both GDR film and other visual arts. The authors of these three essays explore themes and issues that are addressed elsewhere in the volume—including memory, subjective authenticity, illness, trauma,

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and alienation—but they address them through the different lenses of other artistic genres.

In his essay "A Woman's Voice on Screen: Christa Wolf and the Cinema," Barton Byg discusses Wolf's participation in the creation of perhaps the best-known film for which she provided the script, *Der geteilte Himmel* (*Divided Heaven*, 1963). The film was based on her novel of the same name and directed by the famous GDR filmmaker Konrad Wolf (no relation). Byg probes how Christa Wolf's experiences with film—including three other films on which she collaborated—contributed to increased cinematic qualities in her own prose. At the same time, Byg argues that Wolf's "'melancholy modernist' critique of the ideology of socialist progress" influenced changes in GDR cinema more broadly. Another instructive aspect of Byg's essay is his discussion of non-German films that influenced those in which Wolf was involved, particularly the famous French film, *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), written by Marguerite Duras and directed by Alain Resnais.

In her essay "Women at the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown: The Berlin Wall and the Collapse of Female Consciousness in *Divided Heaven* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*," Susanne Rinner explores ways in which the Berlin Wall, by separating East Berlin from West Berlin for twenty-eight years, affected the women protagonists' lives in these two works: one a novel (that was, however, made into a film shortly after its publication in 1963), the other a film created by Wolfgang Becker in 2004. By "crossmapping" these works that both represent women collapsing and spending time unconscious in hospitals (Rita when the Wall is built, and Christiane when it is torn down), Rinner provides "a critical framework for understanding the importance of the image of the unconscious woman in the continuing debates that shape the cultural memory of the GDR and the Cold War." Rinner notes that women's illnesses and the ensuing unconsciousness, which appears to be necessary for their recovery, become a common trope in Wolf's later works as well. Indeed, Rinner's analysis of *Divided Heaven* demonstrates that several key tropes and themes were first employed by Wolf in this novel, including the connection between the protagonist's physical breakdown and political, social, or historical upheavals; and the importance of how memory, replacing forgetting during the "down time" of an illness, allows for self-reflection and working through conflicts and traumas. An important contribution of Rinner's chapter is her focus on Wolf's complex commitment to thinking deeply and writing about the challenges that women face in gaining agency in a patriarchal society.

In her essay "The Impact of Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* on Women Artists in East Germany," April Eisman articulates the significant influence of Wolf's novel *Kassandra* (1983; *Cassandra*, 1988) on two quite different women artists, Nuria Quevedo (born in 1938) and Angela Hampel (born in 1956). Eisman considers how Wolf's novel provided these exceptional visual artists with an updated version of the Cassandra myth that emphasizes her fate as

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a woman in a patriarchal world, where women tend not to be listened to or believed by men. Wolf's *Cassandra* influenced these women's artworks, but it also helped awaken a "feminist" consciousness that moved them to confront the patriarchal treatment they are still subject to in their own time and place. Just as Wolf shifted the narrative focus onto the character Cassandra, who is a minor character in most versions of the mythical stories of the Trojan War, Quevedo and Hampel make her the center of their artworks. Eisman explores the major differences between those early recountings of the Trojan War in which Achilles "is not a hero but simply a beast" and Wolf's version, arguing that its alignment of "patriarchy with war and brutality, and the concomitant praise of matriarchal inclusiveness and pacifism, made [Wolf's] *Cassandra* at once controversial for the East German government and inspirational for many women on both sides of the Berlin Wall." As an art historian, Eisman places the works of Quevedo and Hampel in a broader visual context, emphasizing how the former's style in her mostly black-and-white drawings is reminiscent of the works of Käthe Kollwitz, while Hampel's prints and paintings that reinterpret the same story include "punk-inspired images of Cassandra and her 'crew.'" Eisman emphasizes the many ways in which Wolf's *Cassandra* awakened a "feminist" consciousness in women in East Germany and beyond.

## The Legacy of Christa Wolf

In the title of her essay included here, Janine Ludwig cites a line from a Hölderlin poem: "Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter" (What remains, however, the poets provide). *Was bleibt* is also the title of Christa Wolf's 1990 autobiographical novel that set in motion the German *Literaturstreit* (Literature Dispute). At the conclusion of her essay, Ludwig posits an answer to the question of what remains: "the literature itself." Writing in 2010, Wolf's literary colleague and friend Günter Grass responded to that same question:

> What remains, above all, are her many books. At a time when East and West, bristling with weapons, faced off in rigid ideological confrontation, she wrote books that crossed and overcame this divide, books that have lasted: the great allegorical novels, the personal of illness and pain…

Certainly, the novels and stories themselves are the most tangible and accessible items in a writer's legacy. It was due to the exceptional quality, undeniable impact, and considerable enthusiasm for her novels and stories that Wolf received an exceptionally large number of major awards and prizes for her works during her lifetime. The continuing significance and international interest in her books today indicate that she is still one of the most admired and widely read German-language writers of the past sixty years.

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Yet, as Ludwig asserts in her essay, there is a great deal more to say about what lends such vibrancy to Wolf's legacy today. It is not only the bold vision of her novels and stories, but as the scholar Margit Resch claimed in 1997, her legacy was also shaped by how she wrote and what she stood for as a person:

> Wolf's legacy is rich and powerful. Her literary reviews, essays, and fiction chronicle the writer's journey from passionate commitment to democratic socialism, on which the German Democratic Republic was constitutionally founded, to courageous yet judicious resistance to an authoritarian regime that increasingly violated these principles. Her work as a whole reflects self-realization under challenging social and personal circumstances, the central pursuit of every protagonist in her novels and stories. … Her recent work describes the varied situations and sentiments of East Germans after the Wall. Because what remains of the GDR and what is worthy of remaining are so powerfully recorded in her writings. Christa Wolf's literary achievement is one of her former country's most stubborn and enduring treasures. (169; 171)

By rejecting the staid and limiting requirements of the GDR's form of socialist realism, Wolf had a far-reaching influence on many East German writers. They felt liberated to experiment and write more openly, subjectively, truthfully, and in ways that took risks, both with form and content: modernist on the one hand, and feminist and critical on the other. Her works after the 1980s, which reflected her feminist, pro-environment, anti-war, and anti-nuclear concerns, spoke to and inspired readers far beyond the GDR. Her willingness to take risks, oppose publicly the increasingly authoritarian government in the GDR, as well as her friendships with and her mentoring of writers young and old, especially women writers, must also be cited as an important part of her legacy.

Most of the dozens of eulogies printed in newspapers, magazines, and other publications across Europe and North America following Wolf's death contained lofty praise of her life and works, even though some did mention the criticisms that tarnished her reputation in the early 1990s. Yet even the negative assertions and charges of those years had ultimately softened and were in some cases even retracted. Grass spoke about that "softening" in his eulogy for Wolf in 2012.[4] Nonetheless, some critics and readers still regard her stubborn but unrealistic hope that the GDR's authoritarian socialism could somehow turn into a humane and democratic socialism as a fatal blemish on her reputation.

In an obituary published in the *New Yorker* a few days after Wolf's death, Sally McGrane asserted:

> [Wolf's] death, at eighty-two, marks the end of an era in divided, then reunified Germany—an era in which literature played an existential role. As long as there was an East Germany, Wolf was an East German writer. But she wasn't just an East German writer. In the days since her death, one hears over and

> over the lament that never again will a German authoress capture the attention of so many. Her impact was the result of a confluence of politics—only in an authoritarian state are writers so important—and an ear for the issues and concerns of the day, be it the building of the wall, the pain of the Nazi past, the search for a new and better society, women's rights, or environmental problems.

Karen Leeder, writing in the London *Independent*, stated the following in her obituary:

> Wolf has been called a "loyal dissident," whose work reveals and enacts the fraught negotiations between power and creativity in a dictatorship—and the inability to move on. But more than that, hers is a scrupulous and humane work that explores what it is to be an individual in a uniquely turbulent century. Moreover, it rests on the unfashionable, but potent belief that literature is important; and that writing is the best means to know oneself and to be more intensively in the world.

Günter Grass describes in his eulogy what he thought about Wolf's blind spots, but emphasized her deserved and positive reputation:

> Christa Wolf belonged to the generation in which I also count myself. We were stamped by National Socialism and the late—too late—realization of all the crimes committed by Germans in the span of just twelve years. Ever since, the act of writing has demanded interpreting the traces of that. One of Christa Wolf's books, *Patterns of Childhood*, responds to that imperative, exposing her successive immersions in brown-shirted dictatorship and the doctrines of Stalinism. False paths credulously followed, stirrings of doubt and resistance to authoritarian constraints and beyond that, the recognition of one's own participation in a system that was crushing the utopian ideals of Socialism—those are the hallmarks of the five-decades of writing that established Wolf's reputation… and the books remain.

The "lessons" that Wolf tried to live by were not always within her reach and became that much more important to her because she had not attained them. She chastised herself to the point of illness about not remembering her collaboration with the Stasi. She remained a member of the SED long after she knew that it had become an authoritarian and brutal government. She realized to some extent after the Wolf Biermann Affair in 1976, and the resulting flight of a number of her writer and artist friends to the West, that her hopes were not in fact realistic. Once Wolf openly admitted her failure to recognize that her idealistic vision of a utopian socialist government would not replace the one in power, she spoke up frequently and wrote about it extensively. This ultimate willingness to admit mistakes is also an important part of her legacy.

It is worth mentioning a few concrete indications that the interest in Wolf's life and works continues to grow and expand, adding positively to her legacy. Interest in her novels and stories remains high, as do their sales, and scholarship on them shows no sign of abating, as this volume demonstrates.

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Attention to her non-fiction works, including several recently published ones—diary collections, letters, and essays that had not yet appeared at the time of her death—has also risen in tandem with the continuing scholarship on her fiction works. Twelve volumes in the *Werkausgabe* (Collected Works) are in print and more are being added. Among the most important recent book-length scholarly publications are the *Christa Wolf Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung,* edited by Carola Hilmes and Ilse Nagelschmidt (2016) and a collection of essays titled *Christa Wolf: A Companion,* edited by Sonja E. Klocke and Jennifer R. Hosek (2018). Additional signs of the continuing importance of Wolf and her writings are evident in the ongoing work of the *Christa Wolf Gesellschaft* (Society) that mounts exhibits and sponsors numerous programs. That same institution, located at the Humboldt University in Berlin, also hosts the *Arbeits- und Forschungsstelle Privatbibliothek Christa and Gerhard Wolf,* founded in 2016, which is dedicated to the literary, artistic, and publishing work of both authors, and encourages and supports the continuation of scholarship focused on their writings and their many public activities. There is also an expanding archive of Christa Wolf's works and related materials at the *Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste* in Berlin.

Such publications, institutions, and activities dedicated to Christa Wolf and her work should encourage us as well to read her anew. All of this provides ample evidence of the viability of the legacy of Christa Wolf, and the sixteen essays in this volume add to it in important and innovative ways. As they abundantly demonstrate, there is yet much to learn from Christa Wolf and her extensive, complex, inspiring, and, yes, controversial writings.

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## Notes

1. Christa Wolf described her program in "Subjective Authenticity: A Conversation with Hans Kaufmann" in 1973. English translation is found in *The Fourth Dimension: Interviews with Christa Wolf,* 17–38. Robert Blankenship's essay in this volume deals with the concept extensively.
2. Cited from the *Diskussionsbeitrag: Zum 11. Plenum—Dezember 1965.* This excerpt is taken from *Christa Wolf: Eine Biographie in Bildern und Texten,* edited by Peter Böthig. Citation translated into English by Gerald Fetz.

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3. The quote in the title of Ludwig's essay comes from Friedrich Hölderlin's poem "Andenken" (1803).
4. Grass's eulogy for Christa Wolf appeared in English, translated by David Dollenmayer, on 17 January 2012.

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