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Autobiographical Progression: Christa Wolf’s
Nachdenken über Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein
Tag im Jahr

Doctoral Thesis
Department of Germanic Studies
Trinity College Dublin

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2009
Declaration

I hereby declare that the following thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University, that it is entirely the own work of the undersigned, and that the Library may lend or copy the thesis upon request.
Summary

Christa Wolf’s Nachdenken über Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr constitute a significant contribution to the field of women’s autobiographical writing in their in-depth questioning of autobiographical conventions and their emphasis on the complications for women in writing autobiographically. Wolf has long been engaged with the notion of female self-expression as evidenced in her preoccupation with the writings of Bettine von Arnim, Karoline von Günderrode and Virginia Woolf, amongst others, but this interest in women’s writing is most closely linked to an interest in autobiographical and so-called ‘authentic’ forms of writing. The autobiographical lends itself to the female preference for diary and journal writing forms, privileging ‘connectedness’ over the ‘separateness’ often perceived in writing forms associated with men. If, as has been claimed, men represent their experience of self and others in “individualistic, objective and distant ways,” and women represent experience in “relatively interpersonal, subjective, immediate ways” (Sidonie Smith, 1987, p.13), Wolf uses her autobiographical writing to exemplify an interpersonal, subjective form of autobiography.

Most of the detailed theoretical interpretation of autobiography by critics such as Karl Weintraub, Georges Gusdorf, Philippe Lejeune, Paul de Man or Jacques Derrida focuses on autobiographies by men. The emphasis in autobiographical criticism on male texts has led to theories of autobiography that marginalize variant forms of the autobiographical. Historically, forms of women’s autobiographical writing have been
difficult to assess as it has been assumed that autobiographies emanating from the lives of culturally insignificant people are themselves culturally peripheral. Christa Wolf’s autobiographical texts present a challenge to this assumption still prevalent in the 1960s as she began to pursue autobiographical writing forms. Wolf personally achieves a kind of public presence, culminating in her Frankfurt lecture series in 1982, and in her writing she rises to the appeal for the culturally prominent autobiographical text and writes autobiography cognizant of the history and the impediments of the genre.

In this thesis I suggest that Nachdenken über Christa T. signals Wolf’s first foray into the autobiographical genre and the text hovers interestingly on the boundary between fact and fiction, self and other, fragmentary writing and more linear or whole narrative. Kindheitsmuster tackles the difficulties of writing autobiography more recognizably in its obvious autobiographical mode (with variation). Ein Tag im Jahr then questions the autobiographical mode again. Wolf asks, in her 2003 text, whether it is possible to place value on a more detailed, fragmentary journal writing that seeks to show how a life may be composed of a sequence of moments assembled together in an attempt to release the impression of a life lived.

Emphasis is placed throughout on Wolf’s tendency, in her autobiographical writing, not simply to conform to the expectations of the genre. In this she demonstrates her complexity as a writer and her perception of her position, as a woman writer, on the border between traditional autobiography and alternative forms of life writing.
Acknowledgements

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For my family, without whom this project would not have been possible.
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Introduction

Three key texts written by Christa Wolf between 1968 and 2003 indicate a movement or progression from personal writing (*Nachdenken über Christa T.*, 1968) to autobiographical enterprise (*Kindheitsmuster*, 1976) to journal writing (*Ein Tag im Jahr*, 2003). *Nachdenken über Christa T.* introduces aspects of life writing, encompassing elements of Christa T.'s life and the life of the narrator over a number of years, from 1951 to 1963. *Kindheitsmuster* describes the life of a child and adolescent from 1929 to 1946 and *Ein Tag im Jahr* relates a life in terms of individual days from the years 1960 to 2000. This trend towards autobiographical expression seems to follow a path towards personal expression in Wolf's work and taking into account the publication date of *Ein Tag im Jahr* it is clear that this work is well attuned to the increasing interest in personal writing and micro narrative in the post-millennium era.

Wolf can be described as an author who frequently captures something of the sentiment of the moment. *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Kassandra* were published at critical moments, to a large readership and played significant roles in GDR literary history. A tendency towards autobiographical expression is noticeable in Wolf's work, beginning with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* through *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*. These texts in particular illustrate Wolf's interest in autobiography by capturing longer periods of time in contrast to texts such as *Störfall, Was bleibt* or *Leibhaftig* which concentrate on a day or a short period of time. In the autobiographical tradition the important trends and turns that become apparent in the life of the autobiographer are generally accessed in texts encompassing longer periods of time. The reasons for Wolf's
interest in autobiographical writing and the autobiographical tradition lie at the centre of the research interest of this thesis.

One of the earliest and most obvious of Wolf's autobiographical ventures, *Kindheitsmuster*, can be seen as instrumental to the search for the reasons for Wolf's veering towards autobiographical writing. *Kindheitsmuster* tends towards a new path for autobiographical writing at the time of its publication. Many of the autobiographies that appear in the 1970s and 80s present stories of survival from hitherto unusual perspectives or question identities new to print. Laura Marcus argues that the United States is an obvious starting-point for the discussion of this complex relationship between autobiography, ethnicity and newer voices: "It has been argued that the Puritan tradition, combined with the isolation of the frontier and the need to create a new national identity, was particularly conducive to autobiographical writing."¹ Although this analysis invokes the colonial myth of a virgin land, it also crucially opens up questions of culture and identity raised by the ethnic minorities in the United States. The slave narratives were crucial resources for white abolitionists and in the 1970s and 80s writers of ethnic minority origin in the United States began to question the intricacies of growing up as a Chinese American in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1975) or a gay Hispanic in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1982). Many autobiographies of the 1970s and 80s redefine the autobiographical form in narratives Laura Marcus describes as combining "[...] the close record of daily life with the thematics of feminist liberation [...]."² These autobiographies chart the essence of the experience of the Women's Movement, such as Kate Millett's *Flying* (1974) or Ann Oakley's *Taking It

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² Ibid, p.280.
Like A Woman (1985), but they focus on the experience of otherness and question the experience, not the form in which the experience is represented.

Kindheitsmuster seeks to make apparent the complications of a childhood spent in Nazi Germany for the narrator, but it represents a more interesting treatment of the experience than the above-mentioned autobiographies of the 1970s because it challenges the characteristics of the established genre of autobiography as well as questioning the experience it seeks to present. In Kindheitsmuster the use of ‘I’ for autobiography is closely considered, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between the autobiographer and the former self in autobiography. Kindheitsmuster also draws attention to other important issues associated with writing autobiographically: the inevitability of gaps in memory and the unreliability of knowledge of the self, amongst others. Wolf’s text challenges the feasibility of the autobiographical undertaking in a fundamental manner while also attempting to question the experience of a child growing up under National Socialism in Germany.

Wolf has acknowledged that many readers focus on the traditional, retrospective, autobiographical level of Kindheitsmuster and ignore the less conventional second and third levels, but even in Nachdenken über Christa T. Wolf tried to make some of the complications of the writing process obvious to the reader. In the earlier text Wolf was palpably conscious of the artificial nature of writing about selected episodes in her friend’s life. In the text, the narrator refers to events that Christa T. had mentioned, but was keenly aware that the details of these events required fictional representation in order to be portrayed. The representation of Christa T.’s encounter with the school director requires fictional representation: “Dieser Mann, von dem sie mir erzählt hat – aber ich
kenne ihn nicht —, muß hier erfunden werden.”^ 3 Wolf seems to turn towards autobiographical representation more consistently in and after *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, following her struggle with the difficulty of adequate representation of Christa T. in writing this text. During the writing of *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Wolf questioned the validity of biographical writing. She began by seeming to aim at the story of Christa T.’s life, but becomes acutely aware of confronting herself and ultimately representing herself in her biographical/ autobiographical narrative.

By 2003 and the publishing of *Ein Tag im Jahr* Wolf is noticeably conscious of the complex writing process that diary entries entail. She questions the perspective of the timing of the writing, the events chosen and the mixing of the experience of the process of writing with the story to be related. Wolf’s tendency in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr* towards making the process and the nature of the writing obvious to the reader critically questions autobiographical writing. Wolf’s life stories emerge in a context that other autobiographers seem not to acknowledge. Wolf’s efforts at autobiographical writing therefore change the way we think about autobiography in a more striking manner than comparable autobiographies of the recent past.

Wolf’s tendency towards autobiographical and personal literature resonates with her recognition of the close connection between autobiography and a kind of ‘decentred self’ which is often seen to have been a result of the tumultuous upheavals of the twentieth century. Michael Jopling writes of “[...] the cultural and linguistic displacement which

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have been an inescapable feature of recent Central European history." Wolf’s autobiographical writing can thus be seen to be specifically of interest because of the two tumultuous periods of the twentieth century she addresses: the experience of a childhood in Nazi Germany and her experience as a writer in the GDR.

Christa Wolf is also a figure who has attracted significant public attention in East and West Germany particularly during the literary debate following the publication of Was bleibt in 1990. At the time the media seemed to focus on Wolf’s personal position within the GDR rather than on the literary merits of the text. Wolf’s personal writing style and autobiographical tendency in writing seems to have lent itself to this kind of personal criticism in the media. Wolf is aware of this difficult dimension to her writing style, but claims her commitment to personal writing modes are attributable to her adherence to what she calls ‘subjektive Authentizität’ in her writing approach. Autobiographical writing is closely associated with ‘subjektive Authentizität’ which results in the narrative being rooted in experience while allowing an interplay between fictional self-representation and ‘reality.’ Wolf cherishes the closeness to the material, “[...] sich seinem Stoff rückhaltlos zu stellen, das Spannungsverhältnis auf sich zu nehmen,” that autobiographical narrative seems to allow, while also questioning the conventions of the genre. The questioning of the genre allows Wolf the freedom to play with the possibilities of fictional and realistic representation.

‘Subjective authenticity’ is also a focus on the individual and the author’s authentic (“wahrheitsgetreue”) experience. Sonja Hilzinger claims that Wolf recognised the

connection between private existence and historical context early: “In der eigenen Biographie erkennt sie Verallgemeinerbares. Das Grundlebnis ihrer Generation, die Prägung durch die nationalsozialistische Erziehung, den Zusammenbruch 1945 und die Suche nach neuer Lebensorientierung, zwingt ihr als Autorin, der die authentische Erfahrung als Voraussetzung für wahrhaftiges Erzählen gilt, immer wieder »Blickwechsel« auf.” Despite the adherence to ‘subjective authenticity’ and personal experience, Wolf’s writing does not remain fixed in this personal perspective:


The continuing association between personal experience and writing confirms Wolf’s overall commitment to autobiographical writing forms.

Another motivation for Wolf’s tendency towards autobiographical expression seems to lie in the close link between autobiographical forms of writing and women’s writing through the years. Wolf’s texts are invariably recounted by female narrators and involve predicaments faced by women. She places increasing emphasis on genres of literature traditionally preferred by women writers: personal writing, diaries and journal writing. In Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra, Wolf directly addresses the issue of the small number of female voices audible for women writers: “Sage Dir alle großen Namen der abendländischen Literatur auf, vergiß weder Homer noch Brecht, und frage Dich, bei

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6 Sonja Hilzinger, Christa Wolf (Frankfurt am Main, 2007) p.59.
7 Ibid, p.60.
welchen dieser Geistesriesen Du, als Schreibende, ankniipfen könntest. Wir haben keine authentischen Muster, das kostet uns Zeit [...] Wenige, sehr wenige Stimmen von Frauen dringen auf uns zu [...]“

Of the few female voices, Wolf makes reference to a number who have influenced her: Karoline von Günderrode, Bettine von Arnim, Rahel Varnhagen, Virginia Woolf, Anna Seghers, Ingeborg Bachmann and Nelly Sachs, amongst others. In an interview with Adam Krzeminski, Wolf is conscious of a strong male tradition in German literature undergoing change after the Second World War:


Wolf’s interest in the tradition of women writers which developed after the Second World War, centres on the integration of emotion into literature and the clashes with patriarchal society that ensued. The introduction of emotion led to the availability of a more subjective, interpersonal style, which particularly appealed to women writers. The notion of the success of a female aesthetic is one that Wolf broaches in her longer autobiographical texts in her reference to ‘subjective authenticity’ and the difficulty of saying ‘I,’ discussed in detail in Chapter 2, and her emphasis on forms of writing associated with women. In the 1970s, Wolf was wary of feminist labeling, understanding the term ‘feminist’ to entail anger and the exclusion of men. She is generally opposed to

8 Christa Wolf, Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra (Darmstadt, 1983) p.146.
9 Christa Wolf, Die Dimension des Autors, op. cit., p.845.
some of the more radical feminist demands for a separate language for women that Julia
Kristeva mentions in her interview “Talking about Polylogue”: “It is unfortunately the
case that some feminists insist on adopting sulking and even obscurantist attitudes: those,
for example who demand a separate language for women, one made of silence, cries or
touch, which has cut all ties with the language of so-called phallic communication
[...].”\(^{10}\) Her writing is close, on the other hand, to the ideals of Hélène Cixous and the
Utopian project of *écriture féminine*, as a writing that seeks to adequately represent
female positions in relation to culture. Ruth Robbins discusses Cixous’ advocation of
writing itself as “[...] the site of the revolutionary expression which will eventually
overthrow both women’s material oppression and their psychic repression.”\(^{11}\) Like
Derrida’s concept of deconstruction, *écriture féminine* is not a method and cannot be
transformed into one. Cixous writes: “It is impossible to define a feminine practice of
writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be
theorized, enclosed, encoded – which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will
always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system [...] It will be
conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms [...]”\(^{12}\) Wolf’s practice
of a feminine aesthetic is similarly difficult to define. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* has
often been described as defying classification. Linda Anderson refers to Wolf’s text in
relation to Shoshana Felman’s claim that autobiography may communicate its knowledge
of the female subject, in part, in terms of the impossibility of having that knowledge and
“[...] criticism becomes the act of attempting to read into the future what was ‘not yet’ in

\(^{10}\) Julia Kristeva, “Talking about Polylogue” in *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (ed.) Toril Moi


\(^{12}\) Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa” in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (eds.) Elaine
the past. This is the nature of the relation or space evoked by Christa Wolf in […] *The Quest for Christa T.*, where the narrator not only elegises her friend, but searches for her through vague and fragmented memories which can only begin to release their meaning later; what beckons into her own writing is the potential or sense of becoming, the not fully realized self who has inscribed her future in the past.”¹³ This potential or sense of becoming is crucial to Wolf’s practice of a feminine aesthetic.

Wolf also places obvious emphasis on women’s writing as a source of strength for women. Her writing seems to support Luce Irigaray’s notion of *parler-femme* as a language between women that requires auditors who listen with ‘another ear’ and discern subtexts and alternative patterns in women’s speech. Wolf also agrees with Irigaray that not speaking is not an option for women. For Wolf, this kind of silence is associated with death.

The question of how *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr* relate to the debate on the significance of autobiography in general depends on the understanding of autobiography that emerges from recent re-interpretations of autobiography by prominent theorists. In this thesis I use the debate on the meaning of autobiography and its conventions to help answer the question of why Wolf tends towards autobiographical expression in her work, specifically in the texts covering longer periods of time: *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*. In Chapter 1, I look at how autobiography has been defined and re-defined following readings of Saint Augustine’s and Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography and Paul de Man’s, Roland Barthes’ and Jacques Derrida’s writing on

autobiography. Feminist inquiry also partially fuels this re-working of autobiography in its insistent resistance to the notion of a single literary tradition in view of the exclusion and marginalization of personal texts by women. In this context feminists find themselves re-reading certain powerful texts by women in an autobiographical light, in view of the shortage of texts designating themselves as autobiography by women.

The perceived notion that journals and diaries, a large part of the legacy of women writers, are uninventive and incomplete is also under review as Wolf, in line with feminist critics, wishes to pursue the value of ‘informal’ as well as ‘formal’ texts. This kind of autobiographical re-interpretation is vital to the standing of women’s writing because women authors seem to be more creative when writing in a form that has female antecedents.

Autobiography as the story of how individual women see themselves and their lives is also crucial to a sense of identity for women. Representing identity is important, not only for solidarity, but as a means of extending the knowledge base of women’s identity, and perceiving and accepting difference in the ways that women see themselves. Women’s lives seem to have changed drastically (if superficially and unevenly) since the 1960s so that it is useful to compare thought patterns and assumptions today with women’s journals and diaries written in the distant and not too distant past (Wolf mentions Günderrode, Woolf and Nin, amongst others) and pose the question of whether current changes in women’s lifestyles, writing forms and views on identity are conducive to desirable progress. Wolf claims:

“Die Frau in der Gesellschaft” ist für mich kein “Thema” unter anderen; ich schreibe fast immer über Frauen, doch nicht in jenem begrenzten Sinn von “Emanzipationsliteratur”. […] Mich faszinieren die Frauen, die ihren historischen Augenblick erkennen und
Wahrnehmen, so schwer es für sie sein mag [...] sie können tun was die Männer tun; nun fragen sie sich, ob sie es überhaupt wollen.  

Wolf is interested in the situations women have inhabited in the journals that have survived and in the roles open to women, both similar and different to those of men, in terms of what might constitute the best role for women in the future.

In Chapter 2, I look at Nachdenken über Christa T. as tentatively autobiographical because it appears to take an autobiographical turn in its final focus on the narrator. It also represents a distinct change in tone from Der geteilte Himmel (1963). Around this time, Wolf acknowledges her appreciation of Ingeborg Bachmann’s work and finds that she too wishes to place emphasis on the how, not simply what in writing and on the sense of a voice being heard in a narrative, notions compatible with more recent autobiographical emphases. In an essay referring to Nachdenken über Christa T., entitled “Selbstinterview,” Wolf stresses the need to expand the ways in which we find out about the self and calls attention to the sovereignty of the individual in society and the ‘subjective’ in literature. Nachdenken über Christa T. can also be seen as the probing of a life with a resulting discovery of lost or unfamiliar information about the self, similar to the process experienced in autobiographical writing. The notion that the probing of Christa T.’s life results in a confrontation with the self is consistent with an autobiographical bias. Wolf asks the question of whether the narrator and Christa T. are authentic or fictional figures, demonstrating her sophisticated engagement with the principles of autobiographical writing. She is aware that she is not striving towards biographical truth in Nachdenken über Christa T., but her emphasis on the details of

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Christa T.'s and women's lives and creative patterns is not 'mere fiction' either. Ultimately the stress in Nachdenken über Christa T. on the difficulty of saying 'I' for a writer resonates with more general female dilemmas and relates to the reasons for the emphasis on autobiography as central to the feminist project.

In Chapter 3, I address the notion of Kindheitsmuster's position between the fulfillment of many of the expectations of traditional autobiography of childhood and its inversion of this tradition. Kindheitsmuster also usefully exemplifies the way in which the understanding of autobiography has changed in recent times, from a view of Kindheitsmuster as a representation of childhood during National Socialism in Germany (it was assumed to be a 'description' of the time) to an appreciation of autobiography as a creation of a self (a 'subjective,' individual version of what was experienced) in a mode of self-analysis. Wolf addresses many of the definitive features of autobiography in her focus on the mindset of the child and the adolescent, the influence of the mother, the significance of humour and sexuality in autobiographical depiction, the attempt to probe youthful attitudes to life and the significance of generation in the formation of the individual. She also tackles many controversial issues, not only in writing about this period in history, but in challenging the notion that resistance to fascism was predominant in the eastern part of Germany and in indicating that continuity with this past is not impossible.

The public, heroic and catastrophic version of the Second World War collides with Wolf's quiet insistence that the private, less extraordinary, insider's experience, associated with women's lives (and informal writing forms), inverts the tradition of history writing and the tradition of autobiographical writing to some extent. Wolf's
questioning of historical representation and autobiographical convention illuminates the workings of autobiography in the sense of revisiting the questions of who was 'I' then?, what is the truth?, how is the past still present? and how does violence now differ from violence then?

In Chapter 4, I look at Wolf’s *Ein Tag im Jahr* as a third kind of autobiographical project for Wolf, veering away from the fictional dimension of autobiographical narrative towards the detailed description of specific days. It is possible that the diaries were published as a response to the image of Wolf portrayed by Jörg Magenau in his biography of Christa Wolf, published in 2002. Wolf has long been associated with speaking on her own behalf and with her ‘authentic,’ self-expressive form of writing. Here she seems to discretely straighten her ‘mirror-image’ and provide essential, authentic detail as to her non-public persona. Wolf’s diary is interesting in her self-presentation pre and post-*Wende*, but even more interesting in the inordinate tribute she pays to the journal form with its emphasis on the inward-looking perspective of this kind of writing. She stresses the lack of this kind of interiority in public accounts of historical periods, particularly in newspaper and official accounts of the GDR from within its forty-year history. For Wolf the journal format continues a respected tradition of women’s writing, from Bettine von Arnim to Virginia Woolf, but also points forward to an obsessive interest in detail and micro-narrative in recent autobiographical writing and an interest in the texture of otherness in life writing.

Christa Wolf began a process in 1968 with *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, which initiated a ‘new’ form of in-depth personal narrative. She then wrote *Kindheitsmuster* as a recognizable, traditional autobiography of childhood (with deviations). In 2003 she
published *Ein Tag im Jahr*, making the important suggestion that the time may have been reached for a re-evaluation of 'informal' writing. Here the questions posed are why does she tend towards autobiographical forms above other forms of writing, and how does the motivation in each instance contribute to the understanding of the tenets of autobiography and the goal of establishing a tradition of powerful women’s autobiographical writing?

This thesis is methodologically rooted in the theories emerging from the discussion of autobiography since the 1960s. The questioning of the conventions of autobiographical writing and writing in general that emerged in the 1960s is particularly relevant to Wolf’s autobiographical writing. The relationship between autobiography and feminist engagement in literature is also of profound interest to Wolf’s autobiographical works and to the theoretical approach of this thesis. It is clear that differences exist between the position of feminism within Marxist traditions and that in Western feminism as Lorna Martens makes clear in her book on feminist writing in the GDR. Yet Christa Wolf has long been involved with Western approaches to feminism through travel and access to Western literature. She occupies a position that is sensitive to aspects of Marxist and Western feminism, finding a common ground and a position relevant to theories of literature and feminism.

Many critics have addressed the autobiographical aspect of Christa Wolf’s writing, mostly with reference to *Kindheitsmuster*. Most critics claim that *Kindheitsmuster* is

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not essentially autobiographical because of its dubious relationship with biographical accuracy. In this thesis autobiography is not considered solely as a source of historical and biographical accuracy but as a form of self-creation and self-analysis within a biographical framework. Wolf’s 2003 publication of *Ein Tag im Jahr* is important as it serves to emphasize her continuing involvement with varying forms of autobiography, informal as well as formal. Wolf’s involvement with this variety of autobiographical forms has not been critically addressed.

_Bernhard, Peter Weiss, Christa Wolf_ (Stuttgart, 2001) and Sonja Hilzinger makes reference to _Kindheitsmuster_ as a new type of autobiographical writing in _Christa Wolf_ (Frankfurt am Main, 2007).
1. Theoretical Perspective on Autobiography: Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*.

The plausibility of reading Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr* as a combined autobiographical odyssey depends on the understanding of the many permutations of the term 'autobiography.' Autobiography has been defined in the past half century in terms of the understanding of key primary texts, on the one hand, and in terms of theoretical re-readings of autobiographical texts on the other hand. Autobiography is often loosely associated with 'Western,' 'Christian' and 'Romantic' literature, or more recently with deconstructive and post-structuralist literary theorists and proponents of personal writing. The concept of 'confession' in the context of autobiography has received scant attention,\(^1\) but the notion of the construction of selfhood has fuelled very prominent interest in autobiography in recent years. Lejeune's proposal for a definition of autobiography in the 1970s placed significant emphasis on identity and verifiability, but these concepts have become almost obsolete as the notion of the inability of language to accurately communicate experience has been extensively propounded.

In the late 1970s, Paul de Man dismissed autobiography as embarrassing in comparison with other genres,\(^2\) but today the notion of separating autobiography from other forms of

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\(^1\) The notion of confession as closely allied to autobiography, discussed in the context of Paul de Man's understanding of Rousseau's *Confessions*, is interestingly argued by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in *Testimony* (London and New York, 1992).

\(^2\) De Man's own difficult relationship with the concept of autobiography, related to his non-revelation of his Nazi sympathies as a young journalist in Belgium, is reviewed by Felman and Laub in *Testimony*, op. cit., p.120.
narrative on the grounds of ‘self-indulgence’ and a simplistic frame of reference is no longer an accepted form of argumentation. Determining the difference between autobiography and other genres in terms of aesthetic form or verifiability is of peripheral interest because, as Linda Anderson believes, autobiography is becoming ‘[…] less a question of form and aesthetics than of ideology.’³ Autobiography is often seen as a form of reading that depends on a number of complex components. The unreliable designation of autobiography by the author plays an initial role in the interpretation of autobiography, but texts are often read as autobiographical, though the author has avoided autobiographical categorization. The designation of autobiography seems to have temporal fluctuations. Wolfgang Türkis claims that no text in German designating itself as autobiography was published between 1977 and 1981⁴, yet after this time the term resurfaced in various forms for authors referring to texts that are perceived as having autobiographical backgrounds.⁵ The author’s classification of the text as autobiography cannot be the deciding factor in autobiographical understanding. The sense in the text that the construction of selfhood or the creation of an identity has been combined with the expression of lived experience, is a more compelling justification for autobiographical interpretation.

Though the meaning of the term autobiography has undergone many changes since its early forms, many of the original attributes are relevant to the discussion of the

⁵ Also terms making reference to autobiography are used to describe texts related to autobiography. Herta Müller employs the term ‘auto-fiction,’ to describe her literary output, according to Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler in Contemporary Women's Writing in German: Changing the Subject (Oxford and New York, 2004) p. 5 and 100. The autofictional is "the creative reworking of the author's experience." The term has been borrowed from Georges Arthur Goldschmidt (See Gepräch mit Herta Müller in Brigid
classification. Here I will look at Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* and some interpretations of it as the key early text in the development of the concept of autobiography. Rousseau’s *Confessions* is then significant in its deviation from Augustine’s and because of the critical response it initiated, especially as interest in autobiography and Romanticism began to increase in the 1970s. Gusdorf and Lejeune became famous for their discussions and definitions of autobiography in the 1970s, and the perceived narrow scope of Lejeune’s definition occasioned many refutations and re-readings of autobiography, expanding the definition significantly. Paul de Man, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault were instrumental in challenging the presuppositions of the ‘tradition’ of autobiographical writing and writing in general and their questions about language, writing and the author are specifically relevant to Christa Wolf’s ‘autobiographical’ leanings between 1968 and 2003.

1.1. The ‘Origins’ of Autobiography: Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*.

Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* (c. AD 398-400) is often cited as the ‘origin’ of modern Western autobiography, as a historical beginning and as a model for later texts. It seems to initiate the construction of a history of selfhood, through which “the subject has learned to know who s/he is.”6 This emphasis in early autobiographical texts on the attempted ‘construction of selfhood’ is important in considering Christa Wolf’s autobiographical writing and is crucial to her adherence to autobiographical forms in the greater part of her writing. The pattern of constructing and knowing the self is most

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Haines (ed.) *Herta Müller* (Cardiff, 1988) and presents difficulties for the critic in acknowledging the autobiographical while not overestimating its interpretive importance.
pronounced in Nachdenken über Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr and is critical to Wolf’s sense of the significance of autobiographical expression within the literary tradition. Wolf places emphasis on previous journal writers in Ein Tag im Jahr and ‘masterpieces’ are crucial to the genealogy of other traditions and genres. Autobiography has also been essentially described in terms of a history of masterpieces beginning with Saint Augustine’s Confessions. Georges Gusdorf, in “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” writes:

Autobiography is a solidly established literary genre, its history traceable in a series of masterpieces from the Confessions of St. Augustine to Gide’s Si le grain ne meurt [...], with Rousseau’s Confessions, Goethe’s Dichtung und Wahrheit, Chateaubriand’s Mémoires d’outre tombe, and Newman’s Apologia in between. Many great men, and even some not so great – heads of government or generals [...] have devoted the leisure time of their old age to editing “Memoirs,” which have found an attentive reading public from generation to generation.7

And he notes, Augustine’s Confessions offer us:

[...] a brilliantly successful landmark right at the beginning, one nevertheless recognizes immediately that this is a late phenomenon in Western culture, coming at that moment when the Christian contribution was grafted onto classical traditions.8

According to Gusdorf, autobiography requires a kind of ‘consciousness of self’ which is peculiar to Western culture.9 Augustine’s Confessions brings to the fore Christianity’s call for the confession of sins and strengthens the ‘inward-turning’ gaze which is, for Gusdorf, the origin and basis of autobiography. Gusdorf locates the origin of autobiography in the moment of Augustine’s introduction of Christian preoccupations into the ‘Classical tradition.’ Gusdorf’s emphasis on the exposition of an ‘inward-

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8 Ibid, p.29.
turning' gaze is one of the features of autobiography that is noticeably consistent with Christa Wolf’s personal writing style in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*. The image of Christa Wolf focusing her writing on questioning her own motives and thought processes, encapsulates much of Wolf’s personal writing style. Other forms of writing may include introspective reflection, but the ‘inward-turning’ gaze combined with concepts, such as confession and a claim to authenticity, helps to explain the use of the term autobiography in describing a text.

Commentators on autobiography have also claimed that the *Confessions* is important because none of the ancient writers, though they might have written autobiographically, had “opened up their souls in the inwardness of genuine autobiography,” as Karl Weintraub writes in *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography*. Critical in this early approach to Augustine’s *Confessions* is the establishment of autobiography as a genre. If Augustine’s text can be isolated from his classical predecessors, the prerequisites for a definition of autobiography can more easily be located. Yet this kind of division between classical and personal literature has been challenged. Jonathon Dollimore, in *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, points out that the separation of Augustine from his predecessors is difficult, because it is hard to see Augustine as occupying any single point in history, since the characteristics of his narrative have completely “infused the way we structure our understanding of him.” He is “scripted” in terms of the same narrative he “powerfully influenced.”

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The *Confessions* tell the story of Saint Augustine’s conversion to Christianity through a process of spiritual and physical wandering, yet critics have stressed that Augustine’s conversion also has to be read as a “conversion, in narrative terms, to a point of view from which the future, now become past, can be seen as part of the overall design.”

Linda Anderson, in *Autobiography*, cites two well-known incidents from the *Confessions* to illustrate this point. Augustine’s account of his boyhood theft of some pears is shameful in retrospect in its transgression for its own sake. Augustine stresses the youthful laughter of the group and the wasteful energy of the pointless act and asks: “Can anyone unravel this twisted tangle of knots?” Anderson believes that Augustine “anticipates the clarity of the resolution, deep in the entanglements of his story.”

Autobiography is written from a retrospective position, so that the resolution is essentially given. Early in the narrative, the retrospective resolution has an effect on the account and this perspective influences the understanding of autobiography and the attempt to define autobiography.

In the second incident, at the end of a long period of indecision, Augustine hears a child chanting the terms of a child’s game ‘tolle lege’ or ‘take it and read.’ He interprets the words as a divine command, picks up the Bible and reads:

> Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature’s appetites.

This episode echoes and redeems the earlier one. The child’s voice could have been interpreted as coincidental, but is read as a form of direct address. The spiritual

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significance read into the incident seems to exceed by far the seriousness of the event itself, which suggests that Augustine’s “experience at the turning point of his life was from the moment itself an act of literary interpretation.” The conversion is a ‘textual’ conversion. The text is crucial to the interpretation of the life and the sense of the awareness of the ‘construction’ of selfhood is evident. This concept of the text being influential for the interpretation of the life is important for Wolf’s awareness of the role of her writing in the explanation of key personal conversions and her interest in the ‘creation’ of the self by means of the text, in writing autobiographically.

Augustine’s struggle with language in the dual address of the Confessions has often been noted, much as Wolf’s struggle with language and the unusual reference to ‘du’ (‘you’) in Kindheitsmuster has been debated. The Confessions are written in the vocative – using ‘you’ – they have God as their direct addressee. But Augustine asks, what is the point of telling God what he, in his omniscience, already knows?

O Lord, since you are outside time in eternity, are you unaware of the things that I tell you? Or do you see in time the things that occur in it? If you see them, why do I lay this lengthy record before you? Augustine seems to believe that he is writing his Confessions for God and for “men, who […] will learn from his life and […] share his vision of God.” He is aware, however, that there are two problems with the Confessions: how will people know he is telling the truth and how can he confess without offering his life for judgment by others? By addressing God, he tries to make God the arbiter of truth. It is possible that Christa

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17 In Kindheitsmuster, the use of ‘du’ is generally understood to be a reference to the sense of alienation between the adult and the child, but ‘du’ may refer to the ‘listener,’ not unlike Augustine’s open address to God.
Wolf’s use of ‘du’ in *Kindheitsmuster* also attempts to create a distance between her text and those who may sit in judgment on her representation of a childhood during National Socialism.

Jacques Derrida addresses the question of God’s position as omniscient in the *Confessions* in his autobiographical text *Circumfession*. Derrida reads Augustine contrary to what he says, as wanting something more than truth and emphasizes that Augustine writes after the death of his mother. Like Derrida in *Circumfession*, he could be said to be writing *for* his mother, but ‘for’ could mean towards or in her place. According to Derrida, the *Confessions* move towards Augustine’s mother Monica. With Monica, he shares a moment of sublime fusion, which marks the end of her life and the beginning of Augustine’s spiritual and autobiographical authority. Augustine’s text is consequently read as moving towards his mother’s death. Writing is a means of postponing the mother’s death. Derrida writes about his own mother’s death in *Circumfession*:

I am writing here at the moment when my mother no longer recognizes me, and at which, still capable of speaking or articulating, a little, she no longer calls me and for her and therefore for the rest of her life I no longer have a name [...]. I am writing *for* my mother, perhaps even for a dead woman [...] no [...] for if I were here writing for my mother, it would be for a living mother who does not recognize her son.21

Derrida claims Augustine must relate his ‘arriving at God’ in writing, “precisely after the death of his mother.” Derrida associates his own autobiographical writing with his mother’s decline:

[...] not that I dare link what he says about confession with the deaths of our respective mothers [...] but what these two women had in common is the fact that Santa Monica, the name of the place in California near to which I am writing, also ended her days, as my mother will too [...] far from her land [...] I owe it to autobiography to say that I have

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21 Ibid, p.22ff.
spent my life teaching so as to return in the end to what mixes prayer and tears with blood [...]  

Linda Anderson reads Derrida’s interminable sentences in *Circumfession* as though he were “trying to prolong the moment before the end, to postpone the death that is also coming.” The significance of the death of the mother for the writing of autobiography has often been mentioned and is central to the interpretation of Wolf’s most traditional autobiographical narrative, *Kindheitsmuster.*

For Derrida, Augustine’s *Confessions* never seem to attain the final mastery of truth he desires, but are haunted by their own otherness, uncertainty and dissolution: “Memoirs and self-portrait, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* no doubt tell a prehistory [...] of vision and blindness [...] I have always read them as the great book of tears [...].” According to Derrida, confession necessarily involves something unclosable, something exceeding rationality. Derrida claims that Augustine’s text establishes the unified transcendent ‘I’ of the autobiographical tradition, but he continues: “A work is at once order and its ruin. And these weep for one another.” Interestingly, at the moment of the apparent initiation of the genre of autobiography, Augustine’s *Confessions,* Derrida anticipates its ruin. Autobiography introduces the concept of the unified ‘I,’ but for Derrida, establishing the truth and a coherently unified selfhood involves both order and ruin.

Christa Wolf’s autobiographical projects reflect certain features of Augustine’s autobiography, while maintaining significant deviations in focus and style. Some aspects of Gusdorf’s understanding of the Christian ‘inward-turning gaze’ seem to underlie

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22 Ibid, p.18ff.
Wolf’s reflections in Nachdenken über Christa T. and the sense of ‘confession’ of sins and interpretation of conversions underpin Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag Im Jahr. Nachdenken über Christa T. begins the difficult process of saying ‘I’ and thereby invokes the debate on the complicated understanding of the addressee of an autobiographical writing process. Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr can be read as sustained attempts at constructing a history of selfhood in terms of pivotal conversions from Nazism to communism and socialism. Wolf is embroiled in issues of truth and judgment in Ein Tag im Jahr. If Augustine’s Confessions address the Christian notion of confession in order to achieve the absolution of sin, Wolf’s texts seem to conjure up the notion of a secular ‘ethics’ of selfhood. She is concerned with the awareness of the presentation and interpretation of the self and of pivotal moments of conversion pinpointed through the medium of the text. Wolf is aware that the text creates the self so the interpretation of the pivotal moment is ‘haunted by uncertainty,’ as Derrida describes Augustine’s autobiography, as the conversion is intra-textual not extra-textual.

1.2. Variation on the ‘model’: Saint Teresa’s Book of Her Life

An interesting variation on Gusdorf’s location of Augustine’s Confessions at the beginning of an essentially male autobiographical tradition is the occasional reference in the history of autobiography to a text by Saint Teresa entitled Book of Her Life (1561-1565) which, according to Carole Slade in St. Teresa of Avila,26 seems to loom as “the only peak in the relatively featureless landscape of women’s self-representation in the

25 Ibid.
form of autobiography before Goethe.” Karl Weintraub includes Teresa as one of only two women in his history of the assertion of individuality from Augustine to Goethe. Weintraub has respect for the Life as an expression of Spanish religiosity from sixteenth century Spain and the scene of the greatest mystical movements of all time. He claims the Life does not equal the more mature expression of the mystical life given in her later book The Interior Castle, but it is interesting in its joining of an “intense longing for mystical union” and devotion to the practical task of reforming the Carmelite order (both male and female). The “talking book” has many limitations because Teresa seems to strictly adhere to her confessor’s request that she write the account as an aid to her confession. It does include her first visions and raptures and her account of the founding of the convent of St. Joseph at Avila, but she claims she wishes:

[...] that I had been allowed at the same time to speak distinctly and in detail of my grievous sins and wicked life. But it has not been so willed; on the contrary, I am laid herein under great restraint; and therefore, for the love of our Lord, I beg of everyone who shall read this story of my life to keep in mind how wicked it has been.26

This seems to suggest that the autobiography is not a voluntary account, but Weintraub claims that “the book she wrote expresses much of what she was and what she experienced. It has long been valued as one of the great autobiographies in the Western tradition.”29 In the greater scheme of the autobiographical tradition from Augustine to Goethe, however, Weintraub finds that Teresa does not succeed in expressing individuality in her Life. He claims she needed to “test her experience against the established norms of the old tradition,” but concludes that her “self-conception stayed

27 The term ‘autobiography’ is anachronistic for texts written before the 19th century.
29 Ibid., p.212.
within the tradition of the model Christian life.” Carole Slade argues that Weintraub’s wording is paradoxical. Teresa followed a Christian model, but did ‘test her experience against the established norms.’ Slade believes that Teresa reveals something of a private, unique self in the Book of Her Life. Teresa had been a keen reader of Augustine’s Confessions. She writes within the model of the ‘Christian’ life, but, according to Slade, she presents a female perspective on Christian life. She writes an autobiography that is quite different to Augustine’s and warrants discussion in its own right. For Slade, the Life is an example of individual writing if the reader is prepared to give the text a bit more thought. Teresa tests her experience against the established norms and introduces women’s experience to autobiographical writing.

Sidonie Smith also comments on Weintraub’s inclusion of Teresa in The Value of the Individual as a failure to consider Teresa’s identity as a woman in the patriarchal culture of sixteenth century Spain and adds:

He fails also to consider the value of the nun’s life as an alternative to married life for women of the period and therefore neglects the opportunities such a life offered to women for pursuing “individuality”[…].

Weintraub also notes that Teresa claimed that she ought not be writing as an “unlearned woman,” though he does not explore “the rhetorical utility of self-abnegation for a woman who would dare to speak, even to instruct, in a church and a culture that suspected and rigidly proscribed such individualistic and atypical activities for women.”

The Book of Her Life does not feature significantly in the writings of theorists of autobiography, but the suggestion of a female Life early in the tradition of

32 Ibid.
autobiographical writing unsettles Gusdorf’s influential representation of Augustine’s *Confessions* as the lone influential autobiographical text before Rousseau.

1.3. The other ‘original’: Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*

Although Augustine’s and Teresa’s texts are often mentioned as the original autobiographies, one of the important implications of the significance of Augustine’s *Confessions* in the history of autobiographical criticism is the *distinction* commonly made between Augustine’s work and the other renowned autobiographical text with the same title. Rousseau famously wrote his *Confessions* “resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent and which, once complete, will have no imitator.”[^33] He may lack a precedent, but in the second claim Rousseau seems to have been well wide of the mark. However his claim to uniqueness and several others such as his claim to worth, still resonate strongly in autobiographical criticism today: “[…] there are those who cannot imagine that a man in need of bread can be worth knowing. It is not for them that I am writing […].”[^34]

Rousseau, in contrast to Augustine and his venerable position within a powerful church, seems to stand alone. His belief that ‘a man in need of bread’ can be worth knowing and that the autobiographer may write for a wider audience than previously customary (“It is not for them that I am writing”), echoes the wider contemporary debate on the importance of the diversity of voices currently being heard in autobiographical genres.

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Without the sentiment that Rousseau embodies, many of these stories might not have been voiced.

J. M. Cohen, in his introduction to Rousseau’s *Confessions*, claims that before the *Confessions* there were but two great autobiographies, St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and St. Teresa’s *Book of her Life*, “both written not for personal justification, but to tell of a vital religious experience which might serve as an example to others.”

Rousseau, Cohen writes, saw himself as a unique individual, important for the “history of his mind.” What was important to him was not so much to tell of his history and achievements, as to prove himself a man who, with all his imperfections, was nevertheless fundamentally honest and good. He set out to win his reader’s sympathy and to “gain partisans who could compensate him for the misunderstanding of which he felt he had been a victim throughout the long misery of his life.”

He took pride in recording – even exaggerating – his more disgraceful actions, which, according to Cohen, is “the one feature of the *Confessions* that has found few imitators.”

His propensity to ‘exaggerate’ guilt, however, has been interpreted as a general characteristic of autobiography by Paul de Man, who emphasizes this attribute in support of his interpretation of autobiographical writing, to which I will return later.

Rousseau’s emphasis on the unique individual is said to differ from previous spiritual models in its obsessional self-writing. Rousseau’s is a new model of secular autobiography for the Romantic era, according to Huntington Williams in *Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography*. Rousseau both exemplifies modern Romantic autobiography and occupies a ‘pivotal position historically’.

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36 Ibid.
I take Rousseau as exemplary for modern, Romantic autobiography, not just because he occupies a pivotal position historically, but also because he attempts to construct his personal identity primarily in his own writings. Rousseau does not find himself ready-made in the texts of others; the radical internalization [...] is instead one of the major causes of his historical novelty and influence. 38

Rousseau's refusal of other sources for himself and radical internalization of personal identity makes him novel and influential. Rousseau is described by Williams as the source of the first "modern Romantic autobiography." 39

He confidently asserts his own singularity:

I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different. 40

He conflates truth with truthfulness, the non-verifiable intention of honesty on the part of the author. Rousseau's 'I know my own heart' answers the question of 'Who am I?' for Jean Starobinski in Transparency and Obstruction. Starobinski claims that for Rousseau, self-knowledge is based on feeling, circumstances may change, but feelings are unmistakable. What is of primary importance is not historical veracity but the emotion experienced as the past emerges. According to Starobinski, "We have moved from the realm of (historical) truth to that of authenticity." 41

Rousseau transposes to 'natural man' the power to know or see inside the self that once resided with God. But, without recourse to divine help, Rousseau's feelings stretch out into a succession of endlessly renewable inner revelations about himself. He embarks on further autobiographical projects, the Dialogues and the Reveries, following the Confessions.

37 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Rousseau believed his task as an autobiographer was to ‘confess’ all and make himself as transparent to his readers as he was to himself. Starobinski writes:

He displays, spread out over biographical time, the truth that feeling takes in at a glance. The unity and simplicity of that time are unraveled in a multitude of instants lived one after the other in order to show how a single law governs [...] He must show how he came to be the person he is.\(^{42}\)

The notion of showing how he came to be the person he is means that his autobiography is less an attempt to remember the past, than to make others recognize the inner truths about himself that he knows through unique access to his own feelings. This move in autobiographical tendency from history and achievements towards inner truths, and the transposition of the power to see inside the self from God to the individual, mark the change from Augustine’s autobiography to Rousseau’s ‘Romantic’ autobiography.

Linda Anderson sees Rousseau as caught up in a series of paradoxes and contradictions in relation to his autobiographical project. He cannot simply “dwell in the grace of transparency” as Starobinski terms it. He must prove himself through ‘confession’ and becomes trapped in the mediating power of story and language. Anderson claims the ‘plot’ of his autobiography is “the displacing onto the outside world the connivances and designs which belong to autobiographical writing itself.”\(^{43}\) Rousseau claims that the outside world misunderstands him, yet he creates the insurmountable distance between the outside world and himself within the writing of his autobiographical reveries.

Two incidents related in the *Confessions* have sparked significant discussion on what we understand as autobiography. The first is a childhood incident in which Rousseau is wrongly accused of breaking a comb, refuses to confess and is beaten repeatedly. In the

\(^{41}\) Jean Starobinski, *Transparency and Obstruction*, op. cit., p.198.

\(^{42}\) Ibid, p.188.

second instance, Rousseau has stolen a ribbon to give to a maidservant, but refuses to confess and accuses the maidservant (Marion) of having given it to him. They are both dismissed. Rousseau claims his remorse and the need to confess this offense is one of the central motivations in writing his *Confessions*.

Paul de Man discusses the Marion episode in “Excuses (Confessions)” in *Allegories of Reading* and finds an interesting distinction between the ‘cognitive’ and ‘performative’ aspects of autobiographical writing, between what autobiography means and what it does. De Man claims that Rousseau does not limit himself to telling us about his crime, he excuses it by reference to his contradictory inner feelings: “But I should not fulfill the aim of this book if I did not at the same time reveal my inner feelings and hesitated to put up such excuses for myself as I honestly could.”

De Man suggests there is evidence for the theft, but there is none for Rousseau’s feelings. The performative dimension of the confession functions in a different mode to the cognitive, the verbal utterance which cannot be verified. The excuse fails to satisfy; it does not provide closure. De Man claims it could be “expanded and repeated.”

Rousseau’s shame is intimately allied to exhibitionism for de Man: there is a connection between hiding oneself and self-revelation. Rousseau’s shame is an excuse for exposure. His confession cannot make reparation to his victim, instead Rousseau creates “a stage on which to parade his disgrace.” He fulfils his real desire in writing, which is to compel public admiration for his inner self.

De Man claims the performative will always be in excess of the cognitive dimension of autobiography. The textual ‘I’ seeks out excuses to perform itself; it creates dramas in

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order to stage the ‘real’ drama of the self. For de Man, the text generates guilt in order to justify the excuse rather than the other way around: “Autobiography is in search of an excuse for its own being.”

De Man puts forward an interesting theory, but his criticism of autobiography as exhibitionism seems to apply fairly specifically to Rousseau’s text, not to autobiographical narrative in general. Nonetheless, the spectacle that de Man detects in autobiography can be described as an aspect of autobiographical writing. The forced proximity between the writer and the reader in autobiographical writing seems to provoke revulsion in de Man’s reading of Rousseau’s text. Rousseau presents a character that is difficult to like. De Man dislikes his exhibitionism. In other autobiographies, the reader may feel supportive of the autobiographical character. De Man seems to reject fundamentally the proximity between the writer and the reader in autobiography, yet the awareness of the reader on entering an autobiographer’s (textual) world, the sense of (vague) proximity between writer and reader and the rumination on believability and perspective, doubtlessly contribute to the attraction of autobiography for the reader.

Derrida’s emphasis on Rousseau’s writing as a supplement, is also useful in thinking about autobiographical narrative techniques. For Derrida, Rousseau’s writing is a supplement, added on to speech. For Rousseau, speaking had a ‘naturalness’ that writing tried to imitate. Writing had to attempt to ‘be’ natural and cheat nature. According to

47 It is ironic that de Man links self-revelation with hiding oneself. Shoshana Felman portrays de Man’s criticism of (Rousseau’s) exhibitionism as attributable to de Man’s silence about his wartime activities: “The resonance between Rousseau’s text and de Man’s past […] lies not so much in a one-to-one resemblance […] but in the structural resemblance of a primal scene of guilt that links an act of speaking with the unpredictable and devastating consequences of this act.” Testimony, op. cit., p.142. She claims he didn’t tell his story because it was not simply over and his afterlife was dedicated to “bearing witness to its lesson.” p.137.
Derrida, Rousseau demonstrates in his autobiography that it is up to writing to replace a deficiency or fill an absence where speaking should have been. Rousseau, who time and again fails to speak, compensates through writing. The writing is a substitute and a supplement. For Derrida, we do not only not have access to Rousseau’s essential reality within the text; there is no reality: there has never been anything but writing. ‘Nature’ which Rousseau assumes precedes the text, has never existed. Autobiography begins from the position of a writing which can only produce the “mirage of the thing itself.”\(^\text{48}\) In the silence after a reading of the *Confessions* at the end of the text, this becomes apparent. Rousseau writes:

Thus I concluded my reading, and everyone was silent. Mme d’Egmont was the only person who seemed moved. She trembled visibly but quickly controlled herself, and remained quiet, as did the rest of the company. Such was the advantage I derived from my reading and my declaration.\(^\text{49}\)

Rousseau is astounded by the lack of reaction to his reading. He often fails to speak, but also seems to fail in using writing as a substitute: Rousseau is dispossessed *of* words, but also dispossessed *by* words.

1.4. Christa Wolf’s Links to Romantic Self-expression

If Rousseau marks the beginning of a secular, Romantic autobiography, Christa Wolf also writes in close association with a Romantic sentiment, albeit from a different perspective. Rousseau focuses on feeling in relating the past, he bases self-knowledge on emotion and he answers the question of ‘Who am I?’ with the words “I know my own heart.” Wolf writes in sympathy with this position, to some extent. She developed close Romantic

\(^{48}\)Ibid, p.53.
associations in her writing, responding to works by German Romantic figures such as Bettine von Arnim, Karoline von Günderrode, Georg Büchner and Heinrich von Kleist.

In an interview with Frauke Meyer-Gosau, she discusses the unlikely link between Romanticism and her own literary influences:

Frauke Meyer-Gosau: Romantik als Literatur-Epoche stand demnach gar nicht im Vordergrund Ihres Interesses?


Her interest in Romantic figures focuses on their complicated emotion: “Überspanntheit [...] Übertriebene Verletzbarkeit, Überanstrengung [...] Angst, Depression [...] Hang zur Selbstzerstörung”  Wolf was attracted to the Romantic emotional intensity and the failure to integrate. She began focusing on the writings of Karoline von Günderrode and was fascinated by the planned meeting between Günderrode and Kleist in 1804:

Ich jedenfalls bin sicher, daß die Begegnung nicht stattgefunden hat. Aber das war ja nur das äußere, nicht mein inneres Motiv [...] das war, wie immer, ein autobiographischer Impuls. Was mich dann in zunehmendem Maße interessiert hat, als ich mich damit beschäftigte, war ihr, der Romantiker, Versuch eines Lebensexperiments. Es ging nicht mehr um Literatur allein, nicht mehr in erster Linie, sondern darum, was diese damals jungen Leute versucht haben: in Gruppen lebend, da es in der Gesellschaft nicht ging, am Rande der Gesellschaft, aber, literarisch gesehen, in ihrem Zentrum [...]. Wie sie das gemacht haben, wie sie das durchstanden haben, wie die Frauen gerade in diesen Gruppen das initiiert haben, da sie es mit am meisten brauchten [...] das hat mich brennend interessiert. Das eigentlich ist für mich dann unter dem Begriff “Romantik” zusammengeflossen.

51 Ibid, p.517.
52 Ibid, p.882.
The ‘life experiment’ represented the exterior aspect of Romanticism for Wolf, the writing itself provided a process of intense self-expression and an inexhaustible source of writing which Wolf found fascinating:

Aber letzten Endes war es doch, ein von heute aus gesehen, wohltuend unverfälschter Prozeß des Sich-Ausdrückens: Nur an sich denkend, im besten Sinne, bzw. an den Gegenstand, an das Thema, an das denkend, was man da bearbeitet, aber nicht sich selbst als Objekt erfahrend dabei. Immer als Subjekt. Das gehört zu meinen persönlichen Antrieben beim Umgang mit diesen Figuren: der Versuch, an die verschütteten Quellen von Produktivität heranzukommen.  

Focus on the self as subject and a sense of emotion in relation to the depiction of the past predominates in Wolf’s writing and is highlighted, by contrast, in the emphasis on historical veracity which is often referred to in newspaper headlines in *Kindheitsmuster* or *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Like Rousseau, Wolf insists, not on exactitude of biographical fact, but on accuracy in depicting her relation to the past. Starobinski’s discussion of time unraveled in a multitude of instants in order to show how one came to be the person one is, is compatible with Wolf’s preface to *Ein Tag im Jahr*: “So setzt sich Leben aus unzähligen [...] mikroskopischen Zeit-Stücke zusammen?” Rousseau’s succession of endlessly renewable inner revelations about himself lead him to further autobiographical projects as Wolf is tied to autobiography:

Wann werde ich, oder werde ich überhaupt je noch einmal ein Buch über eine ferne erfundene Figur schreiben können; ich selbst bin die Protagonistin, es geht nicht anders, ich bin ausgesetzt, habe mich ausgesetzt.  

Paul de Man’s insistence on autobiography as the drama of the self, in line with Rousseau, can also be related to Wolf’s autobiographical work. Wolf is involved in the *act* of confession in *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Her wartime experiences do not specifically invite recrimination (she was sixteen at the close of the war) and her

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involvement with the SED, though controversial, was chequered (she was, at least, a form of dissident if also a supporter). But Wolf’s autobiographical writings can be seen as emphasizing the confessional act of relating difficult events. She emphasizes the drama of the self as confessor. Wolf’s confessional writing might be better described, in Shoshana Felman’s terms, as ‘testimony,’ but de Man’s criticism of confessional exhibitionism is not entirely absent from the choice of difficult historical periods in Wolf’s writing. Kindheitsmuster betrays an unresolved sense of guilt in having followed fascist prescripts from an early age. Ein Tag im Jahr conveys a sense of confession and guilt as a ‘supporter’ of a totalitarian system, albeit tempered by a belief in resistance and persistence in reforming the GDR State. Wolf signals her thorough dissatisfaction with the GDR State as early as the Biermann Ausbürgerung in 1976, but if, as de Man suspects, the excuse does not satisfy, she also appeals to a consideration of the individual embedded in history in the Preface to Ein Tag im Jahr: “Nach einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt an [...] beginnt man, sich selbst historisch zu sehen; was heißt: eingebettet in, gebunden an seine Zeit.”

Wolf’s ties to Romantic autobiography are pronounced in her obsession with self-investigation and involvement in confessional writing, yet she is at a clear distance from Rousseau’s confident claims to knowing the self, speaking the truth and believing in transparency. She is skeptical of the Romantic notion of an original and authentic self.

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55 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony, op. cit. Felman develops the notion of testimony in relation to bearing witness as ethical conduct and discusses the lack of public confession on de Man’s part as partially comprehensible because de Man is aware that the act of bearing witness can be an illusory endeavour. He is aware of the impossibility of confession for him because he believes that every confession contains a desire to be absolved. p.137 & 148.
56 Christa Wolf, Ein Tag im Jahr, op. cit., p.5.
and is excruciatingly aware of the complexities of language in attempting to represent the self.

1.5. Influential Theorists of Autobiography: Georges Gusdorf and Philippe Lejeune

Georges Gusdorf wrote his authoritative essay on autobiography, “Conditions et limites de l’autobiographie” in 1956. It was first published in a Festschrift in Germany, then reprinted in Lejeune’s L’Autohiographie en France in 1971 and translated in James Olney’s Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical in 1980. Olney claims that only with Gusdorf’s essay were “all the questions and concerns […] that have preoccupied students of autobiography […] fully and clearly laid out and given comprehensive and brilliant, if necessarily brief, consideration.” Gusdorf states that his aim is to look beyond the popularity of both autobiography and memoirs to assess autobiography’s significance. The genre of autobiography, he claims is “limited in time and space; it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere.” Biography, he claims, presents an “exterior presentation of great persons […] autobiography implies a new spiritual revolution […] our interest is turned from public to private history […].” Rousseau, Goethe or Mill are not content to offer the reader a sort of curriculum vitae retracing the steps of an official career: “[…] the act of memory is carried out for itself […] anxious to recover and redeem lost time in fixing it forever […].” With auto-

60 Ibid, p.31.
biography, we move from the “light clear space” of exterior space to the “shadowy nature of interior space.”

Autobiography is a “second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it.” Gusdorf claims:

[...] every work is autobiographical insofar as being registered in the life it alters the life to come [...]. The autobiography is lived, played, before being written; it fixes a kind of retrospective mark on the event even as it occurs [...] the prerogative of autobiography consists in this: that it shows us not the objective stages of a career [...] but it reveals instead the effort of a creator to give the meaning of his own mythic tale.

Gusdorf’s essay introduces some interesting notions to the discussion of Christa Wolf’s autobiographical writing. The move from a curriculum vitae retracing the steps of an official career towards an act of memory recovering and redeeming lost time is compatible with Wolf’s sentiment in the Preface to Ein Tag im Jahr in response to her ‘Horror vor dem Vergessen:’ “Gegen diesen unaufhaltsamen Verlust von Dasein wollte ich anschreiben: Ein Tag in einem jeden Jahr wenigstens sollte als zuverlässiger Stützpfeiler für das Gedächtnis sein [...].”

Gusdorf’s emphasis on Goethe’s autobiographical writing echoes Wolf’s close relationship with Goethe’s poetry. Gusdorf’s reference to the interior quality of autobiography tallies with the often-mentioned interiority in Wolf’s writing, though Wolf is aware that the making public of a “shadowy” interior space impacts our understanding of that public space.

The complex relationship of past to present in recalling the past and the impossibility of discovering the past ‘without us’ is a concept that Wolf has consistently probed in

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62 Ibid, p.32.
63 Ibid, p.38.
Nachdenken über Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr. The ability of the second reading to alter the past, present and future is a feature of the probing of memories in Kindheitsmuster. The difficulty of recapturing memories appropriately in Kindheitsmuster may have led Wolf to cherish and publish the apparently immediate diary entries of Ein Tag im Jahr, where the narrative emphasis changes from the accurate recovery of salient events and attitudes to the choosing of what to relate and how to capture significant experiences in language.

Philippe Lejeune's "Autobiographical Pact" is closely related to Gusdorf's resuscitation of interest in autobiography in "Conditions and limits of autobiography." But Lejeune, in contrast to Gusdorf, was strongly influenced by the link between autobiography's definition as the literature of the first person and the 'discovery' of the 'pronoun-boundedness' of identity by Emile Benveniste in Problems in General Linguistics.66 Here Benveniste accorded special status to the 'I' – it paradigmatically referred to the speaker, as opposed to 'he' which can refer to any person or none. Lejeune claimed that the first person focus of autobiography affirms the 'identity' between the names of the author, narrator and protagonist and guarantees the non-fictive status of autobiography to the reader.

Lejeune's famous definition of autobiography describes a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality."67 The definition involves four categories:

1. Form of language: a) narrative; b) prose.
2. Subject treated: individual life, personal history.

3. Situation of the author: the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator are identical.
4. Position of the narrator: a) the narrator and the principal character are identical; b) retrospective point of view of the narrative.68

A degree of latitude is possible in the first two categories, but Lejeune claims categories three and four are a matter of all or nothing. Either there is identity or there is not. Closely related genres such as memoirs, personal novels, journals, diaries, self-portraits or essays do not meet the requirements of autobiography. Lejeune admits that the notion of ‘identity’ raises many problems, specifically in the fact, as he puts it, that “identity is not resemblance,” but in this early essay, he retains a narrow definition of autobiography.

Towards the end of his essay “The Autobiographical Pact,” Lejeune includes a section called “Autobiographical Space.” Here he admits to a central complication for autobiography in quoting Gide’s claim that the novel is often truer than the autobiography. Lejeune writes that he has no intention of defending the autobiographical genre and trying to establish that autobiography is the more truthful. Instead he claims that Gide is in fact designating the autobiographical space in which he wants us to read his work. Rather than a condemnation of autobiography, Gide’s claim is an indirect form of the autobiographical pact. Rather than stick to the definition of fiction as based on non-identity and autobiography based on identity, Lejeune chooses to read Gide’s comment as a claim to autobiography for some of his fictional works.

In 1989 Lejeune himself details the criticisms of his definition – it has been described as “sectarian and dogmatic,” “a falsely magical formula that blocks reflection instead of

68 Ibid.
stimulating it,” 70 contrived and of uncertain theoretical status. In the opening to “The Autobiographical Pact” he had claimed to be cataloguing a coherent corpus of autobiographical texts since 1770 and limited himself to European literature since “our way of thinking about autobiography today becomes anachronistic or not very pertinent outside this area.” 71 He later writes in “The Autobiographical Pact (bis)” in 1989, that his earlier definition was intended as a point of departure, that he would remodel in the light of the work it allowed him to do. He intended to adjust the definition in response to the criticism it occasioned. He claims the definition was nonetheless necessary as it is “impossible to study the object without having defined it, impossible to define it before having studied it.” 72

In his 1989 text, Lejeune writes that he believes that “we can promise to tell the truth,” he believes in “the transparency of language and in the existence of a complete subject,” that the proper name guarantees autonomy and singularity and believes that when “I say ‘I’, it is I who am speaking”, but he also believes the contrary. 73 He admits he is fascinated by Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, the anti-Pact par excellence, with its “dizzying game of lucidity around all the presuppositions of autobiographical discourse – so dizzying that it ends up giving the reader the illusion that it is not doing what it nevertheless is doing.” 74 He writes that we know that in the field of the subject there is no referent, but “we go on as if we did not know it.” “Telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as complete subject – it is a fantasy. In spite of the fact that

73 Ibid, p.131.
74 Ibid.
autobiography is impossible, this is no way prevents it from existing." Lejeune seems to acceptable many of the criticisms of his definition. He claims that the debate was part of his intention in producing the definition, as though the debate would enhance the definition without changing it significantly. He is unclear about the connotations of the statement that autobiography is impossible, but nonetheless exists. He seems not to acknowledge the suggestion that his definition of autobiography requires significant modification.

Lejeune’s original definition may be limited and limiting, yet his attempt at defining autobiography has been invaluable in exposing traditional presuppositions of autobiography. In particular, feminists have disapproved of the ‘pact’ and its emphasis on the ‘proper name.’ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write: “For women in our culture a proper name is at best problematic […] even as it inscribes her into the discourse of society by designating her role as her father’s daughter, her patronymic effaces her matrilineage and thus erases her own position in the discourse of the future.” Instead, women often focus on developing forms of ‘diurnal’ writing though they may not meet the requirements of autobiography for Lejeune. Despite the controversy, Lejeune’s essay succeeds in emphasizing many important questions remaining in the mind of the reader of an autobiographical text, such as: what constitutes identity?, who is the ‘I’ or the ‘s/he’?, is the novel ‘truer’ than the autobiography? And, though limiting, some view Lejeune’s model as surprisingly flexible. Michael Sheringham in French Autobiography: Devices and Desires writes: “The great advantage of Lejeune’s definition is that it ties autobiography to reference, but not resemblance (of text to ‘life’, copy to model); to the interaction of textual ‘I’ to extra-textual counterpart, but not to any specific kind of

75 Ibid.
relationship between them. The pressure to tie autobiography to a particular form of intentionality is greatly reduced; at the same time anything which occurs in the space defined by the relations of the author, text and reader becomes ‘of the essence.’”

Lejeune claims autobiographical texts are written for readers; readers make them function. This reader-centred approach opens many channels for autobiographical interpretation. Though he believes it is impossible to constitute the self as a complete subject, Lejeune recognizes that we choose to read autobiography frequently as if we did not know this. We choose the fantasy because we enjoy reading a life if we are emotionally involved. Nancy K. Miller addresses this subject in *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People’s Lives*, claiming she reads memoirs obsessively. In the Preface to the book, she claims to see her life as an “unwitting but irresistible collaboration between other texts and other lives.” Sometimes the identifications with the stories not about her (not even remotely) come to feel like a rediscovery of her own life and memories.

Lejeune’s original definition of a “retrospective, prose narrative, produced by a real person concerning his own existence,” seems to rely on a tradition of male writers similar to Gusdorf’s insistence on the autobiographies of Rousseau, Goethe or Gide. It is too limiting and dogmatic to describe the important forms of autobiographical writing proliferated by women in the 1970s in a bid to define their identity. Lejeune’s definition and ‘identity clause’ also significantly lose credibility when faced with the pressing

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78 Nancy K. Miller, *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People’s Lives* (New York, 2002).
question that women writers sought to address in the 1970s, the question of what constitutes identity in language.

Christa Wolf, in a foreword to *Kindheitsmuster*, writes that there is no identity between author and narrator in her text, but claims, in interviews, that the text is autobiographical. This, in line with Lejeune’s interpretation of Gide, seems to constitute an indirect form of the autobiographical pact. The formulaic disclaimers preceding *Kindheitsmuster* and *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, seem to challenge Lejeune’s suggestion that it is possible for language to recreate identity in an autobiographical text. In this sense it echoes a number of women’s autobiographies that begin with similar disclaimers, such as Ann Oakley’s *Taking It Like A Woman*: “Some of the characters in this book are real and some aren’t.” 79

Lejeune began with a definition emphasizing truth, identity and a proper name, but came to appreciate the questioning of this definition. His subsequent positioning of autobiography between truth and fantasy, is consistent with Wolf’s well-described, questioning, uncertain writing style. In *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Wolf mentions an unending, fantastical search for ‘truth’:

»Die Wahrheit« sagten wir, konnten es nicht lassen, diesen Namen immer wieder auszusprechen. – Wahrheit, Wahrheit, als sei sie ein kleinäugiges Tier, das im Dunkeln lebt und scheu ist, das man aber überlisten und fangen kann, um es dann ein für allemal zu besitzen. 80

Wolf believes in a degree of transparency in language (a position between truth and fantasy), but is uncertain as to the stability of truth, the possibility of truth in language and the coherence of the subject.

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1.6. Deconstructive Reaction to Gudorf and Lejeune: Paul de Man

Laura Marcus describes Paul de Man as the most important deconstructionist in the United States, whose revaluation of Romanticism in the late 1970s is "[...] closely related to academic interest in autobiography." For deconstructionists, both Romanticism and autobiography are defined through their problematisation of the subject/object relationship. This subject/object identity "[...] privileges autobiography above other forms of knowledge," and yet recently, Marcus points out, "[...] autobiography has also been privileged because of the split between subject and object, self and other.

Paul de Man's essay "Autobiography as De-facement" is critical of the theories of autobiography prevalent in the 1970s and de Man develops an influential theory of autobiography drawn out of a reading of Wordsworth's Essay upon Epitaphs. De Man opens with the accusation that many recurrent questions and approaches to the theory of autobiography are confining, they are "stymied, with predictable monotony, by sets of problems that are inherent in their own use." One of these is "the attempt to define and to treat autobiography as if it were a literary genre among others." By treating autobiography as a genre, it is elevated "above mere reportage" and is given a place:

[...] among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres. This does not go without some embarrassment, since compared to tragedy, or epic, or lyric poetry, autobiography always looks disreputable and self-indulgent in a way that may be symptomatic of its incompatibility with the monumental dignity of aesthetic values.

82 Ibid, p.203.
84 Ibid.
De Man notes that autobiography lends itself poorly to generic definition; “each specific instance seems to be an exception to the norm; the works themselves always seem to shade off into neighboring or even incompatible genres.”

He finds the distinction between autobiography and fiction more fruitful, but undecidable. Autobiography seems to depend on verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction, it belongs to a “simpler mode of referentiality.” But de Man asks whether we can assume that the life produces the autobiography, or:

[...] can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project itself may produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined in all aspects, by the resources of his medium?

De Man concludes that the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity, but it is undecidable, “a revolving door” or “whirligig.” Autobiography is not a genre, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts. But to say that all texts are autobiographical is to say none of them is or can be: “The difficulties of generic definition that affect the study of autobiography repeat an inherent instability that undoes the model as soon as it is established.”

De Man also famously calls attention to the use of prosopopeia (to confer a mask or face) in Wordsworth’s trope “the sun looks down upon the stone.” The sun becomes the eye and reads the text of the epitaph. The epitaph personates the deceased and represents him as speaking from his own tombstone. De Man claims prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography. One’s name is made memorable as a face. Autobiography deals with the

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85 Ibid, p.920.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, p.923.
giving and taking away of the faces of the self by the self, with facing and defacing, figuration and disfiguration.

Laura Marcus argues that de Man's model of autobiography, always given over to undecidability about the verifiability of the events and the notion of defacement, is questionable as the generalisable model he holds it to be. She questions his grounds for basing his argument on the Essay upon Epitaphs and for claiming such a close relationship between epitaph and autobiography:

[...] de Man's essay shares the striking preoccupation of recent autobiographical criticism with the theme of death. Implicit in the search for totality in more traditional autobiographical criticism is the paradox that autobiography ex hypothesi cannot be written from the standpoint beyond the grave which would secure this totalizing vision of the life. By extension for the autobiographer to aim at this totalizing vision would itself be to aim for death.®

For de Man, death determines autobiographical discourse as much as life. In the act of self-figuration, the biographical self is replaced by a trope; it is 'disfigured' and in the process 'dies' so the literary self-representation becomes for de Man the creation of a kind of epitaph. But, according to Marcus, the 'Victorian' notion of autobiography as an epitaph or monument to a past life has been recently rejected "in favour of a stress on the communication of life and lived experience."88 Deconstruction with its suspicion of some models of subjectivity and experience is left harking back to an image of autobiography as funerary architecture.

De Man's theory that the distinction between autobiography and fiction is undecidable, seems to be reflected in Wolf's use of the title Roman for the West German edition of Kindheitsmuster, despite her claims that the text is autobiographical. De Man's conclusion that autobiography is not a genre, but a figure of reading that occurs, to some

88 Laura Marcus, Auto/biographical Discourses, op. cit., p.208.
degree in all texts, explains some of the difficulties in defining autobiography on one hand, though it ignores some of the crucial elements of autobiographical writing on the other. Whether or not the biographical detail is verifiable and the text involves fiction, is one aspect of the understanding of autobiography, but the perspective of the writer as the subject and object of the narrative is a more interesting attribute of autobiography. The autobiographer may ‘falsify’ the testimony or the reader may not accept the autobiographer’s perspective, but the reader looks for the author’s ‘personal’ representation in autobiography.

De Man’s ‘Victorian’ idea that autobiography is essentially an epitaph or monument to a past life does not reflect the recent stress on life and lived experience in autobiography, and Christa Wolf’s predominant emphasis in her autobiographical writing. The idea that autobiography often precedes death, written at the close of a ‘chapter of life’ and with a sense of impending death, may be true of some autobiographies, such as Virginia Woolf’s A Sketch Of The Past, but many autobiographies focus on the present as well as the past. The possibility of impending death is mentioned by Christa Wolf, during health crises in Ein Tag im Jahr, but this work is primarily focused on a life in progress and the writing process that defines it. The proximity to death in Nachdenken über Christa T., albeit not for the narrator, seems to be associated with the urgency of the autobiographical approach to the topic for the narrator, further linked to Christa T.’s claim: “Daß ich nur schreibend über die Dinge komme!” Here the narrator identifies closely with Christa T., involving herself with the connotations of her impending death, as well as with a form of writing Christa T.’s epitaph. Although this text is closely

89 Ibid, p.209.
associated with the topic of impending death and the writing of an epitaph, the narrator is not writing her own epitaph, as de Man suggests, but focuses on the articulation of experience. *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*, focus on the communication of life and lived experience.

1.7. Writing Autobiography Against Itself: *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*

Roland Barthes' autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, is often cited as the most famous attempt to "write an autobiography against itself" and is interesting as a point of departure for autobiographical works lying ostensibly outside autobiographical tradition, such as *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* or *Ein Tag im Jahr*. While claiming to be an autobiography, it deconstructs from within the major assumptions underlying the genre. It discards the first-person singular and assumes multiple-subject positionings: 'he,' 'R.B.,' 'you' and 'I' change places almost arbitrarily to reinforce the distance between the writer and the written text: "I had no other solution than to rewrite myself – at a distance, a great distance [...]. Far from reaching the core of the matter, I remain on the surface [...]." The text is divided into alphabetically ordered sections so that the structure of the work prevents the impression of a unified writing subject:

The alphabetical order erases everything [...] certain fragments seem to follow one another by some affinity; but the important thing is that these little networks not be connected, that they not slide into a single enormous network which would be the structure of the book, its meaning. It is in order to halt, to deflect, to divide this descent of

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discourse toward a destiny of the subject, that at certain moments the alphabet calls you to order [...].

The text avoids narrative, it offers repeated beginnings, not the reconstruction of a past, nor new layers to abolish previous truths. The past is not simply excluded, it is stripped of its ideological function as a privileged source of meaning. This questioning of the privileged function of the past echoes Wolf’s quotation of Faulkner in the opening lines of *Kindheitsmuster*: “Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd.”

Much of Barthes is concerned with the recognition that a coherent self is a fiction, that it must always involve being seen from a distance, through the perspective of the Other. In one of the captions to the photographs at the beginning of the book, he writes: “Where is your authentic body? You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens [...].” Like Brechtian theory, in which the actor never simply identifies with the character he performs, Barthes writes *Barthes* as though demonstrating or rehearsing different parts.

Linda Anderson notes that however critically Barthes treats autobiography and the notion of a unitary subject, he undertakes his project in a form that still signifies autobiography to him:

Autobiography survives its reconfiguring by poststructuralism by absorbing and acknowledging self-critique [...] to see the demise of autobiography in Roland Barthes is quite simply to affirm a greatly simplified conception of the autobiographical act [...] as though when a genre or mode of writing advertises its inherent problematics it is thereby denying or destroying itself.

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Anderson finds Barthes’ last book *Camera Lucida*, apparently about photography, to be more autobiographical than *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Written in the immediate aftermath of his mother’s death, his quest to discover what photography is in itself, merges with the quest to discover the beloved person that no image can reconstruct. He finds a photograph of his mother that is powerful enough to connect himself with the ‘real’ of the past. The photograph can succeed where the text cannot, it can communicate what cannot be put into words. The photograph remains private, the personal space outside the text is presented as a feminine or maternal space. Barthes writes of his mother’s dying: “I never ‘spoke’ to her, never ‘discoursed’ in her presence, for her; we supposed, without saying anything of the kind to each other, that the frivolous insignificance of language, the suspension of images must be the very space of love, its music.”\(^6\) For Barthes, the mother belongs to a space outside discourse.

Following this relationship between the mother, language and autobiography, Julia Kristeva postulates in *Black Sun*, that by taking up the place within the symbolic and entering language, the child kills the mother, substituting words for her body which is forever lost: “For man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity [...] Matricide is our vital necessity [...]”.\(^7\) Barthes’ assertion that his relationship to his mother lies outside discourse, leads him away from theory towards autobiography where, though her dying is represented, her death can be endlessly postponed. By writing about his mother dying, he keeps his emotional turmoil and by extension, his mother, alive. He also attempts, in Christa T.’s words, ‘schreibend über die Dinge zu kommen.’

Barthes' autobiography calls into question the assumptions of autobiography about the privileges of the past and the coherence of the self, both concepts Christa Wolf tries to explore in her autobiographical writing. She investigates the nature of the past in psychoanalytical terms in *Kindheitsmuster*, in terms of the child’s experience of time and the significance of the mother in the autobiographical narration of early childhood. The complex relationship of autobiographical narration to the past is one of the central concerns in *Kindheitsmuster*. Wolf searches for explanations for her reserve and reluctance in beginning *Kindheitsmuster*: “Frühere Leute erinnerten sich leichter: eine Vermutung, eine höchstens halbrichtige Behauptung. Ein erneuter Versuch dich zu verschanzen.”

The difficulty in coherence between the child and the adult is also immediately and poignantly addressed in the opening lines of Pablo Neruda’s poem preceding *Kindheitsmuster*: “Wo ist das Kind, das ich gewesen, ist es noch in mir oder fort?” and in the opening discussion of the text itself:

[…] sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen […]. Im Kreuzverhör mit dir selbst zeigt sich der wirkliche Grund der Sprachstörung: Zwischen dem Selbstgespräch und der Anrede findet eine bestürzende Lautverschiebung statt, eine fatale Veränderung der grammatikalischen Bezüge. Ich, du, sie, in Gedanken ineinanderschwimmend, sollen im ausgesprochenen Satz einander entfremdet werden.

The reluctance to use ‘I’ questions the often unreflective use of ‘I’ in autobiographical narrative. And much as Barthes will not allow a number of ‘illusions’ to be maintained in *Barthes*, Wolf is unsure as to her success in interrupting the powerful influence of the past in the closing lines of *Kindheitsmuster*: “Und die Vergangenheit, die noch

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99 Ibid.
Sprachregelungen verfügen, die erste Person in eine zweite und dritte spalten konnte – ist ihre Vormacht gebrochen? […] Ich weiß es nicht.”

The fiction of the coherent self is a notion that Wolf also addresses in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. These diaries carry a glimpse of the writer from 1960 to 2000, through many changes and upheavals. Though providing only a few pages of text per year, the diaries reveal coherence and flux: “[…] natürlich spiegeln sich meine manchmal jäh, häufiger aber allmählich sich verändernden Einstellungen zu [den] […] komplexen, komplizierten Vorgängen.” There is a strong sense in the text that the narrator is both recognizable and consistent, yet changing and transitory through forty years.

1.8. “What is an author?” of Autobiography

The critical discussion of Roland Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author” in 1968 played a central role in the deconstructive reevaluation of the theories of autobiography in the late 1970s. Although later refined, the declaration of the death of the author was a key impetus early in the history of literary theory, and the jettisoning of the author as the source and guarantor of meaning cleared the way for a plethora of questions about the production of literature and the process of reading.

A year later Michel Foucault published “What is an author?” questioning that privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas when the notion of the ‘author’ was born. He stresses that, despite the declaration of the death of the author: “[…] when we

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100 Ibid, p.549.
reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak […] in comparison with the fundamental unit of the author and the work.” Writing is supposed to have freed itself from the dimension of expression:

Referring only to itself […] it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier […]. In writing, the point is not to […] pin a subject within language; it is rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears.

The difficulties of pinning a subject within language is a concept Wolf refers to for her own writing and Christa T.’s in Nachdenken über Christa T.:

The reader is aware that s/he is entering a writing space, not a place where a ‘subject has been pinned down,’ in Nachdenken über Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr, although the writing subject does not disappear in Wolf’s writing.

Foucault claims that criticism has taken note of the death of the author, but a number of notions intended to replace the privileged position of the author actually seem to preserve the privilege. One of these notions that preserves privilege is the idea of the work. There remains a discrete reverence for an author’s ‘work.’ Foucault asks: “If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers […] could be called a “work”?” Another notion of privilege is writing or écriture. This is

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104 Ibid, p.102.
105 Christa Wolf, Nachdenken über Christa T., op. cit., p.75.
106 Ibid.
not the act of writing, nor the meaning which ‘the author’ might have wanted to express, but the text in terms of “the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds.” Here the writing seems sacred and inalterable and this risks the maintenance of the author’s privileges. It is not enough to keep repeating that the author has disappeared, Foucault claims it is necessary to follow the gaps that this disappearance uncovers.

Despite the progress, modern literary criticism hasn’t fundamentally changed its understanding of the author. The author still provides the basis for explaining the:

[...] presence of certain events in a work, their transformations, distortions and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing – all differences are resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation or influence. The author also serves to neutralize all contradictions that may emerge in a series of texts [...]  

Christa Wolf’s writing tends to lend itself disproportionately to biographical interpretation, perhaps because the writing subject seems to feature strongly in her texts. As Anna Kuhn emphasizes, Wolf has been predominantly read as an East German Woman Writer. Foucault makes a valid point about the over-use of biographically and socially determined literary criticism and about the interference of individual works in a series of an author’s works, but his alternative notion of a work without an author seems to lose this difficult, but potentially useful aspect of a literary

109 See »Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf« Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland (Hrsg.) Thomas Anz (München, 1991) or Der Literaturstreit im sich Vereinigenden Deutschland: Eine Analyse des Streits um Christa Wolf und die deutsch-deutsche Gegenwartsliteratur in Zeitungen und Zeitschriften (Hrsg.) Bernd Wittek (Marburg, 1997).
text to no advantage. Foucault does not depict an alternative: this will have to be ‘determined’ or ‘experienced.’

Foucault writes that the text always contains a number of signs referring to the author, such as pronouns or adverbs of time and place. In discourses “provided with the author function,” these elements play a more complex and variable role:

Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first-person, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance […]111

The person behind the first-person pronoun in autobiographical narrative is neither the author nor the narrator, but operates in the division between the two. This plurality of self and distance between author and narrator is particularly relevant to Wolf’s questions about self and distance in *Kindheitsmuster*.

Foucault’s goal is the reversal of the traditional role of the author; he writes:

[...] the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction.”

Foucault claims to call for a culture in which fiction will not be limited by the figure of the author, yet it would be “pure romanticism” to imagine a culture in which the fictive would be put at the disposal of everyone:

[...] since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive [...] as our society changes [...] the author function will disappear [...] fiction [...] will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint – one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.113

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111 Michel Foucault, “What is an author?” op. cit., p.112.
113 Ibid, p.119.
In “What is an Author?” Foucault emphasizes his understanding that the author and the work are still strong categories, despite claims as to the death of the author. This assertion helps to explain why autobiography is difficult to define and discuss in relation to recent texts, based on its rather outmoded-looking focus on the author. Despite this anomaly, autobiography may be at the crossroads of Foucault’s call for change. If the author function and the regulation of the fictive can be challenged meaningfully, it is very likely to be in autobiographical criticism, where the cult of the author and the question of fiction is closely monitored, and authors and critics are fully cognizant of the calls for the removal of the author function. In writing about autobiography, the critic of autobiography seems to be involved with the author’s biography, determination of evolution and social context, yet the call to deprive the author of the role of originator and to analyze the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse are pleas more readily raised in the mind of the reader of autobiography than in other genres. In reading Christa Wolf’s autobiographical writing the reader is often conscious of the many ways in which the reader ‘constructs’ the author. In the confusion of the vastly differing accusations leveled at Wolf as Staatsdichterin, Stasi informant, cult figure, collaborator or dissident, Foucault’s search for the dispersal of the notion of the author as an indefinite source of signification may have been satisfied.

1.9. Feminism and Autobiography

Foucault’s questioning of the position of the author and the ability of language to represent experience provided feminist critics with a new way of viewing the significance
of the gender and perspective of ‘the author’ and the masculine bias of language. The challenging of the author’s authority and the reverence for the author highlighted the relevance of feminist approaches to the representation of women in literature, which was coming to light in the criticism of images of women in the late 1960s. Feminists also drew attention to the dearth of women’s writing in the literary canon and the lack of availability and discussion of women’s writing where it exists. Women had long been contributors to forms of life writing yet autobiographical writing by women had been largely ignored and the literary canon did not adequately represent the range of women’s writing in existence. Because of the preponderance of letters, journals and diaries surviving in the annals of women’s literature, the relationship between women as writers and readers of autobiographical writing warranted specific interest. Linda Anderson writes that “[...] recognising the absence of women writers from the autobiographical canon, or of gender from critical accounts of autobiography – has been the major enterprise of feminist study of autobiography for more than a decade.”

In 1980, Estelle Jelinek published the first collection of essays on this subject entitled *Women’s Autobiography*. Jelinek claimed that “[...] excellent and innovative autobiographies by women [...] have been ignored or excluded from the critical canon.”

According to Linda Anderson, Domna Stanton in *The Female Autograph* in 1984, “[...] exposed how autobiography as a genre, or as a set of definitions and traditions

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114 Ruth Robbins in *Literary Feminisms* (Hampshire and New York, 2000) cites early feminist classics of the postwar era such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Mary Ellmann’s *Thinking About Women* (1968) and Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) as all sharing “[...] a commitment to pursuing the image as a way of analysing the ideological force of literature and as a method of pursuing political analyses in the worlds beyond the text.” p.57.


aimed at destabilising and legitimating texts, privileged the masculine subject, at the same time as she suggested how women’s very illegitimacy – her fraudulent presence within the symbolic order – could become the mark of her autobiographical difference." The position of autobiography as a genre became the focus of the feminist critique of autobiography.

The reasons for women’s interest in autobiographical and life stories, apparent in the biographical writings and diary entries by women surviving almost from antiquity, are manifold and complex. Patricia Waugh suggests that women writers, on the whole, have not felt comfortable with an ‘aesthetics of impersonality’: “The reason for this is the overvaluation, in the first instance of exclusive objectivity, of distance, autonomy, separateness, discrete form [...].” Feminists tend to associate the interest in life writing with the attempt to link the personal with the political in the late sixties, but Linda Anderson traces Virginia Woolf’s earlier path in experimenting with autobiography and fiction. According to Anderson, Woolf’s family connections ensured her interest in life writing as well as her resistance to many of its assumptions and values. She was “[...] the daughter of the editor of that nineteenth-century monument to egregious lives, The Dictionary of National Biography, Sir Leslie Stephen, and the inheritor of a family tradition of autobiographical writing stretching back several generations [...]” Woolf took her bearings from her father’s work as biographer, but found herself intrigued by what she called ‘the lives of the obscure.’ Anderson writes that Woolf became interested in these stories: “[...] the forgotten lives, mostly of women, who had been marginalized

by the Dictionary’s selection of ‘great men.’ It was not always the case that these lives had gone unrecorded: they could be glimpsed [...] in existing documents, and Woolf imagined herself turning the pages of dusty and hidden volumes, rediscovering lives which have been relegated to the backwaters – or shadows – of history.” Woolf also wrote biographies that mixed fact with fiction. The ‘Journal of Mistress Joan Martyn’ (1906), which was not published in Woolf’s lifetime, is a fictionalized account of a fifteenth century woman’s life.

Feminists worked on countering the perception that there was a lack of women’s literature by looking at forgotten literary texts, but they also focused on the texts that were emerging as women entered the public sphere in greater numbers in the 1960s. Kate Millett’s Flying and Ann Oakley’s Taking It Like A Woman are often cited, as are Zora Neale Hurston’s Dust Tracks On The Road and Maya Angelou’s I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings. Feminists sensed the need for a female perspective, often vividly accessible in women’s autobiographies, and autobiography often demonstrates women’s awareness of their position as ‘other’ in society and in writing. The widespread lack of women in public life prior to the 1960s seems to have spawned their interest in other lives, encouraging the writing and reading of life writing and stories of survival in difficult circumstances.

Lauren Rusk claims that Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own focuses not just on the commonplace that the personal and the political cannot be separated, but Rusk finds that three spheres of activity are addressed in Woolf’s text: the private, interpersonal and public: “Collectively, women have lived their life in the interpersonal realm. But Woolf

120 Ibid, p.97.
finds them mostly absent from the other two, enjoying neither solitude nor public presence.”  

Women need to withdraw to write and bring the fruits of their solitude into the public realm to enrich the culture at large: “Woolf challenges women to adopt the attitude toward creation that is second-nature to men: “I am writing a book which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I must be isolated from everyone.” They need to develop both a certain selfishness, withdrawing from others, and a new kind of generosity, giving of oneself on a grander scale.”

This withdrawing and giving of one’s self seems to be closely reflected in the writing of autobiography which often demands a rigorous kind of giving of oneself. Women’s sustained interest in reading autobiographies by women may help explain the importance of autobiographical accounts in the establishment of a canon of women’s writing.

Feminist interest in the personal genres of autobiography, diary and journals is also often related to the association of women with the body which has long signified a site of difference for women. Women writers seem to occupy a different position in relation to the body to male writers. Masculine ‘selfhood’ is opposed to female ‘otherness.’ The ‘universal’ subject has established its identity through what Patricia Waugh calls “[…] the invisible marginalization or exclusion of what it has also identified as ‘femininity’ (whether this is the non-rational, the body, the emotions, or the pre-symbolic). The feminine thus becomes that which cannot be expressed […]. Constituted through a male gaze and thus endowed with the mysteriousness of one whose objective status is seen as

122 Ibid.
absolute and definitive.” Feminist interest in the personal relates to the common association of women with the body. ‘Personal criticism’ is an example of the connection between the corporeal and feminist concern with the personal. Nancy Miller describes personal criticism as “[…] an explicitly autobiographical performance within the art of criticism. Indeed getting personal typically involves a deliberate move toward self-figuration […]” It is important that women bring the personal into places in which it is constituted as inappropriate because the attempt to erase the gap between the ‘body’ and ‘writing’ in ‘personal criticism’ is linked to a crisis for women in the field of theory. Feminists need to reassert the role of women in the traditionally masculine domain of theory.

In summary, feminist interest in autobiography has been associated with an awareness of the wealth of women writers of letters and diaries in the annals of literature, the desire to link the personal and the political, female skepticism about the ‘aesthetics of impersonality,’ the relationship between the body and literature and also to the borderline status of autobiography itself. Tess Cosslett locates feminist interest in autobiography in this crucial borderline status. Autobiography can be seen as being situated on the border between the personal and the social, the everyday and the literary, the authentic and the fictitious. For Cosslett this borderline status resonates very strongly with women’s own status on the border between the public and the private spheres and their interest in examining the possibilities of the borderline status in literature and life: “ […] the challenging of traditional boundaries and definitions has also been central to the feminist project […] and autobiography provides a meeting-place for many different kinds of

feminist approach." The focus on the borderline in terms of literary genre or in terms of life status seems to closely reflect Christa Wolf's interest in autobiographical writing in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*. The protagonists in these texts associate themselves with a borderline status in life and literature. Feminist exploration of a borderline status for women and autobiography therefore helps explain the crucial link between Christa Wolf's writing and autobiography in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*.

1.10. *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr* and the Autobiographical Tradition

The intense focus on autobiographical definition in the 1970s began with emphasis on predominantly 'classic' texts by male authors, such as Saint Augustine, Rousseau, Goethe and Wordsworth, but today autobiographical criticism addresses autobiographical texts by women and non-traditional writing groups in forms incompatible with the original definitions and understanding of the 'genre.' Autobiography seems to be accumulating and refining its components, rather than losing its traditional attributes altogether in this transformation. Traditional emphasis on the truthfulness and the cathartic effects of confession, on the 'Christian' inward-turning gaze, self-scrutiny and self-castigation does not wholly disappear from more recent autobiographical texts, though these may be further refined by a questioning of identity, consciousness of the limitations of language.

and awareness of the impossibility of a unified subject. Christa Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*, lie within the latter stance, clearly questioning traditional notions of representation and coherence, yet without relinquishing the reference to the classical concepts of the search for ‘truth’ and the need for confession.

Wolf’s autobiographical texts are important to autobiographical interpretation because she is committed to the autobiographical form beyond other forms of writing and her texts are unusual, in-depth literary autobiographies paying close attention to many of the key features of autobiographical writing. The significance of Wolf’s texts for the understanding of women’s autobiographical writing is profound. Domna Stanton in “Autogynography” mentions the conundrum of the negative associations of autobiography when applied to women’s texts:

[...] “autobiographical” constituted a positive term when applied to Augustine and Montaigne, Rousseau and Goethe, Henry Adams and Henry Miller, but it had negative connotations when imposed on women’s texts. It had been used, I realized as I moved through the stacks toward the French collections, to affirm that women could not transcend, but only record, the concerns of the private self [...] the anonymous seventeenth-century Portuguese Letters had been called autobiographical, spontaneous, natural when ascribed to a woman, but fictive, crafted and aesthetic, when attributed to a man.126

Christa Wolf’s writing belies the notion of the limitation to the record of the private self for women writers. She escapes the “[...] autobiographical narrowness and narcissism of female writing”127 with her public notoriety, public presence and her interest in both public and private forms of writing. Simone de Beauvoir’s comment in *The Second Sex* confirms the perception of a lack of challenging autobiographies written by women: “[...]

127 Ibid, p.5.
there are, for example, sincere and engaging feminine autobiographies, but none can compare with Rousseau’s *Confessions* and Stendhal’s *Souvenirs d’égotisme*.” Wolf’s autobiographies contest this disparaging notion of a lack of depth in women’s autobiographies and compare with the autobiographical tradition of male authors, with Rousseau and Stendhal, in a favourable way.

Defining autobiography even for the purposes of this study is difficult because many of the defining characteristics of autobiography falter in the last analysis and, as Paul de Man has suggested, each autobiography seems to be an exception to the rule. The variation that de Man mentions, however, lends itself to the attraction of the genre and particularly to the attraction for those new to writing and women struggling for representation in the literary canon.

Christa Wolf’s autobiographical writing does not mark a clear break with traditional notions of autobiography such as confession and truthfulness. These concepts seem to underpin her concept of subjective authenticity and Jörg Magenau has very carefully documented Wolf’s deep engagement with Marxist principles of ‘fair play’ and ‘honesty’ (‘richtig denken und fühlen’) in literature in the early 1960s. The Romantic self-absorption and autobiographical self-expression also captures Wolf’s interest as a valuable source of creativity but the most important concept in Wolf’s life writing is her questioning of the process of the writing of autobiography similar to Barthes’ interest in the anti-pact and his questioning of the privilege of the past and the coherence of the self.

129 Magenau mentions rigorous concepts that Wolf grappled with such as: “Ein sozialistischer Schriftsteller ist einer, der denken und fühlen kann, was zu denken und fühlen richtig ist, und der das auszudrücken versteht.” Wolf is aware of the seriousness of these concepts in the severity of the criticism she endures as she withdraws from her early strongly Marxist position: “Es kam zu ersten Auseinandersetzungen mit mir
Foucault’s discussion of language as the creation of a space not the capturing of a subject is also crucial to Wolf’s concept of autobiographical writing. The sense of distance between the author and the work and the variation in this relationship that Foucault mentions is relevant to the understanding of Wolf’s autobiographical process. Finally, Wolf’s awareness of her context as a woman writing, her association of the personal and the political and her recognition of the borderline status for women in life and literature, is the most obvious motivation for her involvement with autobiography.

Christa Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T.* can be read as an early foray into the field of autobiographical experimentation, an experimentation which was to reach maturation in *Kindheitsmuster* and become overtly autobiographical in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* is a beginning, a tentative work in theme and structure. Initially the theme appears to be a posthumous biography, but the work moves towards the probing of a pivotal close relationship from the perspective of the narrator. The narrator consistently questions her ability to recapture images of Christa T., as well as emphasizing the intricacies of her own relationship to Christa T. Wolf mentions a personal interest as the stimulus for this narrative. The death of her childhood friend Christa Tabbert has not been denied as the starting point for the narrative, for which she refused the classification of novel. I argue that Wolf begins this text with a vague biographical intention, but soon rejects biography for a number of reasons. As Wolf moves away from her focus on Christa Tabbert, she becomes aware that she is confronting herself in this text. She is no longer relating Christa T.’s story, but the story of her relationship with her childhood friend. This change of narrative position within the

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1 The title seems to invite the expectation of biography, much as James Miller’s *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York, 1993) might, but Miller writes in the Preface: “This book is not a biography […] nor is it a comprehensive survey of his works […]. It is, rather, a narrative account of one man’s lifelong struggle to honor Nietzsche’s gnomic injunction, ‘to become what one is.’” Christa Wolf inverts what might be understood as ‘biography’ in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in 1968, creating a genre related to autobiographical writing. At the outset of the book, she quotes Johannes R. Becher’s “Was ist das: Dieses Zu-sich-selber-Kommen des Menschen?”

2 Wolf has long been suspicious of biography having spent a number of months researching a biography of Anna Seghers in 1963 then abandoning the project as Seghers insisted that the details of her childhood and private life be limited (Jörg Magenau, *Christa Wolf Eine Biographie*, Berlin, 2002, p.162/3). Wolf is also wary of the necessarily ‘fictional’ aspects of a biographical account of Christa T. and tends increasingly towards portraying her own sentiment (autobiography) as her most effective writing stance.
text and the significance of the story for the narrator mean that *Nachdenken über Christa T.* can be read in an autobiographical light. The exacting approach towards representing childhood memories is also reminiscent of autobiographical writing. The representation of the difficulty of extracting a ‘personal’ story from memory and the probing of the narrator, are common components of literary autobiographical writing.

Wolf speaks in a circuitous way, in the form of a ‘self-interview,’ of having confronted herself in writing this story:

*Frage:* So schreiben Sie also eine Art von posthumem Lebenslauf.

The two poles of being integrally close and starkly different characterize the emotion that fuels the narrator’s focus on her own reaction to her lost friend. This close and distant relationship echoes Wolf’s concept of other ‘close’ relationships, including male/female relationships in “Selbstversuch” and “Er und ich,” family relationships in *Kindheitsmuster,* and relationships with key writers, Anna Seghers, Brigitte Reimann or Max Frisch in *Ein Tag im Jahr.*

The depth and difficulty of Christa T.’s focus seems commensurate with autobiographical writing as a deep and emotional probing of a life with a resulting emphasis on discovering lost or unfamiliar information about the self. The illumination of early interpersonal relationships is also a prominent feature of autobiographical texts. The

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dominant themes of autobiography have been defined as: "[...] education or development, recognition, self-overcoming, adaptation, the conflict of opposing tendencies (Past and Present [...] ), integration, the exploration of motivation and the boundaries of the human, historical change, and the mirror-window." Christa T. seems to comply with these themes in a tentative way. Education, recognition, self-overcoming, adaptation, etc., are features of Wolf’s early text.

The interpretation of Christa T. as an autobiographical or as a ‘subjective’ (fictive) text hinges on the understanding of autobiography on the part of the critic and reader. Autobiographical criticism itself makes classification complicated. Stephen Shapiro makes this point succinctly: "[...] literary cartographers have long been precisely mapping the continents of fiction, drama, and poetry, all the while pretending that autobiography were not there [...]." Shapiro argues clearly for an understanding of the ‘creativity’ of the autobiographer:

Scholars who revere the mysteries of craft and convention in the sonnet or the Jamesian novel somehow still manage to believe that when the time comes for the autobiographer to tell the story of his own life – his attitudes, actions and evolutions – he just sits down and writes [...]. Like the poet, the autobiographer is a maker. Frequently the limits of language, the slipperiness of experience, the difficulties of both comprehending and recreating the experience become the subjects of autobiography.

The autobiographer is then expected to do the impossible: "[...] recapture time, shape the shapeless, make many one and one multiple, transform an inner image into a picture-mirror for others, make the flesh into words and words into flesh." This discussion of

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5 Ibid, p.106.

the impossible task seems to reflect Wolf's tentative discussion of the slipperiness of experience and the difficulties of re-creating an experience, in *Christa T*.

But finding a reliable way of distinguishing *between* autobiography and the novel is a more difficult task than describing the creative work of the autobiographer. Shapiro writes:

It could be claimed that all novels are autobiographical, made of the transformed experience of the author's life. And certainly all autobiographical writing is structured and conditioned by the "distorting" conventions of art [...]. Although certain works defy classification as either autobiography or fiction, my purpose is not to confound these genres but to reveal the submerged mountain chains that link the continent of autobiography with the literary mainland and to help map this dark Africa of the genres.  

Autobiography, similar to Freud's understanding of women, seems to be shrouded in mystery or lacking in clarity. *Christa T.* may be difficult to classify as either autobiography or fiction, but in Shapiro's imagery, it seems to lie among the submerged mountain chains that link the continent of autobiography with the literary mainland.

On a surface level, *Christa T.* may be read as autobiographical because Christa Wolf refers to a kind of self-discovery in relation to the text and because of its continuity in style and mission with the later *Kindheitsmuster*, which Wolf describes as autobiographical. In the disclaimer preceding *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf claims there is no 'identity' between author and narrator, primarily because she, like many of her generation, is conscious of a schism between her childhood and adult identities due to the traumatic realization of wartime atrocities shrouding her childhood years. Similarly, in

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7 Ibid, p.109.
the disclaimer preceeding *Christa T.*, Wolf denies that the characters in the book bear a relation to real persons, but the denial appears to rest on an attempt to shield the Tabbert family, as she, more ineffectively, attempts to ‘protect’ her own family in her disclaimer in *Kindheitsmuster*.

In “Selbstinterview,” Wolf appears to refer obliquely to an autobiographical component to *Christa T.*, in mentioning “ein subjektiver Antrieb” and a confrontation with herself. The artificial, ‘self-interview’ style of “Selbstinterview” means that the text’s reference is oblique and each reference lies on shifting ground. However, Wolf seems intent on explaining the obvious gap in style between *Der geteilte Himmel* and *Christa T.* in “Selbstinterview.” This gap is referred to in terms of the widespread criticism of the focus on ‘private, intimate conflicts’ in *Christa T.*, and Wolf is clear about the ludicrous inferences of this kind of criticism for ‘socialist’ literature:

Die absurde Meinung, die sozialistische Literatur könne sich nicht mit den feinen Nuancen des Gefühlsleben, mit den individuellen Unterschieden der Charaktere befassen […] diese absurde Meinung wird niemand mehr vorbringen.⁹

In “Selbstinterview,” Wolf refers to a subjective drive, self-discovery, personal feelings (‘Gefühlsleben’) and individual differentiation, but does not mention an explicit autobiographical basis for *Christa T.* The extensive, theoretical discussion of a wider understanding of autobiographical writing, which recognizes the inevitability of a fictional aspect to autobiography, does not take place until the 1970s. Nonetheless, Wolf’s questioning of the place of ‘private’ conflicts in literature and the particular emphasis in *Christa T.* on the significance of writing ‘I’ in 1968, preempts the autobiographical debate.

⁹ Christa Wolf, “Selbstinterview,” op. cit., p.34.
Another interpretation of *Christa T.* as a tentative autobiographical text involves the context of the narrative within Wolf’s writing. Though not ‘autobiographical’ in a traditional sense, viewed together with *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr*, Wolf provides, in these works, a testimony of the time period 1929 to 2000. *Kindheitsmuster* is concerned with the time period of approximately 1929 to 1947, *Christa T.* focuses on the years 1951 to 1963 and *Ein Tag im Jahr* presents one day in the years 1960 to 2000. *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster* together, refer to 1929 to 1963, the rise of Nazism, World War II, the defeat, occupation and division of Germany and the rise of the socialist state. *Ein Tag im Jahr* gives mention to the 1960s, 70s and 80s, aspects of the early and mature writer, the 1989 collapse of the socialist state and the early experience of the ‘unified’ Germany. *Christa T.* emphasizes the postwar period and the development of socialism, whereas *Kindheitsmuster* focuses on the pre-socialist war years, yet the reverse chronological order of these works has been interpreted as non-coincidental. The mourning in *Christa T.* prepares the ground for *Kindheitsmuster*. Anna Kuhn in *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision* writes: “(Wolf's) reconstruction of Christa T.'s past, seems to have served as a catalyst enabling the author to attend to her own past and to work through her own experiences.”10 These links between *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster* reinforce the understanding of the earlier work as tentatively autobiographical.

*Christa T.* proceeds in an unchronological manner (moving from an opening reference to Christa T.'s death to a portrait of her at school), as Wolf’s autobiographical works seem to be autobiographically disordered. Dieter Sevin divides *Christa T.* into five sections. The first three chapters describe the first encounters between the narrator and Christa T.

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and close with her reunion with the narrator in 1951. The next eight chapters focus on Christa T.'s four year study of German from 1951, the following three chapters cover her year as a teacher in Berlin. Christa T.'s marriage to Justus are the subject of the next three chapters and the final three chapters, cover events from New Year 1962 until her death in February 1963.  

This breakdown, though complicated and in disregard of the intentionally unstructured quality of the text, points to an underlying chronology containing conventional narrative sequences. It supports the notion of a structure beneath the apparent lack of structure in Christa T. and a framework beneath the lack of autobiographical order in the writing of Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr. Christa T.'s structure is chronologically unorthodox and this is a feature that also marks the gap in style between Der geteilte Himmel and Christa T. that Wolf is anxious to address in “Selbstinterview.” Christa T. ‘s form seems to reflect the unstructured quality of memory and the grieving process that feature strongly in the narrative. The tone and perspective are also unusual. Written from a narrator’s perspective, the idea of perspective is questioned in the text, along with a questioning of the notion of biography and the significance of using ‘authentic’ materials: notes and sketches penned by Christa T. These notes echo the use of news clips in Kindheitsmuster, as a kind of ‘historical’ or objective relief from the ‘subjective’ narrative. The contrast between a ‘subjective’ (narrator) quality and an ‘original’ tone (Christa T. ‘s writing) in Christa T. is striking in the text, challenging the notions of both the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective,’ and linking the text to the preoccupations of autobiographical and personal writing more common decades after its publication.

In essays and interviews, Wolf’s discussion of needing to find the right mode in order to write her story is reminiscent of the difficulties that autobiographers often mention in finding the appropriate angle from which to approach their story. In her interview “Erfahrungsmuster,” Wolf tries to justify the ‘difficult’ style of *Kindheitsmuster*:


This sense of one tone of narration in mind and the filling of a space, though referring to the writing of *Kindheitsmuster*, is applicable to *Christa T.*, and is strongly reminiscent of personal writing and autobiography where the search for tone and atmosphere seems crucial to the personal situation. Wolf’s mention of an “Erzählraum” is also significant for the unusual character of *Christa T.* The description of the filling of a space and the existence of a space around the text is different to the conventional concept of the text as words on a page and helps to account for the sense of gaps in the text, that which has remained unsaid and the presence of that which cannot be said, which is characteristic of *Christa T*.

In “Selbstinterview” Wolf mentions the criticism following the appearance of *Christa T.* of her retreat into the personal, “Rückzug in die Innerlichkeit, Ausflucht ins Privatleben” and her cultivation of sensitivity and emotion, (“Empfindsamkeit”), yet she argues:

Warum nicht an die alte Lösung erinnern: denkend fühlen und fühlend denken? […] Ich habe einen Weg ausprobiert, den ich nicht noch einmal gehen kann. Andere Autoren werden ihn für sich nicht angebracht finden […]. Aber ich habe herausgefunden, daß man um jeden Preis versuchen muß, den Kreis dessen, was wir über uns selbst wissen oder zu wissen glauben, zu durchbrechen und zu überschreiten.¹³

Wolf emphasizes that Christa T. is written in a style uniquely possible for this material and she stresses the need for expanding the ways of finding out more about the self, both concepts consistent with the underlying tenets of autobiographical writing.

Though it is being suggested here that Christa T. exhibits tentative characteristics in theme and style, compatible with a recent understanding of autobiographical and personal writing, this narrative first appeared in the GDR in 1968 in a climate hostile to or uninitiated in the concept of non-traditional autobiographical self-expression and more recent notions of personal writing. From the beginning, its difference did not go unnoticed and its ‘novel’ form precipitated interesting and disparate initial reactions.

Here I will first look at the early reception of Nachdenken über Christa T. as symptomatic of the gulf in 1968 between the expectation of form on the part of the established critics (from East or West) and the reader’s interest in a more open-ended writing form, and in a text that the GDR ‘establishment’ seemed reluctant to release. Despite the initial Western interest in the text as proof of ‘illness’ in the East German state, Christa T. was quickly ranked among key texts in literary terms in the West. Christa T. represents a significant departure from previous form for Christa Wolf and she tries to justify this change of focus from what is being said to how it is said, in her essays “Lesen und Schreiben” and “Selbstinterview.” The question of whether the narrator and Christa T. are to be primarily understood as ‘authentic’ or ‘fictional’ characters relates

directly to the notion of considering Christa T. as a first step in Wolf's creation of an autobiographical oeuvre. In "Selbstinterview," Wolf's claims that "Ein Mensch, der mir nahe war, starb, zu früh" and "Ich stand auf einmal mir selbst gegenüber" hint at autobiography, while "Christa T. ist eine literarische Figur" in the disclaimer, emphasizes the difficulty of capturing experience in language and the necessity of understanding autobiography as a position *between* authenticity and fiction.

I then look at the relationship between the narrator and Christa T. in order to investigate the essentially autobiographical motivation in writing Christa T. The examination of the narrator's relationship with Christa T. results in the narrator recognizing, developing and confronting herself. The sense of difference between the narrator and Christa T. causes dissension. The narrator struggles to understand her bitter associations with aspects of her friend's lifestyle and her own compulsion to both support and question Christa T.: "Mir liegt daran, gerade auf sie zu zeigen." Wolf's interest in the extraordinariness of the seemingly insignificant is related to her awareness of a general absence of women in the public sphere and underlies her interest in turning to the private sphere and autobiographical writing in Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr.

The associations between death and autobiography echo the difficult positioning of autobiography between truth and fiction. Derrida claims that the autobiography is neither the 'life' nor the 'work,' but in between. He also claims insightfully that autobiography is a place of self-division, requiring an addressee and an addressee. Wolf's title, Nachdenken über Christa T., complicates the consideration of death and autobiography. Christa T.'s death means that she is associated with silence and cannot express herself, like the mother in Derrida's representation of autobiographical writing.
represents instead the natural living mother tongue. She speaks, but doesn’t write. ‘Das Nachdenken’ in Wolf’s title refers to the living addressor and narrator. This narrator inherits the conflicted role of the ‘paternal’ writer, only to ‘speak’ and enter the ‘life’ as a narrator in an autobiographical context.

Following that, I look at reactions to an autobiographical reading of Christa T. Many critics object to the suggestion of an autobiographical interpretation of Christa T., seeing this as a reduction in the scope of the understanding of the narrative. The link between lived experience and literary expression is sometimes understood as a narrowing of focus. I argue that an autobiographical interpretation of Christa T., Kindheitsmuster or Ein Tag im Jahr does not reduce these texts to biographical truth, but emphasizes Wolf’s evocation of the ‘reality’ of women’s lives while maintaining the possibility of a fictional aspect to self-expression in autobiographical narrative.

I conclude with a look at the link between the notion of a ‘female aesthetic’ and autobiographical narrative. Christa T.’s “die Schwierigkeit ‘Ich’ zu sagen” is often understood as a reflection of a female experience of fragmentation and absence in language and a difficulty with articulating the self using a male-dominated discourse. The use of a nonlinear, self-interrupting mode of discourse in Christa T. creates an aura of conversation between the narrator and the reader and attempts to overcome the polarity between writing and speech. This is instrumental in introducing Derrida’s ‘living feminine’ to writing. Christa T. tries to communicate its knowledge of the female

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14 Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler, Contemporary Women's Writing in German. Changing the Subject (Oxford, New York, 2004). In reference to autobiographical influence in texts by Ingeborg Bachmann, Elfriede Jelinek, Anne Duden, Christa Wolf, Herta Müller and Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Haines and Littler write: “The focus on women's experience in the chosen texts raises the question of autobiographical influence, which in several of them is quite strong. [...]. We hope to show that the close link between lived experience and literary expression does not in any way involve a narrowing of focus, because of the diversity of that experience and the subtleties of its expression.” p.5.
subject, yet shows awareness that these ‘memories’ can only begin to release their meaning in the future.

2.1. Early Reception of Nachdenken über Christa T.

The first limited edition of Nachdenken über Christa T. appeared in the GDR in 1968. Critics in the GDR were immediately skeptical of the perceived abandonment of political context in favour of ‘subjectivity’ and concerned about the inferences of the text for GDR society. They were disconcerted by the experimentation with perspective and narrative form. In general, they were unsure and critical of Christa Wolf’s second work, mainly perhaps because it represented a seemingly unacceptably radical departure from her first novel Der geteilte Himmel, published in 1963.

The details of the book’s slow ‘release’ are documented by Fritz J. Raddatz in his article “Mein Name sei Tonio K.” in Der Spiegel on 2nd June, 1969 as follows:


This complex beginning for the text, though not entirely unprecedented for the time and place, foreshadows the intense critical reaction and denotes the sense, on the part of GDR

officials, that the public may be unusually sensitive to the issues raised in the book.

Therese Hörnigk writes:

Ebenso vielschichtig wie Christa Wolfs Text war die Reaktion, auf die ihr Buch stieß. Es entbrannte ein Kritikerkrieg [...]. Christa Wolf hatte Probleme angesprochen, die sich im öffentlichen Bewußtsein noch nicht durchgesetzt hatten oder erst langsam als zu behandelnde erkannt worden waren.16

The reluctance on the part of GDR critics to ‘release’ Nachdenken über Christa T. fuelled West German critical interest in the narrative. Marcel Reich-Ranicki famously claimed, in his book review “Christa Wolfs Unruhige Elegie” in Die Zeit on 23rd May, 1969: “Christa T. stirbt an Leukämie, aber sie leidet an der DDR.”17 Though inflammatory and unsupported by the text, this reading was symptomatic of the time and typical of the book’s first reception and the West’s early preoccupation with Wolf as an East German writer. Symptomatic too is Reich-Ranicki’s search for precedents: “Traditionsbewußt und vielen Vorbildern verpflichtet, erweist es sich trotzdem als durchaus eigenwillig und modern zugleich.” Reich-Ranicki sees parallels with West German authors: Uwe Johnson, Heinrich Böll, Max Frisch, Günter Grass. He writes: “Dieser Roman könnte also auch heißen: ‘Mutmaßungen über Christa T.’ oder ‘Ansichten über eine Germanistin’ oder ‘Mein Name sei Christa T.’” Reich-Ranicki cannot escape a West German bias: “[...] über die Techniken und Ausdrucksmittel, die Christa Wolf offenbar von westlichen Autoren übernommen hat, verfügt sie jetzt sehr sicher und ganz natürlich.” Wolf’s work bears similarities in tone to Mutmaßungen über Jakob, Ansichten eines Clowns and Mein Name sei Gantenbein, but Reich-Ranicki’s

16 Therese Hörnigk, Christa Wolf (Göttingen, 1989) p.131.
point is to claim that *Christa T.*’s admirable *style* follows West German trends, while its theme and critical stance is reserved for the East Germany regime. His tendency towards splitting the attributes of Wolf’s text into East and West associations is very rigid, but he does reveal some respect for the text:

Es ist ein leicht angreifbares und schwer greifbares Stück Literatur, ein Roman, der Interpretationen geradezu herausfordert und sich schließlich, nicht ohne Grazie und Koketterie, jeglicher Interpretation entziehen möchte.¹⁸

Reich-Ranicki sees Christa T. and Christa Wolf dismissively, not as individuals, but as members of a generation:

Es ist die Geschichte ihrer Generation, die Christa Wolf hier erzählt, die Geschichte jener, die kurz nach 1945, damals kaum achtzehn oder zwanzig Jahre alt, begeistert und emphatisch die Morgenröte einer neuen Zeit grüßten und die sich wenig später inmitten des grauen und trüben Alltags von Leipzig oder Ostberlin sahen. Sie glaubten, den Sturm der Revolution entfesselt zu haben, doch was kam, war nur der Mief der DDR.¹⁹

Though devoid of sympathy for the *search* for an alternative to German fascism after 1945, and portraying East Germany in clichéd terms, Reich-Ranicki does foresee the deep-seated dissatisfaction of many East German citizens that became visible twenty years later, in November 1989. Judging by the response of critics in the GDR and reactions similar to Reich-Ranicki’s in the West, it is obvious that the literary debate following *Christa T.*, and the debate surrounding *Was Bleibt* in 1989 centred mainly on political issues and not on the literary significance of Christa Wolf’s writing. Interesting in early reviews of *Christa T.* is the wealth and breadth of classical and autobiographical texts mentioned as parallels for Wolf’s text: Reich-Raniciki mentions

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¹⁸ Ibid, p.104.
¹⁹ Ibid.
Johnson, Böll, Frisch and Grass. Therese Hörmigk mentions Ingeborg Bachmann’s Das dreißigste Jahr, Brecht’s Ballade von der Marie A. Other critics mention Thomas Mann’s Tonio Kröger, Schiller’s Kabale und Liebe, Goethe’s poem Edel sei der Mensch and Die Leiden des jungen Werthers. Fritz Raddatz mentions Kleist’s letter to his sister on the 5th of February, 1801. Despite its difficult publication and hostile first reception, Christa T. was quickly ranked among influential texts.

Christa Wolf openly objected to Reich-Ranicki’s reading of Christa T.’s demise as a result of the ills of the East German State in 1969, claiming Christa T. had lived a full life. Despite the many interpretations of Christa T.’s inopportune death as attributable to the GDR system, in the text itself, Christa T. appears to be, at first, committed to the socialist state. Increasingly, she is unable to live in it. She is an outsider and non-conformist in the socialist state, but Wolf claims her search for self-knowledge is consistent with Marx’s view that all aspects of personality should be developed in a Marxist society. The text can be read as a critique of the GDR’s subordination of humanistic goals to economic and political exigencies, a tendency criticized by Wolf in “Notwendiges Streitgespräch,” but despite this discernible social criticism, even early reviewers saw the revolutionary potential of Christa T., not in its social critique, but in its form, a new form of writing for Wolf that began to take shape in the 1960s and is evidenced in Wolf’s criticism of literary realism from the mid-sixties.

2.2. A New Literary Form

In *Christa T.*, Wolf explodes the expectations of the socialist realist narrative aesthetic, with its emphasis on the objective reflection of reality, *Volkstümlichkeit*, and the positive hero and creates a self-reflective, open-ended form, exuding ambiguity and contradiction, prefiguring autobiographical writing forms of the 1970s. The self-reflexivity, the mixing of thematic concerns and the treatment of writing as a theme, are the features of *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster* that most closely echo the modernist literary tradition, a style of writing strongly criticized by commentators in the GDR at the time. Anna Kuhn in *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision* writes: “In *Christa T.*, Christa Wolf abandons the paradigmatic closed structures prescribed by Socialist Realism and breaks through to her own unique style [...]. Wolf was never comfortable with the normative strictures imposed by Socialist Realism.”

Essays, letters and writings from the mid-sixties reveal Wolf questioning the prevailing notions of literary realism. In her comments in “Notwendiges Streitgespräch” Wolf reaffirmed her commitment to socialism and the GDR, yet addressed aspects of her society that disturb her: “Engstirnigkeit [...] falsche Anforderungen, die an Literatur gestellt werden [...] falsches Lob, falschen Tadel [...] mangelnde Weltoffenheit, mangelnde Veröffentlichung von Büchern.” This criticism of narrowmindedness

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21 Objective reality is not to be confused with realism or naturalism according to Gail Finney in *Christa Wolf* (New York, 1999), but is to transmit the “truthful representation and the ideological transformation of individuals.” It is to “portray reality in its revolutionary development towards communism.” p.12. *Volkstümlichkeit* was understood to convey an optimistic and transformed folklore with a broad appeal. The positive hero was supposed to strive actively for the establishment of the socialist society, “oblivious to personal sacrifice in his concern for the common good” and “in harmony with himself and with society.” p.12.

22 Anna Kuhn, *Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision*, op. cit., p.52.

and false expectations of literature lead her to abandon socialist realism\textsuperscript{24} and focus on a freer, more open style of writing. While stressing the positive aspects of GDR society, she asks: "Wofür arbeiten wir? Wofür machen wir überhaupt diesen Sozialismus? Denn es kann passieren, daß über den Mitteln – Politik, Ökonomie – das Ziel vergessen wird: der Mensch."\textsuperscript{25} This focus on the person, as the goal of socialism, and on subjectivity in writing, leads Wolf to the story of Christa T., and more personal forms of writing.

In 1968, in her essay "Lesen und Schreiben," often construed as an element of Wolf’s response to the criticism of the novel narrative form in \textit{Christa T.}, Wolf rejects the traditional concept of plot as antiquated and calls for a shift of emphasis away from a plot-oriented, closed form of narrative, as reflecting a mechanistic attitude towards the world, in favour of an open-ended form, as the expression of a dialectical stance. She calls for an ‘epic prose,’ like Brecht’s epic theatre that would use models to encourage people to think dialectically. Epic prose would deflect attention from \textit{what} is being said to \textit{how} it is said. Similarly, Wolf warns readers of Ingeborg Bachmann’s texts not to expect plot-oriented stories with detailed descriptions of events or characters in a traditional sense; instead they will hear a voice: "Eine Stimme wird man hören: kühn und klagend. Eine Stimme, wahrheitgemäß, das heißt: nach eigener Erfahrung sich äußernd, über Gewisses und Ungewisses. Und wahrheitsgemäß schweigend, wenn die Stimme

\textsuperscript{24} Wolf’s initial immersion in socialist realism was predicated on the idealism of the positive hero (visible in \textit{Der geteilte Himmel}). Interestingly, Gail Finney in \textit{Christa Wolf} (op. cit.) quotes George Buehler as observing that “if one were to strip all of the political ramifications from socialist realist literature, the remaining characteristics of the positive hero in the service of mankind are strikingly reminiscent of the ideals espoused by Lessing, Schiller and Goethe.” p.13. Wolf’s admiration of Goethe’s writing is well-documented, facilitating her initial espousal of the socialist humanism at the centre of socialist realism and its link to romanticism as a progressive, revolutionary force, mobilizing dreams and visions of the future.  

\textsuperscript{25} Christa Wolf, “Notwendiges Streitgespräch” op. cit., p.406.
This significance of voice is crucial to the tone of Christa T. The focus on "eigene Erfahrung" is also essential for Wolf's understanding of her mission in Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster or Ein Tag im Jahr. It is decisive in her appreciation of Bachmann's writing. The Bachmann essay "Die zumutbare Wahrheit" appeared in 1966 and marks Wolf's definitive break with the reflection theory of realism and the initiation of interest in a voice, rather than a plot. This voice and process-oriented writing, and focus on the person, visible in Christa T., represents an early move towards recognition of the intricacies of autobiographical self-expression.

2.3. 'Authentic' or 'Fictional' Figures?

The notion of a voice in Christa T. is represented from the perspective of the imprecisely drawn narrator, whose presence in Christa T., marks a significant break with the circular narrative structure of Wolf's preceding work, Der geteilte Himmel. In Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster, authorial subjectivity, which Wolf later calls 'subjektive Authentizität', seems to take the form of the author's presence, as narrator, in the literary text. This breaks significantly with traditional modes of literary interpretation that insist on the strict separation of author and narrator. Wolf must have been aware that this approach would encourage critics to conflate the author with the narrator. In uninformed interpretation, this leads to flat conclusions such as Reich-Ranicki's reading of Wolf 'representation' of her own generation in Christa T. Wolf's wary style, warnings in the

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text and nuanced statements should stave off the conclusion that the narrator and the author are ‘identical.’ Wolf clearly states of *Kindheitsmuster* in 1988 in relation to her childhood, for example, that the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* cannot be construed as simply identical to the author: “Wenn ich *Kindheitsmuster* heute noch einmal schreiben wollte, sollte oder müßte [...] würde es ein anderes Buch werden.” In *Christa T.*, Wolf experiments with autobiographical and essayist forms that imply identification, yet stops short of identifying the narrator with the author. In “Selbstinterview” Wolf describes the process of writing *Christa T.* thus:


The “ich” in this artificial interview is understood as the ‘author,’ writing and searching for a strategy to cope with the death of a friend. The figures of “ich” and “ein Mensch, der mir nahe war” are assumed to be ‘real,’ leaving behind the authentic material of the “Tagebücher, Briefe, Skizzen.” Wolf speaks of two ‘authentic’ figures:


 Frage: Immerhin haben Sie nun zugegeben, daß zwei authentische Figuren auftreten: Christa T. und ein Ich.

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Here Wolf equivocates: the ‘authentic’ figures may have been invented. One of the cruxes of autobiographical definition, the distinction between ‘real’ and fictional figures, is under review here. Lejeune’s influential definition of autobiography calls for “a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence,” but Lejeune’s definition, in turn, depends on the understanding of a ‘real’ person and on the sometimes conflicting statements made by an author about an ‘autobiographical’ text. Here Wolf seems to claim that the narrator and Christa T. are both authentic and fictional, in uncertain language (“Habe ich das zugegeben?”), which is a way of emphasizing that no two figures in a written text can correlate exactly with ‘authentic’ figures, making Lejeune’s definition appear obsolete. The narrator in *Christa T.* makes clear that she does not know Christa T. to any absolute degree and was obliged to invent scenes in Christa T.’s life to re-create her story. Similarly the narrator provides an account of a ‘subjective’ experience that seems autobiographical, but the narrator is not ‘identical’ with the author. Wolf’s play with claims of authenticity and fictionality serves to blur the 

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29 Ibid, p.32.

30 Interestingly, Ursula Ackrill in *Metafiktion und Ästhetik in Christa Wolfs „Nachdenken über Christa T.“, „Kindheitsmuster“ und „Sommerstück“* (Würzburg, 2004), claims that the occasional fictional narration in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* holds positive associations, whereas the fictional representation in *Kindheitsmuster* is much more complicated: “Die Erzählerin in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* arbeitet mit Fiktionalität, um sich in der Gegenwart der verstorbenen Freundin einzufühlen, sie sich und dem Leser zugänglich zu machen. Das Fiktionalbewusstsein hat positive Bedeutung [...]. In [...] (Kindheitsmuster) sieht sich der Leser mit einer Erzählinstanz konfrontiert, die ihm Fiktionalität und alle damit verbundenen Erfahrungen, wie interesseloses Wohlgefallen [...] kurzerhand verbietet. [...] (die Erzählerin) kommt auch häufig darauf zu sprechen, dass sie Fiktionalität in Fall dieser Erzählung unpassend findet. Am deutlichsten wehrt sie sich dagegen, als sie über ein Telefongespräch berichtet, aus dem Nellys Vater erfährt, wie seine Einheit in seiner Abwesenheit fünf polnische Geiseln exekutiert hat. Die Erzählerin unterbricht den Lauf der Erzählung mit der Begründung: “Von hier ab verschlägt es die Sprache. Es wird nicht erinnert und soll nicht erinnert werden, in welchen Worten, auf Grund welcher Fragen Bruno Jordan seiner Frau den Inhalt des Gesprächs mit Leo Siegmann mitteilte.” (K, 229)” p.63. The scope for fiction in *Kindheitsmuster* is more intricate than in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* as Wolf appears to diversify her attitude to autobiographical writing forms in the writing of *Kindheitsmuster*. 

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distinction between these supposed poles and emphasizes the fact that the ‘authentic’ is inevitably ‘fictionalized’ to some extent in a narrative text.

Wolf hints at the incertitude of knowing a person or an identity also in many comments on the deceptive aspects of memory, “trügerische Erinnerung”: “Wie erinnert man sich eigentlich, woran erinnert man sich, warum an manches ja, an manches nicht.”

Because of Wolf’s search for almost mathematically precise ‘truths,’ memories, or material about Christa T., Christa T. like Kindheitsmuster, can be read as an autobiographical text, not in terms of Lejeune’s definition of autobiography, establishing identity with the author’s name, but as a complex procedure of uncovering the past and a process of self-discovery based on a personal narrator, closely linked to the author.

In the disclaimer preceding Christa T., Wolf writes:


Interestingly, she does not seem to question the ‘authenticity’ of the narrator in this disclaimer, but is clearly playing with biographical and fictional writing forms. A blurring of autobiographical and biographical forms is not without precedent for biography. Autobiographical writing is often intertwined with biography. Laura Marcus in Auto/Biographical Discourses, discusses the ‘new biography’ of early 20th century Britain as a partially autobiographical project. Here the biographer had an “active, transferential relationship to the biographical subject, in part narrating his/her own story,

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real or fantasized."\textsuperscript{32} The biographer needed to be aware of the complexity of the self and the difficulty of knowing the self. Marcus quotes Virginia Woolf in her essay "The New Biography":

Consider one’s own life; pass under review a few years one has actually lived. Conceive how Lord Morley would have expounded them; how Sir Sidney Lee would have documented them; how strangely all that has been most real in them would have slipped through their fingers.\textsuperscript{33}

This understanding of perspective is relevant to \textit{Christa T}. Wolf is conscious of the ‘subjectivity’ of her undertaking in writing \textit{Christa T} and that what was ‘real’ in Christa T.’s life might have ‘slipped through her fingers,’ making her more aware of the ‘reality’ of the autobiographical basis of \textit{Christa T}. ("Ich stand auf einmal mir selbst gegenüber").

Virginia Woolf also mentions Harold Nicolson’s \textit{Some People}, where she believes he achieves self-portraiture under the guise of biography. In \textit{Christa T}, Wolf might have been accused of self-portraiture in the guise of biography, but for her honesty about the complexity of the process that led her to face Christa T. Her recognition that \textit{she} needs Christa T. is one of the key discoveries of the narrative. This early recognition ("Sie braucht uns nicht […] wir brauchen sie" \textsuperscript{34}) leads Wolf to reject the notion that \textit{Christa T} is a biography early in the text. If \textit{Christa T} is not a biography, then the discussion reverts to Wolf’s reference to authentic and ‘literary’ figures in the disclaimer to \textit{Christa T}, and the distinction between fictional and autobiographical narration.

\textsuperscript{32} Laura Marcus, \textit{Auto/biographical Discourses. Theory, Criticism, Practice} (Manchester, 1994) p.90.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Christa Wolf, \textit{Nachdenken über Christa T}. (München, 1999) p.11.
The disclaimers preceding *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster* do not help to distinguish whether these texts can be considered primarily autobiographical or fictional. Many autobiographical works written in the 1970s have 'ironic' disclaimers, which have generally been read as limited liability statements and are not considered relevant. But the disclaimers do draw attention to the dimension in which all writing and self-representation is approximate, emphasizing the limitations of autobiographical writing. Wolf's disclaimers might also be read as forms of inverse autobiographical pacts, disclaiming 'truth' in a facile fashion, uncharacteristic for Wolf, encouraging the interpretation of the text as the 'fiction' that is truer than autobiography.

### 2.4. The Autobiographical Turning Point

The Early Influence of Christa T. and her Relationship with the Narrator

*Christa T.* may be a tentative autobiographical text, intentionally ambiguous about the relationship between the narrator and the author, but the root of the autobiographical impulse lies in Wolf's attempt at revealing her specific relationship with Christa Tabbert, also mentioned in *Kindheitsmuster* as a classmate and friend. In *Christa T.*, Wolf focuses on the nature of their relationship and this relationship, in its specificity and intensity, is essentially understood as an autobiographical stimulus.

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35 The disclaimers also seem to betray a desire to cling to 'fictional' interpretation, perhaps as a reaction to the insistent realism of the prescriptions of socialist realism. Herta Müller also speaks of a need for fiction in an interview with Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler in *Herta Müller* (Cardiff, 1998): "Ich bin ja auch von diesem Sozialistischen Realismus ein gebranntes Kind. Darum ist für mich wahrscheinlich auch das Bedürfnis nach Fiktionalem so groß, und nach Literarisierstem und nach dem Raum, der diese Realität über sich hinaufwirbelt, wo die Dinge dann schweben und wo ästhetisch oder poetisch die Spannung entsteht." p.18.
In the first line of Section I the narrator attempts to capture something specific about Christa T. and portrays herself feigning disinterest in an adolescent guise. This is a key, first experience for the narrator, with consequential significance. The narrator is struck by Christa T.'s behaviour:

Es war der Tag, an dem ich sie Trompete blasen sah. Da mag sie schon monatelang in unserer Klasse gewesen sein [...] sie saß in ihrer Bank und sah [...] unsere Lehrerin an, uneifrig, eiferlos [...] dieser Blick [...] dieses Benehmen [...] Was sollte man davon halten? Nichts. Nichts und gar nichts hielt ich davon, sondern ich sah gelangweilt aus dem Fenster [...]. Die Wahrheit war: Sie brauchte uns nicht.36

There follows an impressionistic description of the grey November day and the wartime setting. Therese Hörnigk writes: "Mit wenigen Sätzen ist die Atmosphäre der letzten Kriegsjahre eingefangen: Fahnenappelle, Fliegeralarm, Kriegerwitwen sind die Erkennungsworte." 37 Groups of pupils walk through the town and toward the cinema. Christa T. accompanies them:

Da fing sie zu blasen an oder rufen, es gibt das richtige Wort dafür nicht [...] hielt sich plötzlich eine zusammengedrehte Zeitung vor den Mund und stieß ihren Ruf aus: Hooohaahooo [...]. Da sah ich’s nun. Grinste dazu wie alle, wußte aber, daß ich nicht grinsen sollte. Denn anders als alle erlebte ich diese Szene nicht zum erstenmal [...]. Ich hatte es einfach gewußt [...] (der) Ruf, der das alles wegwischte und für einen Sekundenbruchteil den Himmel anhob.38

Towards the end of the narrative, in 1962, this moment is referred to as a key moment in the understanding between the narrator and Christa T. The narrator is, at first, surprised to discover that Christa T. remembers the incident. Early one morning, when the narrator is staying with Christa T., they discuss the cry ("es gibt das richtige Wort dafür nicht"):  

37 Therese Hörnigk, Christa Wolf, op. cit., p.118.
38 Christa Wolf, Nachdenken über Christa T., op. cit., p.16. Page numbers hereafter refer to this edition as N.
Ich habe dich mal Trompete blasen sehen, vor achtzehn Jahren. Merkwürdig, sie schien Bescheid zu wissen. Ihr Geheimnis, auf das ich aus war, seit wir uns kannten, war kein Geheimnis mehr. Was sie im Innersten wollte, wovon sie träumte und was zu tun sie seit langem begonnen hatte, lag offen vor mir [...]. Jetzt scheint mir, wir hätten es immer gewußt. Sie hatte es ja nicht besonders ängstlich gehütet [...]. Ihr langes Zögern, ihre Versuche in verschiedenen Lebensformen, ihr Dilettieren auf manchem Gebiet deuten in dieselbe Richtung, wenn man nur Augen hatte zu sehen. (N 187)

The secret, the need for an outlet, the Hooohaahoo cry and Christa T.’s hesitation are all related to the difficulty of self-expression for an individual, a woman and a generation, and the explication of the difficulty of saying ‘I’ that follows is related to the outcry:

In ihren nachgelassenen Manuskripten lese ich die Stücke in der dritten Person: SIE, mit der sie sich zusammentat, die sie sich hüttete, beim Namen zu nennen, denn welchen Namen hätte sie IHR geben sollen? SIE, die weiß, daß sie immer wieder neu zu sein, neu zu sehen hat [...]. Ich begreife das Geheimnis der dritten Person, die dabei ist, ohne greifbar zu sein, und die, wenn die Umstände ihr günstig sind, mehr Wirklichkeit auf sich ziehen kann als die erste: ich. Über die Schwierigkeit, ich zu sagen. (N 187)

These passages reflect the difficulty of autobiographical expression inextricably linked to the vital need for self-expression, difficult for many writers, more complicated for women writers, due to an underdeveloped sense of ‘tradition’ and sense of self. The secret of the third person which can be more ‘real’ than ‘I’ relates to the difficulty of autobiographical truth and the female lack of a sense of reality in saying ‘I.’ The significance of the difficulty of saying ‘I’ and its interpretation in relation to a future for women’s writing will be discussed later.

The narrator also emphasizes another insight, initially gained through Christa T.’s critical distance:

Christa T. sah sich nach unserer Lehrerin um [...]. Sie ist berechnend, sagte sie im Ton einer Feststellung. – Das wollte ich am liebsten nicht gehört haben, aber ich fühlte, sie sah die Dinge, wie sie waren [...] (sie) setzte sich auf den Rand des Brunnnens (am
Marktplatz) […] hielt ihre Hand in das Wasser und sah sich mit ihrem gründlichen Blick um. Und ich mußte auf einmal denken, daß dieses Wasser da vielleicht doch nicht das Wasser des Lebens war und die Marienkirche nicht das erhabenste Bauwerk und unsere Stadt nicht die einzige Stadt der Welt. (N 20)

The invaluable lesson for the writer, of seeing familiar sights with new eyes, is attributed to Christa T.’s “gründliche(m) Blick.” Wolf often mentions ‘seeing’ as preceding writing or as having a similar goal; it is a crucial ability. Kassandra is valued as being a seer. The ability to see and represent what is seen, is something the narrator senses in Christa T., though Christa T. does not write in a coherent, consistent manner. The narrator believes Christa T. feared disappearing without a trace, so the narrator asked her to write many times:

Warum schreibst du nicht, Krischan? Ja, ja sagte sie, bestritt nicht, gab nicht zu. Wartete. Wüßte lange nicht wozu, da bin ich sicher. Sie muß frühzeitig Kenntnis bekommen haben von unserer Fähigkeit, die Dinge so zu sagen, wie sie sind. Ich frage mich sogar, ob man zu früh davon erfahren und für immer entmündigt werden, ob man zu früh klarsichtig, zu früh der Selbsttäuschung beraubt sein kann. So daß man verzichtet und die Dinge ihrem Lauf überläßt. Dann haben sie keinen Ausweg: nicht den der Ungenauigkeit, nicht den der Lüge […]. Dann machen sie das Beste aus sich, oder das Schlimmste. Oder das Mittelmäßige, was oft das Schlimmste ist. Und was man, wenn man sich davon bedroht fühlt, allerdings nicht mehr mit Schweigen übergehen kann. (N 42)

“Unsere Fähigkeit, die Dinge so zu sagen, wie sie sind” is ambiguous. This may be a writer’s ability, Christa T.’s and the narrator’s ability or women’s ability, linked to the emphasis here on Christa T.’s hesitation associated with her preoccupation with caring for her family. The narrator seems to be addressing the lack of writing by women in general (“Schweigen”): they wait too long, they see too early, they give up and allow things to take their course, they are wary of deception, and they settle for mediocrity. Here Wolf addresses many significant issues of women’s writing: its absence, its frequent mediocrity, the passivity of waiting for and giving up on writing. She recognizes
women's fears. Wolf believes that women see clearly and she credits Christa T. with recognizing problems in the GDR very early: "Christa T., sehr früh, wenn man es heute bedenkt, fing an, sich zu fragen, was das denn heißt: Veränderung." (N 65) Christa T. has many virtues that are recognized and appreciated, yet the narrator rallies against her silence. She is sure that silence is not the answer to doubt about writing and should not represent Christa T.'s legacy.

Christa T. sees her own faults, but is unable to eradicate them. In her letter to her sister, she writes: "Ich erkenne alles, was falsch an mir ist, aber es bleibt doch mein Ich, ich reiß es doch nicht aus mir heraus! [...] Hätte ich ein Kind, schrieb sie noch." (N 82) Christa T.'s closeness to children, her 'shyness' in her relationship with Justus and her life as "Tierarztfrau im Mecklenburgischen" seem to surprise the narrator. She is discontented or disoriented at aspects of the unexpected 'mediocrity' of Christa T.'s life. She searches for explanations:

Natürlich hat sie auch Schutz gesucht [...]. Einen Faden in die Hand nehmen, der in jedem Fall, unter allen Umständen weiterläuft [...]. Kinder zur Welt bringen, alle Mühen auf sich bringen, denen sie ihr Leben verdanken. Tausend Mahlzeiten zubereiten [...]. Die Haare so tragen, daß sie dem Mann gefallen, lächeln, wenn er es braucht, zur Liebe bereit sein.
Sie nimmt den Vorteil wahr, eine Frau zu sein. (N 136)

This advantage of being a woman is a difficult, perhaps ironic notion, mentioned here without much commentary, yet with bitterness. The narrator describes Christa T., around New Year 1962, as beautiful, strange and happy. Christa T.'s 'happiness' is mentioned without much explanation. It seems the narrator is more surprised than satisfied with Christa T.'s new life. A previous question is partially answered in this new life. The
narrator claims she wanted to ask Christa T. about her future plans, as a student, but anticipated laughter and a lack of an answer if the question had been posed:


Now the narrator claims the question might have been answered, though still unsatisfactorily:

Auf die Frage: Was willst du werden? Hätte sie jetzt zu antworten. Ich will, hätte sie zu sagen, jeden Tag früh aufstehen, um zuerst das Kind zu versorgen und dann für uns beide, Justus und mich, das Frühstück zu machen; ich will, während ich hin und her gehe, hören, was er mir aufträgt [...]. (N 152)

The contrast in lifestyle between Leipzig and Mecklenburg is a kind of riddle for the narrator. The Mecklenburg lifestyle deviates strongly from Christa T.’s lifestyle and mindset at the time of the original question. Both lifestyles incorporate something incomprehensible for the narrator. She searches for meaning and finds the differences between herself and Christa T. and the complicated influence of a close relationship to Justus and her children, as a justification for Christa T.’s lifestyle. The description of Christa T.’s life in Mecklenburg retains frustrated undertones. Christa T. is also described, at times, from a frustrated perspective, in physical terms, in a female kind of discomfort (disfunction):

[...] ein Leiden ist wieder aktiv geworden, der Arzt sagt, das bringe das Kind mit sich [...]. Als ich sie wiedersah, lag sie schon in ihrem Bett in der Charité, halb schuldbewußt, halb verärgert und im Begriff ein Kind zu bekommen. (N 142)
She is also described in physical terms, suffering, tired and pregnant, on the last occasion the narrator saw her:

[…] von der Küche her kam Christa T., schwerfällig und stark geworden […]. Ich weiß nicht, ob sie meinem Gesicht etwas ansehen konnte. Als wir einen Augenblick allein waren, sagte sie, wie um mir zuvorzukommen: Ich bin älter geworden […] (ich) dachte bei mir, “älter” sei nicht das Wort […]. Ihr Gesicht war gedunsen, die Haut war rauh und schuppig geworden, und die Adern an Armen und Beinen traten stark hervor. (N 177)

Her physical discomfort seems to be associated mainly with pregnancy (and a family condition, even symptoms of aplastic anaemia (“Panmyelopathie”)), and is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir’s evocation of the negative associations sometimes related to the female condition in *The Second Sex,* a stark contrast to the aloof Christa T. as a student. Christa T. vacillates in the text between her earlier aloofness and later ‘ordinariness’ or is both at once to varying degrees. The narrator struggles hard with this evocation of Christa T. as ordinary and extraordinary. She seems to be wrestling with herself in accepting the common with the uncommon. She emphasizes Christa T.’s choice in living this life:

Christa T. konnte nicht sagen, daß sie ihre Rolle nicht selbst gewählt hätte, sie sagte es auch nicht. Im Gegenteil, sie benannte sich, ironisch natürlich, in einem ihrer seltenen Briefe. Tierarztfrau in mecklenburgischer Kleinstadt, schrieb sie […]. (N 151)

The narrator also stresses her own choice in writing about Christa T.:

Wer den Kopf jetzt wegwendet, wer die Achseln zuckt, wer von ihr, Christa T., weg und auf größere, nützlichere Lebensläufe zeigt, hat nichts verstanden. Mir liegt daran, gerade auf sie zu zeigen. Auf den Reichtum, den sie erschloß, auf die Größe, die ihr erreichbar, auf die Nützlichkeit, die ihr zugänglich war. (N 150)

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The narrator is aware of Christa T.’s strengths, but does not shy away from doubts about a lack in Christa T.’s lifestyle: she lives in a small town, her time is devoted to family, she does not write or express herself, privately or publicly. This is a lack that seems familiar to the narrator. It mirrors the history of many women writers. Linda Anderson quotes Hester Thrale’s description of the difficulty of spending time writing and time with her children: “[...] if one is to listen all Even and write all Morning what one has heard, where will be the time for tutoring, or caressing, or what is still more useful, for having one’s Children about one.” This seems to be the point at which Wolf is most obviously facing her own reflection, as she claimed in “Selbstinterview.” She is palpably not ‘portraying’ Christa T., she is writing an interpretation of her. She reveals her own emotion in her interpretation of her friend and this ‘personal’ turn in the narrative indicates that the text is not centred on Christa T., but on the narrator. This recognition lends itself to an autobiographical reading of the text.

The narrator learns from the investigation of her relationship with Christa T., from the differences between them. The narrator calls Christa T. unexemplary, yet her unexemplary life triggers the recognition with the narrator that this “Lebensmöglichkeit” should not end with Christa T.’s death. Ortrud Gutjahr in “Erinnerte Zukunft” claims:

Sie, die Erinnemnde, braucht, was die Verstorbene ihr durch die Erinnerung zu sagen hat für ihr eigenes Leben. Das, was die Ich-Erzahlerin fasziniert und was sie für das Wichtigste hält, ist, daß Christa T. mit ihrem Wünschen über ihre Lebensmöglichkeiten hinausgegangen ist [...] Die Figur Christa T. erscheint im Erinnerungsprozeß dieser Ich-Erzählerin nicht nur als Mensch, der eine Vision von sich gehabt hat, sondern sie wird selbst zur Vision, zu der es gerade gehört, in einem alltäglichen Leben die Besonderheit und das Anderssein, das unbedingte Streben nach Selbstverwirklichung zu zeigen. Schon früh läßt die Erinnerung der Ich-Erzählerin Christa T. dieses Anderssein spüren. “Der Schmerz kann noch größer werden, ICH, denkt das Kind, ICH bin anders.”

41 Ortrud Gutjahr, “Erinnerte Zukunft” in Erinnerte Zukunft. 11 Studien zum Werk Christa Wolfs (Hrsg.) Wolfram Mauser (Würzburg, 1985) p.58.
The narrator values Christa T.'s difference, her vision and search for self-fulfilment, though frustrated by unfinished manuscripts, a rural lifestyle and pregnancy and illness. The narrator learns from the space between valuing Christa T.'s life and being frustrated by it. Christa T.'s life and death question women's lifestyles, and their meaning, in a manner that is still significant for women. Women's changing and disparate lifestyles are often relevant to autobiography because most autobiographies include a reference to early childhood and the mother, incorporating the story of women's lifestyles through time into the story of autobiography. In Christa T., the narrator is concerned with the story of women's lifestyles and oscillates between appreciating Christa T.'s difference and asking what else there might have been. Hope lies in the belief that the future will bring more:

Was wir uns später zu sagen haben werden, können wir nur ahnen, auch Worte haben ihre Zeit und lassen sich nicht aus der Zukunft hervorziehen nach Bedarf. Zu wissen, daß sie einmal dasein werden, ist viel. (N 204)

The argument that the ordinary is extraordinary in Christa T. has a parallel in Wolf’s claim of wanting to tell a wartime story without writing about combat or resistance in Kindheitsmuster. Wolf is also interested in the ‘ordinary everyday’ in women’s journals and diaries, such as Karoline von Günderrode’s and Elisabeth Langgässer’s, her own Ein Tag im Jahr, and the everyday, autobiographical emphasis, initiated in Christa T., is carried through Kindheitsmuster, Was bleibt, Störfall, Leibhaftigkeit to her most recent publications. Wolf finds the ordinary and the everyday most successfully in a ‘subjective authentic’ approach. This ‘subjective authentic’ approach has a lot in common with writing later to be called ‘autobiographical.’ Her discussion on subjective authenticity in
her interview with Hans Kaufmann seems compatible with more recent discussions of autobiographical writing:


Wolf’s claim that ‘everything is connected’ (“Plötzlich hängt alles mit allem zusammen”) reflects the contemporary interest in the link between an individual’s private and public lives, previously held to be separable. The interest in the sometimes ordinariness of extraordinary lives and minds is also steadily increasing and pushes the borderline between the public and the private life of an individual into the literary arena. Many theorists are struck by the attempt to exclude the personal lives and mindsets of writers from the literary corpus. Derrida writes:

We no longer consider the biography of a “philosopher” as a corpus of empirical accidents that leaves both a name and a signature outside a system which would itself be offered up to an immanent philosophical reading [...]. This academic notion utterly

ignores the demands of a text which it tries to control with the most traditional determinations of what constitutes the limits of the written, or even of "publication."\(^{44}\)

Wolf's claim "es wird viel schwerer "ich" zu sagen, und doch zugleich oft unerläßlich," is prophetic of the compulsive and prolific nature of autobiographical writing following the 1970s. Her distinction between truthfulness and authenticity in 'subjective authenticity' is important. She emphasizes that the attempt to be 'truthful' always emanates from a particular perspective and that the withdrawal from difficult, topical themes limits literature. Wolf's discussion of 'subjective authenticity' with its emphasis on the changes that both the material and the author endure in the process of writing, seems also to foreshadow the direction of recent autobiographical and personal writing.

2.5. The Association between Death and Autobiography

The spectre of death has long been associated with autobiography in terms of autobiography's early affiliation with a writing reflecting on life, while approaching death. Autobiographies were, until more recently, often undertaken in the form of a legacy ('epitaph') to be left behind, bequeathed by older to younger generations. The autobiography was seen as the closing of a chapter, the end of an era, as Christa T. is inextricably linked to death as the (premature) end of a life and the close of a relationship for the narrator. The text opens with a reference to Christa T. in her grave, then reverts to her early life. The text is then essentially written in awareness of a sense of lack of time.

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Linda Anderson in *Autobiography* discusses the link between death and autobiography in terms of Derrida’s reformulation of the problem of the autobiographical as the troubling border space between the ‘life’ and the ‘work.’ Derrida redefines autobiography as ‘thanatography’ (thanatos Gk. – death), a writing not of a living but a dead author. In “Otobiographies” in *The Ear of the Other*, Derrida claims that autobiography is the writing of a dead author because the proper name takes on overtones of death since the name will outlive its bearer:

The name of Nietzsche is perhaps today, for us in the West, the name of someone who [...] was alone in treating both philosophy and life [...] with his name and in his name [...] . To put one’s name on the line [...] . Not so as to guarantee him a return, a profit [...] he is dead [...] . Only the name can inherit, and this is why the name, to be distinguished from the bearer, is always and a priori a dead man’s name, a name of death.  

Autobiography increases its involvement with death by taking the name of the author into the title of the work. In attempting to make use of the name as a guarantee of self-presence, autobiography is overrun by the death it releases through writing.

Derrida uses a discussion of a scene in Nietzsche’s text, *Ecce Homo*, written in 1899, as an example of the significance of the name. He claims Nietzsche “[...] puts his body and his name out front even though he advances behind masks or pseudonyms without proper

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46 Jacques Derrida, *The Ear Of The Other*, op. cit., p.6.
names.” Derrida refers to the Preface to *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche claims his identity has nothing to do with what his contemporaries know by his name: “It has passed to him through the unheard-of contract he has drawn up with himself. He has taken out a loan with himself and has *implicated us in this transaction through what, on the force of a signature, remains of his text.* “Auf meinen eigenen Kredit.” The life that he lives and tells to himself is his by way of a contract:

[... the life that he lives and tells to himself (“autobiography,” they call it) cannot be *his* life in the first place except as the effect of a contract, a credit account which has been opened and encrypted [...]. This life will be verified only at the moment the bearer of the name [...] will have died. [...]. Between the Preface signed F.N., which comes after the title, and the first chapter, there is a single page, [...] an *hors d’oeuvre*. [...]. “today” “my birthday” [...]: “It was not for nothing that I buried my forty-fourth year today: I had the right to bury it [...]. How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life? – and so I tell my life to myself.”

The difficulty for Derrida with this autobiographical exergue is the question of the borderline between the beginning of the text, the life and the signature. The place from which the life is to be recited is “[...] neither in the work (it is an exergue) nor in the life of the author. At least it is not there in a simple fashion, but neither is it simply exterior to them.”

Christa Wolf’s *Christa T.* can be seen as a borderline text similar to the situation that Derrida outlines. The text can be read as neither in the author’s work nor in the life. Wolf blurs the border between the fictional quality of Christa T. and the narrator, and the possible ‘authenticity’ of the two figures. She draws attention to the borderline.

Derrida’s discussion of the proper name in an (autobiographical) contract is also relevant.

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to Wolf's disclaimers in *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster,* signed C. W., fuelling the sense that the name carries significance aside from the work or the life.

Wolf’s use of Christa T.'s name in the title of the work complicates the text’s involvement with death and autobiography. The text opens with a reference to Christa T. lying in a village cemetery, so the reader associates her primarily with death, yet her proper name, a name of death, is denied to the reader, truncated to T. Wolf seems not to provide a proper name in order to thwart identification, but also to break the link with the proper name, which situates a subject. Wolf has claimed that Christa T. should not be associated with death, but with life. The title *Nachdenken über Christa T.* subverts the identification with the proper name, with the sign of death.

Derrida also emphasizes that the ‘I’ of autobiography is always a place of self-division, requiring an addressor and an addressee, a name which, after it is spoken, also requires to be heard. Derrida quotes Nietzsche: “I am, to express it in the form of a riddle [Rätselform], already dead as my father [als mein Vater bereits gestorben], while as my mother, I am still living and becoming old [als meine Mutter lebe ich noch und werde alt].”51 This gendered division within the subject makes the father, or the name of the father, always the sign of death, while the mother lives on as the ‘living feminine.’ For Derrida, the mother and father signify the dual inheritances of language: the formal, scientific, dead paternal language and the ‘natural, living mother tongue.’ Language must pass through the body by way of the mouth and the ear so that what is dead is regenerated into the ‘living feminine.’ Linda Anderson writes that the mother: “[...] is the body through which language must pass to make itself heard [...] the price of her positioning

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51 Ibid, p.15.
as the vital principle of language is that she herself does not live or speak. She is fundamental, but she is also anonymous.}\textsuperscript{52}

Derrida’s ‘I’ as a place of self-division is significant for an interpretation of \textit{Christa T.}

Some of the difficulty of saying ‘I’ lies in the requirement to be heard, a requirement that many women of Wolf’s generation tried to negotiate in 1968. The gendered division of the subject into the writer and the speaker, the father and the mother, is also relevant to Wolf’s involvement in the ‘dialogic’ approach to writing, a shift in writing from emphasis on the formal, paternal written language to the natural, living ‘mother tongue,’ a theory suggested by Myra Love in “Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection,” which will be discussed in more detail later. Wolf seems to be searching for a form of writing in which the voice of the mother is not excluded from participation, in the manner Derrida describes in \textit{The Ear Of The Other}.

2.6. Objections to an ‘autobiographical’ reading of \textit{Nachdenken über Christa T.}

Some critics object to the reading of \textit{Christa T.} and \textit{Kindheitsmuster} as autobiography, claiming this was an anomaly in the early reception of the texts. \textit{Christa T.} and \textit{Kindheitsmuster} were read as autobiographical in the sense of representative, verifiable depictions of life in the GDR or a childhood in Germany. Anna Kuhn searches for alternative interpretations of the “ich” in \textit{Christa T.} and encounters complications. The narrative stance of \textit{Christa T.}, its “interweaving of first-person and third-person perspective,” she writes, is initially “incongruent since the narrator of \textit{Christa T.} is

\textsuperscript{52} Linda Anderson, \textit{Autobiography}, op. cit., p.83.
ostensibly concerned with someone else’s past.” Since the narrator’s memories of Christa T. and her diaries and literary sketches are limited, she can only produce a deceptive account of her friend’s life. Kuhn claims that the narrator hopes to let the reader ‘see’ Christa T. and save her from oblivion. The narrator, “after reading Christa T.’s literary remains, believes she knows her friend as she actually was” and the text “serves as a means of testing her memories against her new-found understanding: This self-evaluative function of the text justifies the narrator’s use of first-person narration.”

Kuhn’s isolation of a “self-evaluative function” justifying the use of first-person narration does not deny the possibility of autobiography, if autobiography is interpreted as a text that cannot avoid invention on the part of the author. In the light of Wolf’s subsequent increasingly open autobiographical stance, it is credible that Wolf is beginning to use the self-evaluative function and first-person narration in Christa T. from an autobiographical standpoint. Kuhn claims Christa T.’s tenuous nature and the narrator’s respect for her autonomous nature militate against the consistent use of the third-person narration and this explains why Christa T. presents herself in her letters and sketches in the first person. But Wolf is extremely sensitive to the connotations of using third-person versus first-person narration. In Christa T., Wolf tries out different modes of autobiographical voice and perspective, similar to her portrayal of varying perspectives on herself, by herself and by others, in Ein Tag im Jahr.

Kuhn claims that although Christa T. is not clearly delineated, the narrator is an even more imprecisely drawn character and: “This very fluidity constitutes the genius of the narrative voice in Christa T. The lack of clear boundaries reproduces the connectedness

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53 Anna Kuhn, Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision, op. cit., p.63.
54 Ibid.

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that Wolf experienced while writing and is the expression of her new, uncensored writing style.” The fluidity and connectedness of Christa T. are important characteristics of Wolf’s writing, but are also directly relevant to an autobiographical impulse in her work. Wolf’s ‘connectedness’ can be linked to ‘second-wave feminism’ in women’s personal writing, reinforcing the compelling character of autobiography for women writers. Helen Tookey in Anaïs Nin, Fictionality and Feminism, refers to one of the important aspects of Kate Millett’s claim that ‘Our form is autobiography’ in second-wave feminism in the 1970s, as the concept of ‘authenticity’ in relation to women’s writing:

The value of the writing Millett talks about depends on its reference back to the female author – it is a ‘true’ and ‘honest’ account of her life and experiences. As Rita Felski argues in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, this authenticity is frequently grounded in a deliberate distancing from the sphere of ‘the literary’ or of literature – and we can see this in Millett’s appeal to the ‘non-literary’ genres of diaries, letters and journals. Millett is referring to the diaries of Anaïs Nin, but the concept of ‘authenticity’ in relation to women’s writing is relevant to Wolf’s writing. Wolf’s publication of her diary in Ein Tag im Jahr, and her reference to Anaïs Nin’s diaries in Ein Tag im Jahr, lead her to a distancing of herself from the sphere of the literary and a valuation of the ‘authenticity’ or ‘connectedness’ of women’s writing.

Wolf’s fluidity, connectedness and spontaneity also mark a break with Anna Seghers’ view of writing as something one has overcome. In her interview with Hans Kaufmann, Wolf discusses the emancipatory power of the new spontaneity she experienced while writing Christa T., and its link to a new attitude towards her subject matter. Wolf claims:

Ich hatte nämlich erfahren – ich kann wohl sagen: überraschend und gegen meinen eigenen beträchtlichen Widerstand –, was es bedeutet, erzählen zu müssen, um zu überwinden; hatte erlebt, daß der Erzähler (aber ist das Wort noch am Platze? der Prosaautor also) gezwungen sein kann, das strenge Nacheinander von Leben,
This compulsion to write in order to overcome a difficult experience and the inner authenticity Wolf seeks, describe a writing process of survival, similar to the compulsive description of survival commonly noted in the writing of slave narratives, working-class autobiographies and immigrant life writing. As an alternative to an autobiographical interpretation of Christa T., Anna Kuhn suggests that although there are striking similarities between the situations of the narrator and Christa Wolf, ultimately the narrator is an invention of the author: “[...] the text of Christa T. consists of multiple refraction: in order to cope with her grief at the loss of her friend, Christa Wolf creates a narrator, who in order to come to terms with her grief, “creates” Christa T. anew and also creates Christa T., the literary work and seeks to engage the reader in her creation.” This theory of multiple refraction is plausible, yet not inconsistent with autobiographical interpretation, if the concept of ‘creation’ on the part of the author is not excluded from the autobiographical process. The notion of multiple refraction deflects the emotion of the text artificially into an ordered refraction process, not quite compatible with the fluidity and connectedness Kuhn located earlier. It also does not account for the compelling “Authentizität” Wolf mentions in relation to the production of the text. In an autobiographical text, it might be argued that the narrator is always partially ‘created’ by the author, but the claim that Christa T. is an early

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59 Anna Kuhn, Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision, op. cit., p.64.
autobiographical text depends ultimately on a number of autobiographical markers present in the text: the lack of significant contradiction between the situation of the author and the narrator, the understanding of the multifaceted use of ‘ich’ in the text, the fluidity and compulsion to write on the part of the narrator, the focus on the personal relationship between the narrator and Christa T. and the subsequent tendency towards autobiographical writing for Wolf.

Additionally, in view of the dearth of persuasive women’s autobiographical writing, there is a temptation to read ambiguous women’s texts as autobiographical. Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* has been read as autobiographical,\(^60\) partially because this is plausible and partially because, as is the case with *Christa T.*, this interpretation is useful in order to gain some insight into a limited source (“wir brauchen sie”): early self-conscious autobiographical writing by women and the complications of this process for women writers. Crucial for this interpretation is the understanding of autobiographical writing not as biographical truth, but as the sharing of an elaborate experience and a complex journey of self-discovery.

### 2.7. ‘Die Schwierigkeit ‘Ich’ zu sagen’ –

The Claim to Female Aesthetic and its Link with Autobiography

*Christa T.*’s often quoted “die Schwierigkeit ‘Ich’ zu sagen” is often cited by critics as a reference to the space around the female subject, a space which reflects an experience of

fragmentation and absence. Christa T. also emphasizes skepticism towards language, which is key to the female subject’s experience of fragmentation. Many critics read Wolf’s skepticism towards language in Christa T. from a gender specific perspective, claiming women writers have often tried to acknowledge the difficulty of saying ‘I’ as a basic experience of women under patriarchy. Jeanette Clausen claims women have difficulty using a male-oriented, male-dominated discourse to articulate the self. Clausen refers to Monique Wittig’s observations regarding the implications of the pronoun “I” for women. By masking the sexual identity of the writer, using “I” may make the writer feel deceptively at home in a male-dominated language, she may forget that “[...] the female saying “I” is alien at every moment to her own speaking and writing. She is broken by the fact that she must enter this language in order to speak or write.”

The narrator of Christa T. has difficulty with the use of “ich” in writing this narrative and Christa T. is similarly reluctant to write “ich” in her diary, which can be understood with reference to the context of the prolific, male-dominated discourse in which they operate. Both Christa T. and the narrator studied German literature in Leipzig and wrote dissertations on male authors. Neither seems to have gained confidence or insight from these literary pursuits. Christa T. seems to have felt discouraged from writing more than a few fragments and Wolf has often claimed her study of literature led her towards a critical perspective, almost extinguishing her desire to write:


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It seems the study of literature and its critical emphasis, a style of writing frequently associated with a male-dominated discourse, may have influenced Christa T.'s writing prospects and almost suppressed Wolf's ability to write.

Myra Love also reads Christa T. from a gender specific perspective. She interprets the writing of Christa T. as: "[...] a process which breaks down the system of dichotomous oppositions comprising the patriarchal model of perception and discourse." Based on the writings of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig, she argues that male domination is established and sustained through logocentric and phallocentric structures of thought and discourse. The logocentric conception of the world is based on a system of polarities (e.g. subject/object, speech/silence, presence/absence) that relegate woman to the position of other.

Love argues that in Christa T., the patriarchal model is subverted and transcended through the overcoming of two oppositions: presence/absence and speech/writing. Wolf's purpose in Christa T. is to make her absent friend present in the text through reflection. The presence of Wolf in the text "constitutes itself in relation to the absence which is Christa T." and signifies a "process of self-constitution in intersubjective relationship," which represents the "coming-into-being of subjectivity free of domination."

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63 Myra Love, "Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection" in New German Critique 16 (Winter 1979) p.32.
64 Ibid, p.34.
Christa T. also subverts the opposition between speech and writing. Quoting Roland Barthes’s juxtaposition of written and spoken language and his assertion that the ‘closed’ structure of written language militates against communication, Love claims that Christa T., through its use of a nonlinear, self-interrupting mode of discourse and its use of ‘you’ (du) and ‘we’ creates the aura of conversation between narrator and reader and overcomes the polarity between writing and speech. Love attributes women’s silence not only to “the lack of a voice capable of speaking female experience” but also to “the lack of practice in occupying the position of authority which has traditionally characterized authorship.”

In Wolf’s Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung, she emphasizes her sense of lack in women’s writing: “Wir haben keine authentischen Muster, das kostet uns Zeit, Umwege, Irrtümer: aber es muß ja nicht nur ein Nachteil sein. Wenige, sehr wenige Stimmen von Frauen dringen zu uns [...]” Wolf is sure that some women’s voices remain. Love credits Christa Wolf with bridging the gap between experience and culture, demystifying ‘authorship’ by removing it from its traditional position of depersonalized authority and returning it to its function as a means of social communication.

Wolf’s play with the role, position and standing of the author is significant in Myra Love’s interpretation. The aura of conversation between narrator and reader seems to introduce the ‘living feminine’ dimension of language, that Derrida mentions, to writing. Though it is impossible to overcome the polarity between writing and speech and difficult to dispel the authority of the author, in Christa T., Wolf is instrumental in depersonalizing authority and making it easier for women writers to find a voice in the literary canon.

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65 Ibid, p.33.

The presence of Wolf in the text in relation to the absence of Christa T. and the selfconstitution in an intersubjective relationship is a new kind of subjectivity surfacing in
Christa T. This appears to be a novel notion in 1968 and a new model for women’s
autobiography, early in the interpretation of women’s writing. Since then, there has been
a proliferation of studies on women’s autobiographical writing, but important in this is
the representation of women in autobiography, not diary. Linda Anderson notes:

Through the late 1980s and early 1990s critics have also explored, with increasing
sophistication and in the context of recent critical theory, how women can represent
themselves in terms of a genre which as genre – rather than as something ‘homelier’ or
less literary, like diaries or letters – derives its coherence from the unity of the self, from
a self which transcends inconsistency and difference.®

The unity of the self is a concept Wolf grapples with in Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster,
and she attempts the process in an autobiographical form, not in a diary or journal form.
Anderson believes that how ‘she’ identifies as ‘I’ is a central area of focus for women’s
autobiographical study, but she emphasizes, this subject is closely linked to the meaning
of gender itself:

[...] if one of the main areas of focus has been “the difficulty of saying ‘I’” for women
autobiographers, it is impossible to separate this in the end from the difficulty of saying
‘she’; in other words the construction of women as autobiographical subjects is inevitably
implicated in – or part of – the fluctuating discourses which construct the meaning of
gender itself.'

Christa Wolf’s thematization of the difficulty of saying “I” is closely linked to the
construction of women as subjects and the meaning of gender itself. Christa T. marks an
important beginning for the subsequent sophisticated exploration of how women can
represent themselves.

67 Linda Anderson, Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures (London,
68 Ibid, p.3.
Wolf combats female silence in *Christa T.* and creates a voice capable of speaking out about female experience from a tentatively autobiographical perspective. Feminists often view autobiography as a natural testing ground for women writer, a place for women to begin to tell their own story amid their search for subjectivity. Wolf often refers to an existing tradition of women's journal writing, albeit little-read volumes, written by women with unnurtured abilities, not unlike Christa T.'s writing experience. *Christa T.* is in a unique position to showcase the intricacies of the complex process of writing for women and marks a turn in the understanding of women's autobiographical writing, creating a profile for an absent canon, an awareness of a writing that could have been and a prefiguring of a future for women's writing, not realizable at the time of the text's publication. In 1993, Shoshana Felman suggested a return to earlier moments within feminist criticism, when autobiography first broke into critical texts, because woman's autobiography has to be thought of as a narrative that has not yet come into being.\(^9\) Linda Anderson reads this notion of autobiography communicating its knowledge of the female subject as, in part, the impossibility of having that knowledge in Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.*:

[...] criticism becomes the act of attempting to read into the future what was 'not yet' in the past. This is the nature of the relation of space evoked by Christa Wolf in [...] *The Quest for Christa T.*, where the narrator not only elegises her friend, but searches for her through vague and fragmented memories which can only begin to release their meaning later [...]\(^10\)

Anderson believes that the reader may be "[...] hearing in an autobiographical text something that cannot be present to the self [...] the reader’s knowledge too must be constructed through gaps and unconscious desires [...] in terms of the shape and horizons

of memory." Anderson's use of Christa Wolf's text in 1997, to illustrate the 'not yet' of women's autobiographical writing, exemplifies the search for a wider base of texts in women's "desire to speak with the dead." Helen Buss finds that feminist scholars interested in finding the silenced voices of women in history cannot begin merely with an effort to speak with the "famous" dead of the literary tradition:

We hardly know who our dead are: what could they possibly say that was not conditioned and structured by their place inside the gender that silenced them or allowed them to speak only in the limited [...] public scripts allowed to women?

Christa T. plays a pivotal role in the establishment of a tradition of women's autobiographical writing, because it seems not to be structured mainly by a place within gender, conditioned by a time of publication. It is intriguing in its ambiguous form, in its borderline status between the 'novel' and 'autobiography.' It attempts to draw the reader's attention to the issues of women's lives, women's writing, the inadequacies of language, the difficulty of saying 'I' and the search for the self ("Zu-sich-selber kommen"), without limiting itself to a singular line of thinking on these issues, or to a genre or to the 'time' of the text.

The interpretation of Christa T. seems to have moved from an initial 'autobiographical' reading of the text as a faithful reflection of Wolf's GDR experiences, to a rejection of such a simplistic understanding of the relation between narrator and author to the subsequent understanding of the narrator of Christa T. as crucial to the context of women's autobiography. In this, the understanding of autobiography has changed from a true and verifiable account of a life to an evocation of a personal story that needs to be

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told and a writing that seeks to overcome an obstacle ("Schwierigkeit"). As Linda Anderson notes, the identity of autobiography as a genre today is "less a matter of form or aesthetics than of ideology." The understanding of Christa T. as autobiography, is less a matter of biographical truth and authorial dispensation than of recognizing the writing as compulsive, authentic self-expression and part of a process of self-discovery.

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3. Kindheitsmuster as Autobiography: Within the Tradition and Without

Continuity between the Past and the Present

If *Nachdenken über Christa T.* represents an early attempt at self-discovery and self-expression, *Kindheitsmuster* continues this tendency in a more traditional autobiographical mode. Initially the link between the two texts seems to lie in the emphasis Wolf places on the continuity between the past and the present, exemplified in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in the crudity of the Hammurabi incident¹, and the reasons Wolf cites for writing *Kindheitsmuster*. The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* is disturbed by reports of young GDR citizens singing “*In einem Polenstädchen*” in Prag and this prompts the narrator to examine her own ‘instinctive’ recall of song lyrics and other memories, sometimes reminiscent of shocking wartime precepts infiltrating her childhood. The narrator feels she needs to approach the difficult question of whether racist propaganda, assimilated as a child, can have persisted and impacted on her daughter’s generation in the GDR. The question of the degree of change possible in a population following a wartime experience, is an important issue raised by Christa T. in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and revisited by Wolf, in more detail, in *Kindheitsmuster*.

Though the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* believes she is ‘different’ to the child growing up with the *Hitler Gruß*, she must examine this difference in order to find the source of trace continuity between the child of Nazism and the adult who recognises the maliciousness of her childhood

¹ In *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, Christa T. told the narrator that a pupil named Hammurabi had bitten the head off a frog in response to a dare from other pupils. The crudity of the incident upset Christa T. and the capacity for violence on the part of seemingly innocent individuals following the provocation by their peers seems to testify to the survival of violence in the population into the postwar period.
convictions. Wolf speaks of a strong “Fremdheitsgefühl gegenüber diese Zeit,” in an interview about *Kindheitsmuster*, yet is painfully aware of a continuity from childhood in her mindset, though having worked hard on eradicating most of these associations. It is difficult for the narrator to separate out ‘ordinary’ family events and universal patterns of experience, from the specifically insidious Nazi ideology.

The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* mentions topical research that theorizes that most of an individual’s characteristics are formed, through experience and genetic makeup, by the end of the child’s fourth year of life. The question of scope for change thereafter challenges the notion of “Fremdheitsgefühl” and the use of third person narration, due to a sense of ‘alienation,’ in *Kindheitsmuster*. The borderline between changing and retaining familiar characteristics is the focus of *Kindheitsmuster*’s “Wie sind wir geworden wie wir heute sind?” The narrator claims that change is not something that occurs easily or fully and sets about investigating this in *Kindheitsmuster*. Issues of continuity and change lead Wolf to the autobiographical beginning, her early childhood, and the socialization of the child she self-consciously names Nelly: “das Kind [...| wobei sein Name, der hier gelten soll, zum ersten Mal genannt wird: Nelly.”

Her association with this child is autobiographical, but the “Fremdheitsgefühl” and artificial name complicate any easy equation of Wolf with Nelly, and challenge the notion of the referential authority of autobiographical writing. The representation of Nelly’s childhood is autobiographically ‘conventional’ in its focus on the early relationship between the mother and child and various escapades of childhood. The relationship between the mother and the child is not easy, because the child finds itself striving for attention in a regimental environment. The

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3 Christa Wolf, *Kindheitsmuster* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988) p.12.
mother expects the child to be always ‘well-behaved,’ in contrast to the narrator, as mother’s, approach to her own daughter. This generational difference is a difficult experience that Wolf seeks to address in *Kindheitsmuster*. The elaboration on the emotional development of childhood, and a straightforward chronological sequence to Nelly’s 1929-46 years in *Kindheitsmuster* (albeit interrupted by specific timeframes in 1971 and 1972-75), seem to place the text within the tradition of autobiographical narrative. But Wolf plays with autobiographical assumptions using a disclaimer, a title of ‘Roman’ for the West German edition of the book and third person narration. The narrator’s awareness of the complexity of her relationship to this time, the difficulty of saying ‘I’ and her emphasis on the non-heroic, everyday and female experience of an infamously ‘male-focused’ period of history, means that this autobiography adheres less to autobiographical tradition than at first appears.

Wolf is well known as an author who does not shun difficult topics, having written, over the years, on GDR policies, the Biermann expatriation and the disintegration of GDR society in 1989, yet *Kindheitsmuster*, on its publication in 1976, treated a topic, then as now, considered to be one of the most polemical in theme. Any work treating the period of National Socialism in Germany, particularly a narrative of everyday life, provokes a debate on how this difficult period of history ‘should’ be represented to posterity. Wolf justifies her writing approach in “Erfahrungsmuster”:

Ich kann nur über etwas schreiben, was mich beunruhigt […] die einander ablösenden (oder einander durchdringenden) prosaistischen und essayistischen Äußerungen (unterscheiden sich) nicht grundsätzlich voneinander. Ihre gemeinsame Wurzel ist Erfahrung, die zu bewältigen ist: Erfahrung mit dem “Leben” – also der unvermittelten Realität einer bestimmten Zeit und einer bestimmten Gesellschaft –, mit mir selbst, mit dem Schreiben – das ein wichtiger Teil meines Lebens ist – mit anderer Literatur und Kunst.⁴

Writing about something that is disturbing, that is to be overcome ("zu bewältigen ist"), is a pertinent description of the tentative atmosphere of the opening of *Kindheitsmuster*. The mixture of the semi-familiar reality of Nazism (familiar names, concepts and places, such as Göring, *Endlösung*, Auschwitz), the individual writing, the process of writing and the influence of other statements and representations from the time, makes for the multifaceted texture of what Anke Pinkert calls Wolf’s ‘classic’ narrative portraying her childhood in Nazi Germany. She claims that *Kindheitsmuster* “has entered the canon as the German book exemplary of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.”\(^5\) But the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has many problematic connotations, seeming to refer to a general process undergone by a large portion of the population, not recognizing the myriad different methods, different reasons and different experiences requiring ‘Bewältigung’ in the postwar period. *Kindheitsmuster* holds in its title the mention of a ‘Muster’ (perhaps signifying ‘exemplary’), and Wolf has claimed that many members of her generation heralded the arrival of this text, treating the everyday reality of Nazi Germany, but the text seems to be an individual, personal narrative, not a part of a more general review of the past. *Kindheitsmuster* may be an example of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, striking a chord with a generation still grappling with its past, but it is nonetheless an insistently personal narrative bearing little resemblance to a more general process to be undertaken by a non-homogeneous German population looking back at this period of time.

The ‘Muster’ in *Kindheitsmuster* seems to refer instead to the text’s placement within the second wave of literature on the war, published in the GDR in the mid-seventies, focusing, not on resistance to Nazism as in the first wave, but on the continuity with the past and on the traces of fascist mentality evident in Germany. Conformity, moral cowardice, authoritarianism and denial

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still prevail in the 1970s, following the socialization of a generation in difficult wartime circumstances. Wolf believes that resistance to Nazism was less of a pattern than the acquiescence to Nazi ideals. A slow turnaround and residual sympathy with these ideals indicates that there was a pattern of acquiescence, that is still evident in the slow pace of change:

Ein wenig stört mich, daß viele unserer Bücher über diese Zeit enden mit Helden, die sich schnell wandeln, mit Helden, die eigentlich schon während des Faschismus zu ziemlich bedeutenden und richtigen Einsichten kommen, politisch, menschlich. Ich will keinem Autor sein Erlebnis bestreiten. Aber mein Erlebnis war anders. Ich habe erlebt, daß es sehr lange gedauert hat, bis winzige Einsichten zuerst, später tiefergehende Veränderungen möglich waren.

Characteristically, Wolf finds traces of conformity, moral cowardice and slow change, not only in others, but in herself and her family. She probes the reasons for her father's entry into the Nazi party, her own involvement with the Hitler Jugend, her difficult attitude toward her, now Polish, birthplace and her ‘moral cowardice’ in not becoming involved in resistance to military action in Vietnam, in an autobiographical mode of self-examination and self-castigation.

Wolf speaks in “Erfahrungsmuster” of a moral need to write about the time period of fascism in Germany as a witness to this time because:

Ich habe, wie er (Kazimierz Brandys), den Eindruck, daß wir über diese Zeit, über die wir schon so ungeheuer viel gelesen, gehört und zum Teil auch geschrieben haben, im Grunde immer noch sehr wenig wissen – ich meine die Zeit des Faschismus in Deutschland [...].

Also, worryingly, many witnesses to this period have fallen silent on the topic. Silence is a relic from their childhood and silence is a result of fear and lack of understanding: “Das ist eine Erfahrung von mir, daß die Menschen meines Alters [...] sehr wenig über diese Zeit miteinander und mit ihren Kindern reden, und auf eine nicht sehr offene Weise.”

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6 It might be objected that these characteristics are also common in countries unaffected by fascist regimes. Here, Kindheitsmuster makes reference to specific Nazi song lyrics, traditions, statements, etc.
8 Ibid, p.806.
9 Ibid, p.808.
Wolf is clear that silence can only serve to perpetuate fascist tendencies in German society and her clarity about the need to investigate the continuity between the past and the present provides her with a strong motivation in writing *Kindheitsmuster*. The prompt in *Kindheitsmuster* for the autobiographical venture is not Wolf's own generation's need to revisit the past (a form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), but her daughter's questions and lack of understanding of the past. Lenka's story of young GDR citizens singing Nazi songs in Prag, her generation's lack of interest in Auschwitz and her disgust at her parents' lack of resistance to fascism, perforate the narrator's own inhibition about this period and unleash the longest and richest of Wolf's personal narratives.

Here, I will look at the early response to *Kindheitsmuster*, as some of the initial issues raised in relation to the text are still relevant for the present-day reader of *Kindheitsmuster*, though approaches to texts have changed. In particular the understanding of autobiography has changed and *Kindheitsmuster*, though always unreservedly 'autobiographical,' was initially understood as a polemical revision of Second World War representation, and is appreciated today for its understanding of autobiography as a means of self-representation and location of identity and a space within which self-analysis can take place. I will then look at the specific relationship to the child that Wolf portrays, emphasizing self-representation and the question of how the child relates to the adult and shapes the autobiographical project. Following that, I will consider the role of the *mother* in 'creating' the child and influencing the autobiographical writing. The mother's involvement is key to Wolf's autobiographical project and Wolf sensitively pinpoints the areas in which the mother is crucial to autobiographical narrative *in general*, being close to the child (encouraging belief in the self and the confidence to write) and distant enough to create room for the individual story.
Humour and reference to sexuality, often under-represented in Wolf’s other writing, take on obvious significance in *Kindheitsmuster*, as Wolf reinvokes her youthful curiosity about sexuality and her adolescent, nonchalant attitude to life. In this way, Wolf seems to link autobiography with youthful attitudes in a more consistent way than many other autobiographers. The tone of *Kindheitsmuster* is, at times, significantly synchronized with Lenka’s temperament, because her teenage attitude questions and influences the writer in an invigorating manner. Lenka is therefore an important guide in *Kindheitsmuster*, as a reminder to the adult of some of the dis/advantages of an adolescent point of view and a reminder to the autobiographer of the temporal quality of life phases. Lenka also introduces the concept of generation to the understanding of identity.

I conclude with a discussion of how the underlying juxtaposition in *Kindheitsmuster* between the inside, personal story and the outside, ‘newsprint’ version of the story, the everyday (female) and the ‘historical’ (male) experience of conflict situations, is reflected in the tension between the traditional and untraditional autobiographical conventions in *Kindheitsmuster* and how this inside/outside dialectic that Wolf weaves throughout the text illuminates the theoretical operation of autobiography, as *Kindheitsmuster* is ultimately woven between the tradition and its inversion.

3.1. Early Debate about *Kindheitsmuster*

Anna Kuhn in *Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision*, claims that German critical response to *Kindheitsmuster* focused on “readings as autobiography” and on political content. In the GDR,
critics "underestimated the significance of structure for the transmission of meaning." Many focused on criticizing the narrative structure as experimental or formalistic, rather than recognizing the need for a new structure to address an increasingly complex ('layered') topic. The critiques resulted in Wolf having to 'explain' her writing process and 'justify' the three time frames in Kindheitsmuster in her discussion in "Erfahrungsmuster."

Annemarie Auer attacked the book perniciously from an 'antifascist' perspective. She claimed that Kindheitsmuster failed to portray Hitler's defeat as the liberation she had experienced in May 1945 and the text failed to include the perspective of antifascists in National Socialism:


Auer's criticism is harsh, but her claim to antifascist 'authenticity' may be understandable, as Wolf's discussion of 'authenticity' is, at times, ambiguous. Wolf seems to use the term 'authenticity' to portray a kind of 'unartificial' writing style, not an 'authentic experience,' as Auer understands the term. Ultimately, Auer cannot blame Wolf for Auer's generation's lack of narrative on antifascism. She searches for reasons "warum etwas nicht entstand" or why "ein fundamentales Buch" like Werner Krauss' P L N. Die Passionen der halykonischen Seele

11 Despite the questions about Kindheitsmuster's structure, the structure has been generally recognized as a strength. Sonja Hilzinger writes: "Mit seiner besonderen Struktur stellt Kindheitsmuster einen neuen Typus von autobiographischen Schreiben dar" and Kindheitsmuster is "ein wichtiges Beispiel autobiographischer Nachkriegsliteratur." Christa Wolf (Frankfurt am Main, 2007) p.91 and 122.
appeared in 1946 and “fast niemand las es, kaum jemand verstand es [...].” Bound up with the
attack on the prospering Jordans, Auer is justifiably critical of the treatment of the original
inhabitants of Gorzow Wielkopolski:

Für die Deutschen wurden besondere Läden eingerichtet [...]. Das okkupierte Volk wurde
systematisch zum Hungern verurteilt. Das junge Mädchen aber [...] erinnert weder Judensterne,
noch Streifen an den Fahrrädern, noch Extraläden, noch Polizeistunden – die allerdings die
Marschspiele des Bundes Deutscher Mädchen wohl nicht behindert haben dürften.14

Here Auer points directly at Wolf’s reluctance in writing this account and in travelling to
Gorzow Wielkopolski (she is contrite about her BDM status and the Nazi treatment of the
citizens of Gorzow Wielkopolski), yet Auer insists that she cannot fathom the lamentation, “der
Klageton” and “Selbstmitleid” of Kindheitsmuster. ‘Nelly’ did not suffer the terrible fate of
Jewish and Polish victims of fascism, but she cannot be blamed either for her lack of a clear
conscience. She is not a member of an antifascist family. Wolf is conscious of a complicated
‘generational’ guilt (the concept of generation will be considered in more detail later) and tries to
confront it, rather than avoid such guilt, as most of her contemporaries do:

Bestimmte Fragen unter Altersgenossen nicht stellen. Weil es nämlich unerträglich ist, bei dem
Wort “Auschwitz” das kleine Wort “ich” mitdenken zu müssen: “Ich” im Konjunktiv Imperfekt:
Ich hätte. Ich könnte. Ich würde. Getan haben. Gehorcht haben.15

Auer claims: “Der Ton des Buches ist ohne Hoffnung,” yet she finds hope in the presence of
Lenka (“Eine der wertvollsten Erfindungen des Buches ist die Figur der Lenka”) and in Wolf’s
commitment to the concept of guilt thirty years after the fact: “Im Abstumpfen und
Nichthinsehen bestand die faschistische Manipulation. Es ist nur konsequent, wenn in
«Hinsehen» und «Sensibilität» das moralkritische Engagement der Christa Wolf besteht.”16 For
Auer, the good of this process is lost in Wolf’s “Ich-Faszination,” but this interpretation of “Ich”

14 Ibid, p.872.
15 Christa Wolf, Kindheitsmuster, op. cit., p.312.
as trivial represents the point at which Auer misjudges Wolf’s mission. Wolf’s discussion of “Ich” and “Auschwitz” is one of the concepts that make the past accessible in _Kindheitsmuster_ thirty years after the fact.

Unlike Auer, the Marxist critic Hans Mayer in “Der Mut zur Unaufrichtigkeit”17 focuses, not on the retrospective first level of _Kindheitsmuster_, but on the third level, the 1972-75 reference to the continuity of fascism beyond German soil, following Kazimierz Brandys: “Faschismus ist ein weiterer Begriff als die Deutschen. Aber sie sind seine Klassiker gewesen.”18 Mayer accuses Wolf of dishonesty in excluding Communist aggression in her reference to the continuity of fascist tendencies into the present. Fritz Raddatz finds the reflective third level of _Kindheitsmuster_ too intrusive to constitute great art and Marcel Reich-Ranicki claims the book is a failure, containing only the raw material for a novel. Its topic is too obvious to produce great literature.19 Significantly, non-German critics interpreted _Kindheitsmuster_ as an important work. Neil Jackson and Barbara Saunders claimed Wolf’s _Kindheitsmuster_ is “the most daring challenge of her career as an autobiographical writer and literary innovator,” and “Of particular originality for the GDR is the detailed examination of ‘Flucht’ in 1945 and of a visit to what was once a German town and now is neither readily accessible nor easily recognizable to those born there.”20

The two central lines of criticism of _Kindheitsmuster_ concentrate on Wolf’s petty bourgeois lack of representation of the (mainly) Communist resistance to fascism and, on the other hand, the intrusive nature of the third level of narration. The inclusion of news reports from the time

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18 Christa Wolf, _Kindheitsmuster_, op. cit., p.55.
period 1972-75 infer an unacceptable connection between news clips during ‘wartime’ and news items during ‘peacetime.’ Wolf’s everyday perspective on extraordinary events in Kindheitsmuster, her ‘news clip’ approach to historical incidents, such as Kristallnacht, Kapitulation, Flucht and the war in Vietnam, represents an attempt to describe a ‘normal’ life alongside genocide (an answer to the question: “wie war es wirklich?”). The third level in Kindheitsmuster questions the reader and tries to remove the distance between any citizen and an atrocity, forcing the wider community to recognize its own responsibility in violent disputes. This commentary is provocative and upsets the sensitivities of those who wish to separate national strands of public policy and political position. Wolf implies that there are connections between different conflicts, though issues of why nations are involved in conflict are not necessarily to be confused with one another. The upheaval in society and the uneven, everyday experience of aggression is similar in conflict situations in different countries, at different times. The ‘everyday life’ in Nazi Germany is just one layer of the tertiary excavation of the past in Kindheitsmuster, so Wolf needs a contrast to make it visible. The 1971 trip to Landsberg, now Gorzow Wielkopolski, and the reference to the 1972-75 context of the manuscript interrupt the reader’s proclivity towards becoming comfortably immersed in the familiar trials of childhood (relationships with teachers and relatives) and the everyday, personal quality of Wolf’s account of this period. The levels attempt to interrupt the easy identification of the reader with the narrator. They question the referential authority of language and autobiography and remind the reader of the all-important, ever-changing relativity of perspective. With hindsight, many of the anchors of the narrator’s childhood can be seen as contaminated by Nazi ideology, regarding order, cleanliness or victory. It is unlikely that Nelly’s indoctrination would not have been

successful given the pressure to conform from her family and teachers. But Wolf attempts to make the issue of hindsight clear. She writes Nelly’s story from within Nazi ‘ideology,’ yet on the other levels, the narrator is aware of her positioning outside this ideology. Kindheitsmuster also tells the story of the changeover from supporting Nazism to its condemnation. Nelly becomes aware of the extent of the suffering of her contemporaries during National Socialism towards the end of the narrative, and loses the sense of belief in a political system, shedding doubt on many other belief-systems. The narrator refers to the differing sets of “Glaubensbekenntnisse [...], die du, in Abständen von wenigen Jahren, abgelegt hast,” implying a connection between the child’s allegiance to Hitler and the adult’s belief in socialism. The extremity of the first loss of innocence meant that the second was not as unexpected. The sense of a loss of ideals sets the tone for the atmosphere of the controversial third level of narration.

Auer’s criticism that Wolf presents Nelly as oblivious to the fate of the many victims of fascism can be countered only by Wolf’s claim that her ‘wartime experience’ was not one of heroism. It is only as an autobiographical narrative that Wolf can claim that the ‘everyday,’ not the heroic (or the perspective of the oppressed) was a common experience of fascism, without further injuring the victims of fascism. She claims that she cannot speak for other writers, but she can attest to her own experience ("aber mein Erlebnis war anders"). The more ‘personal’ the story appears to be, the less it lends itself to an innocuous reappraisal of fascism.

The changing of the world order following the Second World War contributes to the strong sense of fragmentation of the self in Kindheitsmuster, a loss of belief in political systems and general uncertainty about humanity. Michael Jopling pinpoints the close connection between

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22 Christa Wolf, Kindheitsmuster, op. cit., p.509.
autobiography and the decentred self: "One of the prime sites in which the decentred self is effected and reflected is the autobiographical narrative, where self-representation emerges out of an interplay of the fictional and the autobiographical, the past and the present." Wolf is keenly aware of self-representation emerging from the interplay between the past and the present in Kindheitsmuster and the text seems to demonstrate how the autobiographical narrative is instrumental in 'effecting and reflecting' the decentred self. Jopling describes the relationship between artistic representation and the experience in autobiography succinctly:

[...] the autobiographical narrative’s rootedness in experience enables the reader to maintain the illusion of a prior ‘reality’, however fictionalized, thereby avoiding contamination by the self-indulgent play of signification that has resulted from some (mis)readings of post-structuralist theory.\(^\text{24}\)

The reader and the writer maintaining the illusion of a prior ‘reality’ is very much a part of the retrospective level of narration in Kindheitsmuster. The interplay between the fictional (descriptive) quality of self-representation and the ‘reality’ often represented by newspaper quotations or historical reports, is specifically demonstrable in autobiographical narrative. The claim that autobiography is fiction and fiction is autobiography is not useful, but:

[...] the autobiographical novel retains and consciously plays on elements of classical autobiography’s claim to external verifiability, truthfulness and authenticity in a way which is not so readily available to other forms of fiction.\(^\text{25}\)

Wolf can make the claim that she considers important, that life ‘seemed normal’ in Nazi Germany only by retaining a vestige of classical autobiography’s claim to verifiability, truthfulness and authenticity.


\(^{24}\) Ibid, p.5.

\(^{25}\) Ibid, p.6.
3.2. How does the narrator relate to the child in *Kindheitsmuster*?

One of the central autobiographical predicaments in *Kindheitsmuster* is the location of a sensitive approach to the narrator’s un/familiar childhood and the location of a method of communicating the narrator’s complicated relationship to the distant-seeming time and child. The opening lines of Pablo Neruda’s poem *Buch der Fragen* which precedes *Kindheitsmuster* establish a sense of universality about the difficult relationship between the adult and the child:

> Wo ist das Kind, das ich gewesen, ist es noch in mir oder fort?
> Weiβ es, daß ich es niemals mochte und es mich auch nicht leiden konnte?
> Warum sind wir so lange Zeit gewachsen, um uns dann zu trennen?
> Warum starben wir denn nicht beide, damals, als meine Kindheit starb?

Despite the preceding disclaimer that none of the described episodes coincide with actual events and Neruda’s questions about the common perceived split between the child and the adult, the reader of *Kindheitsmuster* quickly anticipates the specificity of the time frame of National Socialism in Germany. The narrator’s reluctance in writing, the difficulty of the beginning, the limitation of choice: “sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen,” (KM 11) conjure up the difficulty of the child and the time in the opening lines. The distance to the child is both great and small: “Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd.” (KM 11) The sense of painful retrieval and difficult representation is common in autobiographical narrative, as is the awareness of the link in *Kindheitsmuster* between psychoanalysis and autobiography (“Both processes are
concerned with the narrative investigation of identity and experience” 26), but the reader is initially curious about the reason for the particularly difficult relationship between the adult and the child. The narrator questions her affection for this child, from the young child’s socialization, to the narrator’s relationship with a sixteen year old who clings to her loyalty to Hitler.

Most attempts at beginning this book had started with the child saying “in aller Unschuld auf einer Steinstufe [...] zum erstenmal in seinem Leben in Gedanken zu sich selbst ICH.”27 The child feels a shudder at the thought of ‘I’:

Aus dem Wohnzimmerfenster hatte die Mutter nun das Kind zum Abendbrot zu rufen, wobei [...] ein Kind, das zum erstenmal in seinem Leben einen Schauder gespürt hat, als es ICH dachte, wird von der Stimme der Mutter nicht mehr angezogen wie von einer festen Schnur. (KM 15)

The thought of ‘I’ breaks the close tie momentarily and releases the child from her obedience to her mother. It introduces a glimmer of independent thought, which is further developed at sixteen, following the impact of the words: “Wo habt ihr bloß alle gelebt.” (KM 59) The child does many familiar things:


This initial description seems ‘universal,’ yet there is a specific and definite sense of shame and a fear of getting to know this child, which though specific, also highlights some of the difficulties of autobiographical writing in general. Because of Wolf’s inhibition about revealing the child,  

26 Michael Jopling, Re-placing the Self, op. cit., p.2.  
27 Christa Wolf, Kindheitsmuster, op. cit., p.13. Page numbers hereafter refer to this edition as KM.
many questions about the ability of autobiography to represent the child and the writer's relationship to the child, are unearthed.

The child seems to experience a 'universally recognizable' childhood, but with the hindsight of the knowledge of the highly unusual circumstances of National Socialism in Germany, the narrator is in search of unfamiliar markers in the fabric of the events. The narrator admits that her return trip to Gorzow Wielkopolski can be construed as part of a 1970s trend towards "Tourismus in halbversunkene Kindheiten," but claims this will not necessarily taint the writing or the sense of relationship with the child.


Having displayed doubt about the integrity of the young child, the shame and unease is not dispelled as the child gets older: "Je näher sie dir in der Zeit rückt, um so fremder wird sie dir." (KM 285) The teenager does not make the estrangement easier:

[...] soll man um Sympathie werben für ein Kind, das anfängt zu stehlen? Und das darin fortfahren wird über die Jahre, mit immer geringeren Gewissensbissen? Es handelt sich um Mündraub, aber Charlotte Jordan, unerbittlich in Fällen von Kriminalität, würde den stärkeren Ausdruck wählen, wenn sie es je erfahren hätte (doch auch sie kann ja nur sehen, worauf sie gefaßt ist), daß ihre Tochter angefangen hat, sich im Vorbeigehen Konfektstücke aus den Glasbehältern am Ladentisch zu greifen; zuerst nur von der billigen, später nur noch von der teuersten Sorte. Diebstahl also. Doppelter Bruch von Verboten: Im Wohnzimmer am Fenster sitzen [...] die gestohlenen Süßigkeiten in sich hineinschlingende und dabei das 'Schwarze Korps'
lesen [...]. Die Bände enthalten je eine großformatige Tafel einer nackten Frau und eines nackten Mannes [...] die Farben gewisser innerer Organe, welche die Farben der Natur erfolgreich zu übertreffen suchen, können einer überhitzten Phantasie leicht einen andauernden süßlichen Ekel eingeben. (KM 286)

Confessions of this kind are reminiscent of the mode of self-representation initiated by Augustine and Rousseau and they underline the awareness of autobiographical expectation and tradition in this unconventional autobiographical text. The confession seems to solidify the notion of an ‘I’ speaking, confessing and recognizing its own isolation, culpability and identity. Kindheitsmuster is also a text, unusually for Wolf, but in line with autobiographical tradition, that brings to light a large number of personal transgressions: “Beinahe alles gehört hierher.” (KM 130) Wolf writes about offenses from theft, deception and lying, to adultery, miscarriage and sterilization, presumably projected into one time frame by the extreme situation of wartime upheaval. The Flucht upsets the world order for Nelly and brings many unpleasant (often familial) conflicts to the surface. The disruption described is reflected in the writing style of Kindheitsmuster, in the sometimes short and spasmodic sentence structure and the juxtapositioning of difficult emotions with calm and predictable order. Amongst disorder is order and vice versa, surprisingly obvious in the KZler Ernst’s answer to the question: “[...] ob es denn im KZ wirklich so schlimm gewesen ist. Ach Gott, sagt der, was heißt schlimm. Ordnung und Sauberkeit, das war oberstes Gesetz.” (KM 535) Just as tales of domestic violence and illegal abortion do not seem to belong in Nelly’s shopowner’s childhood, “Ordnung und Sauberkeit” do not seem to belong in a Concentration Camp. The text reveals a sickening reversal of order (an inside inverted to the outside), that Nelly experienced in these years, exemplified in imagery of exposure on open streets: “Die Deutschen, kopflos flüchtend, entledigten sich ihres Ballasts [...] Entblößung der Eingeweide” (KM 434) and a surprising modification of Nelly’s mother’s language use: “man müsse Folks dankbar sein [...]. Soviel wie
in die Hand geschissen.” (KM 447) These changes prefigure the reversal Nelly undergoes in her allegiance to Adolf Hitler. The child of Nazism moves closer to the adult that the narrator can recognize as herself.

3.3. Closeness and distance to the mother

Despite the shame and distrust for the child, there is also sympathy and admiration. The narrator has tried to establish a clear break between the child of National Socialism and the adult socialist, but the pattern of continuity between the child and the adult is sometimes undeniable and the narrator can see characteristics of the child that are very familiar. The narrator sees her autobiographical project as primarily an attempt to understand the child in terms of where it came from, as an answer to the question of how we become the way we are. The narrator asks:

Warum sind Schreck und Triumph, Lust und Angst für dieses Kind so innig miteinander verbunden, daß keine Macht der Welt, kein chemisches Labor und gewiß auch keine Seelenanalyse sie je wieder voneinander trennen werden? (KM 17)

The vehemence of this statement, so sure that certain associations from childhood cannot be reversed, emphasizes the point that some forms of continuity with childhood cannot be denied.

In trying to understand the child, the narrator is aware that the relationship to the mother is of crucial importance. The portrayal of this relationship begins with an image of the mother’s attitude to the child. Nelly is to tell her mother everything, but from the beginning the child finds that seemingly straightforward request impossible: “Du weiß doch, daß du jeden Abend alles sagen sollst? Frech zu lügen: Alles ja! Und dabei heimlich zu wissen: Niemals mehr alles. Weil es unmöglich ist.” (KM 27)
The request by the mother that the child confess all is reminiscent of the attempt in the original texts of autobiography to reveal all to a confessor. Characteristically for Wolf, even the young child sees the impossibility of this demand.

A strong sense of the impression that the mother makes on the child pervades the narrative. The story of the relationship with the mother often seems to be crucial to the writing of autobiography, as will be discussed later. The relationship with the mother often encourages the sense of self in the child and the difficult, inevitable separation from the mother, commonly described in psychoanalytical terms, often initiates the desire to write the story of the self. In *Kindheitsmuster*, the child takes careful note of the mother’s words: “Du bist für mich durchsichtig wie eine Fensterscheibe, pflegte Charlotte zu ihrer Tochter zu sagen,” (KM 82) or “Wie du mir ähnelich bist, ach, wenn du würdest.” (KM 127) The mother’s attitude and words are instrumental at key developmental stages. At the onset of menstruation, her mother’s words are remembered: “Nun habe sie erst recht auf sich aufzupassen.” (KM 288) Nelly’s mother watches at the window as Nelly returns from dinner with the wounded officer, Karl Schröder: “Charlotte Jordan liegt, wie erwartet, trotz der Kälte im Fenster und trägt ihr Teil dazu bei, daß der Abschied sich nicht in die Länge zieht.” (KM 334)

Charlotte tries to look out for her daughter and advise her of danger, but she also tries to induce her to take on heavy responsibilities. When she dislocates her brother’s arm, Charlotte tells her: “Du bist schuld, wenn sein Arm steif bleibt,”(KM 32) and she does not tolerate any sign of discontentment:

Nelly hatte das trostlose Gefühl, daß auch der liebe Gott selbst an dem tapferen, aufrichtigen, klugen, gehorsamen und vor allem glücklichen Kind hing, das sie tagsüber abgab. Wörter wie "traurig" oder "einsam" lernt das Kind einer glücklichen Familie nicht, das dafür früh die schwere Aufgabe übernimmt, seine Eltern zu schonen. (KM 38)
Charlotte speaks consistently of having had a happy family life and a happy marriage, but not, the narrator insists, because she believes this to be true, but because she could not have borne the alternative:

Ihr Thema [war] das Glück. Glückliche Ehe, glückliche Familie. Meine Kinder hatten jedenfalls eine glückliche Kindheit […]. So daß ihre Kinder dazu übergingen, sich im Krankheitsfalle selbst zu kurieren, um der Mutter die Angst zu ersparen, bis Lutzens geschwollene Mandeln sich durch seine klößige Redeweise verriet. (KM 207)

Nelly’s mother worked long hours “im verfluchten Laden.” Both parents spent long periods at work, leaving a limited amount of time for family life and just enough time to read the newspaper, though not to reflect sufficiently on the news:


Charlotte and Bruno are singled out by Nelly as members of the generation that feels most betrayed in having to leave Landsberg in 1945 and in having lost the war. The older generation does not have enough energy to carry on after the war, and the younger generation has the luxury of having not yet ‘lived,’ but the middle generation feels most burdened by the losses of the war: “Die Alten damals, die wußten, wie bald sie vergangen und verweht sein würden […] Ihre Söhne und Töchter fühlten sich als die eigentlich Betrogenen und die eigentlichen Verlierer […].”(KM 401)

The most controversial of Charlotte Jordan’s acts as mother, occurs then understandably at the most poignant moment of this loss (the loss of the shop), at the close of the war. She decides not to leave Landsberg with her children on January 29, 1945:

Über die Handlungsweise von Nellys Mutter im Januar 1945, bei der ›Flucht‹, in letzter Minute nicht das Haus, wohl aber die Kinder im Stich zu lassen, hast du natürlich oft nachdenken müssen. Fragen muß man sich, ob sich wirklich in derart extremen Lagen zwangsläufig und zwingend herausstellt, was einem das Wichtigste ist: durch das was man tut. Wenn aber der
This question about the validity of her mother’s decision occupies the narrator’s thoughts to a significant extent: could Charlotte’s choice have meant that she cared more for her material achievement, than for her children? While not wholly discounting this possibility for her mother’s ‘lost’ generation, the narrator is clear that it is only with hindsight that Charlotte’s remaining in Landsberg seems so unacceptable. In January, Charlotte could not have ‘known’ whether the war was truly lost or not. Nonetheless, it is a telling, traumatic moment when Nelly reaches out to her mother:


By April 1945, Nelly has begun to clearly question the values of her parents’ generation who felt they had been ‘betrayed’ at the end of the war. She suggests that in their mania for material gain, they had lost a sense of meaning and reality in their lives. The war, then, can be seen as a manifestation of the loss of reality, not just Hitler’s, but a fanatical, hard-working generation’s loss of reality. Nelly discovers this mania in the spring of 1945: “Sie sah, für jene war Besitz und Leben ein und dasselbe. Sie begann sich der Komödie zu schämen, die sie zuerst vor anderen, am Ende vor sich selbst spielten.” (KM 402)

The notion of the misguidedness of a ‘lost’ generation, helps to explain the circumstances of Nelly’s mother’s life. Her own mother had a severe attitude towards her children. The generational burden partially justifies Charlotte’s decision to remain in Landsberg in January 1945. The narrator resists the harsh questioning of her husband and daughter about the decision,

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28 Charlotte’s sister feared her mother: “Tante Trudchen sah sich gezwungen, ihre Leibesfrucht bei einer weisen Frau abzutreiben [...]. Noch größere Angst vor der Mutter als vor dem Tod.” (KM 283)

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and concludes with the weighing of the mother’s ‘mistake’ against her many caring gestures.

Despite the controversy, Wolf does not avoid this maternal ‘flaw’ (as she does not omit controversial aspects of Christa T.), in the understanding that its inclusion will expose the complexity of the autobiographical undertaking.

At the time of writing Kindheitsmuster, the narrator’s mother is dead, as are many of the pivotal characters in Kindheitsmuster: Juliane Strauch, Horst Binder, Nelly’s grandparents, and other relatives. They can no longer be asked to explain their actions or comment on the narrator’s undertaking. The narrator is disturbed by their lack of a voice:

Warum stört dich immer mehr, daß all diese Leute dir ausgeliefert sind? Nimm Charlotte. Sie kann keinen Einspruch erheben, nichts klar- oder richtigstellen [...] Du kannst über sie erzählen, was dir einfällt und was du willst. (KM 272)

The mother’s lack of a voice is most keenly felt, but the narrator’s brother, Lutz’s, insistence on a limit to the extent of representation of parents is also emphasized:

Was er will – und muß –, ist: warnen. An die Grenzen erinnern. Er spricht behutsam, wie er niemals spricht, wenn er in die Lage kommt, dir ein technisches Problem zu erläutern [...] er muß sich Sorgen machen, weil er gezwungen ist zu lieben, was er nicht ganz und gar billigen kann [...] Ich glaube, daß es für alles Grenzen gibt. Daß sie – die Eltern – jenseits der Grenzen zu bleiben haben, tabu sind. (KM 248)

Lutz’s warning seems to irritate the narrator, because if she were to follow the limitations he suggests, the writing would lose its critical sense of immediacy and difficulty.

Also, irritatingly, Charlotte herself, if she were asked, would probably not understand the narrator’s undertaking: “Charlotte, wenn du sie fragen könntest, würde wohl sagen: Tu, was du nicht lassen kannst. Nicht ganz der Satz, den du gerne hören würdest.” (KM 51)

Here, the narrator of Kindheitsmuster becomes keenly aware of the problem of the link between autobiographical expression and the ‘sensational’ exposition of personal affairs (though Wolf has always been careful to limit her exposure of her most personal relationship, that with Gerhard Wolf). Though aware of her mother’s and brother’s reserve, she believes the ‘whole’ story must
be told in order to answer the question of how we came to be the way we are. The autobiographical dimension, though difficult at times, allows for a kind of immediacy and authenticity which embodies the creativity of the writing.

The narrator also mentions the writer’s dilemma in writing about lived experience. This is aligned with the dilemma of the photographer of the Vietnamese woman held hostage by an American G.I., that Lenka mentions. The narrator claims: “Man kann entweder schreiben oder glücklich sein.” (KM 215) There is also doubt about the profession of the writer: “Bedrückung über die Unmoral dieses Berufes: Daß man nicht leben kann, während man Leben beschreibt. Daß man Leben nicht beschreiben kann, ohne zu leben.” (KM 410) This predicament of not being able to describe life without having lived is heightened for the autobiographer.

Autobiography usually addresses childhood memories, thereby involving those associated with the child’s early socialization. If they are dead, like Charlotte Jordan, their silence is disturbing. The narrator is sure that the exposition of family strife would not have been well-tolerated by Charlotte Jordan (part of her teaching of “was man nicht tut”). But the narrator has hesitated about writing this story for some time and has decided to break her silence for many important reasons. One of the reasons for hesitating is the still real fear of offending her mother:

Vor deinem inneren Auge erscheinen Geisterarme [...]. Da kommt deine Mutter und setzt sich, obwohl sie ja tot ist, zu euch allen in das große Zimmer, ein insgeheim erwünschter Vorgang. Die ganze Familie ist versammelt, Lebende und Tote [...]. Plötzlich ein Schreck bis in die Haarspitzen: Auf dem Tisch im großen Zimmer das Manuskript, auf dessen erster Seite in großen Buchstaben nur das Wort ‘Mutter’ steht. Sie wird es lesen, wird deinen Plan vollständig erraten und sich verletzt fühlen [...]. (KM 21)

The narrator fears she could hurt her mother, even though she is dead. This implies that the story would not have been possible prior to the death of the mother. Similarly, Linda Anderson, in Autobiography, claims that for many autobiographers, for Barthes in Camera Lucida and Derrida in ‘Circumfession’, the death of the mother is the key impulse in writing autobiographically.
The hope of "resurrecting, reclaiming or recapturing" something of the lost relationship with the mother plays a large part in autobiographical writing. In women's autobiographies, such as Virginia Woolf's *Sketch of the Past*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on the Road* and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, the mother's death forms a central moment.

Anderson writes:

[...] the mother's death may have particular significance for the writing of autobiography. For Barthes and Derrida autobiography is on the side of the feminine and their mournful accounts of the mother's dying is also a way of preserving her body within the body of their writing. In psychoanalytical accounts of the subject, on which both Barthes and Derrida draw, the 'I' is founded on separation and the loss of the mother's body: by identifying autobiographically with the mother – and identifying autobiography with the mother – they, as it were, bleed emotionally into their texts, opening up a wound in the self which is also a space for her [...]. According to Julia Kristeva since 'I am she', it is much more difficult for the woman symbolically to 'kill' the mother and there is much more danger that she will identify with the 'dead one' who has been abandoned within herself [...] women become autobiographers against this identification with the mother and by triumphing over the threat of depression.²⁰

The mention of the mother's death more than once in *Kindheitsmuster*, situating it in 1968, suggests that this may have been an important factor in beginning the process of writing the text. According to the narrator, she began to write *Kindheitsmuster* in 1972, but she made the trip to Gorzow Wielkopolski in 1971, bringing the starting date closer to 1968. Anderson’s assertion that women write autobiography against identification with the mother, helps explain the distance the narrator tries to locate between herself and her mother. This seems necessary in order for the narrator to establish her own identity and to write autobiographically. The mother’s death also creates a distance which provides the necessary space for the writing to take place.

Anderson claims that Carolyn Steedman challenges us to see the differences between works written by women. She writes that Woolf and Hurston’s descriptions of the mother’s death evoke particular cultural settings and the details described matter:

They are resonant of both time and place and help to form subjectivity; they establish a
difference which is lost or ignored in ‘grand’ narratives of sexual difference […]. Steedman
helps us to perceive […] that the m(Other) is not just a metaphor, in other words; she is also a
social subject whose difference and specificity needs to be recognized and found a place in our
thinking.  

This kind of recognition of difference is relevant to *Kindheitsmuster*. The mother in
*Kindheitsmuster* is clearly a member of a particular cultural generation that influences her
attitudes and actions, but her difference and specificity is important to the understanding of the
portrayal of her generation in the book. Wolf is interested in the mother as a ‘metaphor’ and as a
social subject in *Kindheitsmuster*.

The narrator’s close, but complicated relationship with her mother spans the scope of the book.
Nelly is essentially ‘close’ to Charlotte, dreaming of her every night when separated from her in
the summer of 1937, too anxious to be told about her goitre operation, and laughing with her
following Nelly’s visit to Lori Tietz’s house. Nelly claims to have inherited more from Charlotte
than from Bruno Jordan and believes her to be the only one with the prerequisite for a conscience
in the aftermath of the war. She admires her belief in her children’s abilities. Charlotte puts her
daughter forward for the job of assisting the Mayor, rather than as kitchen help, in 1946. But
there are differences and difficulties. Charlotte is dubious about the outcome of the war, but
encourages co-operation with the regime and emphasizes order and cleanliness and hard work to
the exclusion of warmer instincts such as sympathy and help for others. At a crucial moment in
time, she risks never seeing her children again, in a bid to retain social standing.

Interestingly, some critics, such as Helga Kraft portray Charlotte as a kind of heroic, non-
traditional mother at a time when non-traditional motherhood was little in demand. Charlotte
was an “active breadwinner,” who “cannot suppress her criticism of Hitler, for which she was in

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fact once denounced.” Nelly, by contrast, is described as embracing Nazi ideology (almost on her own). Other critics, such as Robert C. Holub are much less positive. Holub claims Nelly, her mother and aunts are “depicted not as naïve enthusiasts or as innocent victims, but as conflicted participants in a complex social process” and:

[…] for patriarchy and male domination to continue in German society – or in any society – the cooperation and cooptation of women is essential. That women too were involved in myriad ways in the complex process of passing on and complying with fascist attitudes and values may seem a trivial assertion today, but it certainly was not a prominent theme in discussions during the three decades after the war. Wolf’s Patterns of Childhood thus contributes significantly to a transformation in the way we conceive of both fascism, our ability to come to terms with the fascist legacy, and our complicity with it.32

The narrator does not try to deny Charlotte’s complicity with fascism. She is neither “naïve enthusiast” nor “innocent victim.” The narrator seems to claim that Charlotte’s complicity is a kind of human failing. Charlotte can be neither simply commended nor denigrated.

The narrator’s portrayal of Charlotte Jordan’s complicity with fascism is related to Kindheitsmuster’s location between an inside and an outside view of fascism, and between a ‘reality’ of before and after the outcome of the war. Charlotte’s abandonment of her children is tempered by this inside/outside perspective. Her decision to stay in Landsberg can be understood by means of her sense of ‘reality’ before the end of the war. The mother is also seen from an interior/exterior perspective in relation to the child: Nelly is ‘close’ to her mother, but many of the child’s innermost emotions are concealed from her mother. Charlotte imposes a veil of ‘happiness’ on Nelly and hides the details of important issues from her. She speaks in half sentences on issues such as euthanasia, the attempt on Hitler’s life, infertility, etc., in an attempt


to shield her daughter from difficult issues, but the protective atmosphere is stifling to the curious child. Charlotte’s insistence on a happy family seems only to repress Nelly’s fears and depressive feelings and create a split self, a “Vormittags- und ein Nachmittagskind”:

Nelly ist sich darüber klar, daß sie in mehrere Kinder zerfällt, zum Beispiel in ein Vormittags- und ein Nachmittagskind. Und daß die Mutter, die das sauber gewaschene Nachmittagskind an die Hand nimmt, um mit ihm an einem ihrer seltenen freien Nachmittage konditern zu gehen, von dem Vormittagskind nicht die blasse Ahnung hat. (KM 144)

This split also prefigures the struggle the narrator undergoes in writing the autobiography. The mother opposes any dramatic exposition of sensitive issues, so the narrator must distance herself from her mother’s reticence in order to write. She feels a need to publish her story, but to do so is to turn the inside world out. This exposition of the ‘inside story’ is at once painful and cathartic and alters the meaning of these two ‘opposing’ stories. The distance established between the child and the mother allows the writing to take place. The complicated relationship with the mother, the love for and the strength gained from, as well as the difference and distance from the mother, supports the borderspace in which the autobiography can be written.

3.4. Humour and Reference to Sexuality as Essentially Related to Autobiography

Marcel Reich Ranicki designated Christa Wolf “Deutschlands humorloseste Schriftstellerin” in his essay “Macht Verfolgung kreativ?” The lack of explicit sexual reference in Wolf’s writing has also attracted critical attention. Wolf has claimed that a sexual dimension has been essential in her work from the beginning and that the sexual relationship between Rita and Manfred in Der geteilte Himmel is crucial to the narrative, though subliminal in the text. But despite her claims

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33 Marcel Reich Ranicki, “Macht Verfolgung kreativ?” in » Es geht nicht um Christa Wolf «. Der Literaturstreit im vereinten Deutschland (Hrsg.) Thomas Anz (München, 1991) p.42.
to the contrary, Wolf is generally perceived as a writer whose writing is neither humourous, nor sexually explicit. *Kindheitsmuster*, despite its obviously grave focus on complicity with fascism, is however essentially defined by humourous depictions of circumstances and individuals and has unmistakeable sexual emphasis.

As is clear from psychoanalysis, the study of childhood and adolescence is inevitably linked to an individual’s initiation into sexuality. Accordingly, when Wolf writes about her childhood and adolescent experiences, the child and teenager’s brushes with sexuality play a central part. Characteristically for Wolf, she takes a close look at the complicating factors in this story: the young child’s insatiable curiosity and impressionable nature, the limited means of procuring information on sexuality for an adolescent in the 1940s, and the sense of a child thirsty for knowledge, but frustrated by ambiguous terms. These factors often merge to provoke humourous descriptions of Nelly’s initiation into the world of sexual reference:


Nelly’s first ‘boyfriend,’ Horst Binder, is also described with humour, as a ridiculously extreme Nazi supporter and pathetically persistent suitor:

Nelly manages to be flattered by his attention, disguises the alliance to her mother and succeeds in being seen with him at an icecream parlour. This episode is clearly related with humour from a ridiculous adolescent perspective:

Sie fragte Horst Binder schüchtern, ob sie vielleicht über den Markt gehen könnten [...] Es war ihm egal, wo man ging, wenn er nur über den Tagesablauf des Führers sprechen konnte [...] ihre Gedanken schweiften[ab] zu der Frage, ob aus ihrer Klasse wohl jemand in der italienischen Eisdiele sein würde, in die sie, koste es, was es wolle, Horst Binder in seiner Jungvolkuniform mit der grünen Schnur des Jungzugführers hineinlotsen müßte [...] Sie mußte handeln, da man sich in praktischen Fragen auf Horst Binder nicht verlassen konnte. Sie bestellte zwei Portionen Malaga-Eis [...]. Sie veranlaßte Horst Binder durch eine geschickte Frage, zu zahlen [...] grüßte lässig zu den Fahrschülern [Mädchen aus ihrer Klasse] hinüber [...] und dirigierte auch Horst Binder auf seinen Stuhl. (KM 278)

The machinations at the ice cream parlour could be interpreted as having quite sinister connotations as Nelly is impressed mainly by Horst Binder’s Jungzugführer uniform. Lenka is concerned that this story tends to present her mother in an unflattering light, but the narrator is intent on reading Horst Binder’s attentions lightly and in an understated manner. The humourous description of intimacy is a common trait for women autobiographers, according to Estelle Jelinek in *Women’s Autobiography*:

Women’s self-image is projected by the very means used to distance or detach themselves from intimacy in their life stories – a variety of forms of understatement. In place of glowing narratives, women tend to write in a straightforward [...] manner about both their girlhood and adult experiences. They also write obliquely, elliptically or humorously in order to camouflage their feelings, the same techniques used to play down their professional lives. Even when they risk themselves by relating crises, usually in girlhood, it lacks that nostalgia men seem to experience [...]. Instead, the accounts of girlhood crises, while conveying their authors’ awareness of their importance in shaping their later lives, are distanced by this understated treatment.34

Wolf seems to create a sense of distance to this early relationship in her understated treatment of it, rather than recreating a hint of nostalgia, as might have been expected.

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There is also humour in the description of the pathetic groveling of the narrator’s relatives to their superiors. Onkel Alfons and Tante Liesbeth are a particularly rich source of humourous description in their attempts to please. The Bohnsacks, Onkel Alfons’ boss and wife, attend cousin Manfred’s Christening: “[…] und vor allem waren Bohnsacks doch noch gekommen, die dafür bekannt waren, daß sie keinen Spaß verstanden, und nach deren Handen dieses Monstrum von einer Zigeunerin natürlich zuallererst grapschen mußte.” (KM 107) Later, Onkel Alfons manages to evacuate Nelly’s family using Bohnsack’s truck, but the truck is seized and Alfons is flabbergasted:

Onkel Alfons Raddes Lastwagen stand nicht mehr zur Verfügung, eines Abends war er ohne ihn nach Hause gekommen: Straßen sperren, gegen sowjetische Panzerspitzen errichtet, hatten auch sein Fahrzeug aufgehalten. Wahnsinn! sagte er aufgebracht, wie soll ich bloß Bohnsacken das plausibel machen? (KM 420)

Many of the images of family members fleeing with handcarts and making arrangements for lodging and work with farmers are comical in imagery to the sixteen year old Nelly:

Nach einer heftig und hastig geführten Verhandlung verstaute sie das leichtere Gepäck auf dem Kastenwagen […] die schweren Koffer auf einem der beiden Handwagen […]. Das Bild, das sie abgaben, war lächerlich, doch darauf kam es nicht an. In Zeiten wie diesen ist der Sinn für Komik Luxus. (KM 426)

This sense of humour, accessible to the young at the time, unburdened with too much sense of loss, is in short supply. Nelly, amid the upheaval of events, can still laugh at the ridiculous attempt of the Studienrat Untermann to maintain composure in the face of an American military police arrest:

The young are fortunate enough to be indifferent to or accepting of the changes taking place. Nelly, though disoriented, does not lose hope for the future. The threat to the survival of German children is real, but Nelly is unaware of this threat at the time. The narrator mentions the suggestion that all German children be exterminated after the war, following the assumption that the "Hörigkeit zum Führer" might not be reversible (Horst Binder shoots his family and himself at the close of the war):

Während ja, als der Krieg fortschritt und gewisse unglaubliche Informationen die lange Zeit ungläubige Welt erreichten, Überlegungen angestellt wurden, ob es nicht angebracht, ja vielleicht notwendig sein würde, nach dem Kriege alle deutschen Kinder zu vernichten. (KM 246)

The young maintain their sense of humour only as they are unaware of the chilling alternatives under discussion by the occupying forces. Because of a lack of knowledge, a certain state of mind can be maintained. If the knowledge of the atrocities and Allied plans had been available, the risk of suicide and despair might have been greater. The tenuous nature of the preservation of a sense of humour at the time helps to explain why humour is so important in this narrative. Humour provides the necessary relief to the serious and grave threats to come: extensive knowledge of the reality of the Konzentrationslager at Auschwitz and elsewhere and the euthanasia program. The general awareness of these atrocities only filters through after the war. Humour fuels Wolf's point that due to a lack of information, life seemed 'normal' before the close of the war and heroic efforts at resistance were in short supply. Even as the upheaval of the Flucht progresses, the sixteen-year old Nelly is numb, but protected through her youth and family support from a complete loss of humour.

The link between humour and sexual initiation, seen earlier, does not extend to all of Nelly's experiences of a sexual nature. Her description of the incident with the exhibitionist is rife with sinister undertones. And because of the strange and unresolved nature of the incident, a lot has
been written about its significance. The narrator admits to a difficulty understanding why this episode is associated in her mind with a Jewish boy, toads, spiders and lizards:

Heikel bis heute, der Verbindung nachzugehen, die sich damals zwischen dem namenlosen Judenjungen, den Nelly durch Leo Siegmann kannte, und der weißen Schlange hergestellt haben muß. Was hat der blasse, picklige Junge mit Kröten, Spinnen und Eidechsen zu tun? Was diese wiederum mit der gläubigen fanatischen Stimme, die in jener Sonnenwendnacht vom brennenden Holzstoß her rief: >Rein wollen wir uns halten und unser Leben reifen lassen für Fahne, Führer und Volk! – Nichts, möchtest du sagen, nichts haben sie miteinander zu tun. So muß die richtige Antwort lauten, und was gäbest du darum, wenn sie auch noch wahr wäre [...] Wir wissen wenig, solange wir nicht wissen, wie dergleichen geschieht [...] daß in Nelly mit jenen Bildern nicht Haß oder Abscheu aufkam, sondern Scheu – ein Gefühl, sehr nahe den Vorstufen der Angst. (KM 187)

The narrator admits to a kind of contamination here. This may be the shocking impact of statements such as Warinski’s “Ein deutsches Mädel muß hassen können” (KM 176), which could hardly have been suggested to children without leaking into other confusing emotions in a sexually repressive system. Nelly knew little about sexuality at the time of the incident with the exhibitionist, so she does not mention the man at home. The sexually repressed atmosphere in the home drives Nelly towards associating the inexplicable with uncomfortable experiences. The association she makes between the exhibitionist and the Jewish boy seems to indicate that the narrator’s Nazi indoctrination was more successful than she admits (Nelly also cries: “Ich will keine Jüdin sein” (KM 193) at Tante Trudchens), but because the narrator insists on having felt “Scheu” not “Abscheu,” Kindheitsmuster has recently been interpreted as Wolf’s attempt at redressing the balance of the GDR’s abstract and de-personalized approach to fascism. Anke Pinkert claims that the exhibitionist story suggests that a sense of revulsion connects the images of vermin, the exhibitionist’s penis and the Jewish boy, but the reflecting commentary states something else: “Scheu.”
It is through this semantic shift from *Abscheu* to *Scheu* that Wolf negotiates her engagement with the GDR’s antifascist project revealing that the antifascist bond between critical writers and GDR state was far less immutable than commonly assumed [...].

Shame-humiliation (“Scheu”), Pinkert claims, is linked with love and identification and does not renounce the object permanently. Contempt-disgust (“Abscheu”) is linked with individuation and hate and renounces the object permanently:

These two different psychological models of anti-Semitism provide the sites where Wolf’s text contests the party’s legitimacy [...]. Wolf revises anti-Semitism by splitting off disgust – not *Abscheu* but *Scheu*. This yields empathy […]. A model of anti-Semitism built on the affect of shyness/shame rejects the idea of a radical breach between perpetrator and victims […]. This elegiac search for residual empathetic potential invites the reader’s identification with both the perpetrators and the victims.

Pinkert claims many have read the book, with the text’s exposure of the subject’s complicity with fascism, as a “difficult and fragile, yet successful subject-formation, overlooking that Wolf’s critique of subjugation remains somewhat complicitous itself.” Pinkert agrees with Hans Mayer that it is significant that the text claims to conceal the known truth. “Alles kann und soll nicht gesagt werden, darüber muß Klarheit herrschen” (KM 170) is read as a statement that the text will conceal the truth: “There is something puzzling about this figure of speech of *talking about not telling the known truth*, something puzzling about a book […] produced under the conditions of censorship, in which the protagonist confesses that she knows but will not disclose the truth […].” Pinkert reads this statement as a means of confusing the line between conforming and transgressing for the GDR censor. This sense of concealing and revealing the ‘truth’ is also reminiscent of a Church confession box, where the ‘confession’ takes place behind closed doors in a limited fashion.

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36 Ibid., p.30.
37 Ibid., p.31.
38 Ibid.
Kindheitsmuster makes clear that it is situated in the interspace between speech and silence:

[...] labors of doubt themselves had a tendency to create a false candor that absorbed the dissatisfactions and excused inhuman practices [...]. Kindheitsmuster shows that the underlying logic of this duplicity was not so much one of conscious concealment, lying or betrayal, as the media tended to construct it after 1989 [...] but that the sustenance of doubt rested on the continuous, more or less unconscious, performance of self-deception.  

The self-deception Pinkert uncovers seems to include deception about the repercussions of fascism and antifascism, the GDR censor, the GDR system, etc. The self-deception is extended with the fear that prevents the protagonist from 'telling the known truth':

Wolf protects the real existing socialist system [...] by assuming the role of a scapegoat [...] by constructing her autobiographical characters as defective selves [...] too fearful, too subservient/obedient [...]. Although Wolf's protagonist imagines her fear as the obstacle which interrupts the circle of pleasure from closing, she actually finds a perverse pleasure in this displeasure, in the repeated, circular movement around the unattainable object.

Pinkert quotes Slavoj Zizek's For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor:

"[...] one talks a lot about the "projection" of guilt onto others [...] perhaps we should reverse the relationship and conceive the very act of assuming guilt as an escape from the real traumatism – we don't only escape from guilt but also escape into guilt [...]" Pinkert claims that Wolf's critique of GDR antifascism "engendered a particularly symbiotic [...] relationship between dissident writer and state: Wolf needed the state to allow her to point to its wrongdoings and the state needed Wolf to learn some truth about itself." Kindheitsmuster "displays the insight that power is not simply what we are opposed to but what we depend on for our existence."

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39 Ibid, p.32.
40 Ibid, p.34.
41 Ibid, p.33.
42 Ibid, p.34.
43 Ibid.
Kindheitsmuster seems to expose the subject's complicity with fascism, though remaining compliticious itself, but Pinkert's claim that the GDR State needed the dissident writer to learn some truth about itself, is implausible. It is unlikely that the GDR tolerated Wolf's critique of antifascism other than because it could not be prevented (without embarrassment). It is not likely that the State learned any truth about itself from dissidents, as it was essentially deaf to opposition. On the other hand, it is plausible that Wolf learned from the State that the abstract, depersonalized discourse on fascism was not achieving its goal of encouraging Germans to come to terms with their past. Wolf began from a position of supporting the GDR's antifascist program (in principle), but ultimately disagreed with it. She finds it difficult to break the cycle of seeming to agree with problematic GDR policies, because she fears distancing herself from close antifascist allies.

Pinkert's argument that the pleasure of fear, the escape into guilt and false candor are elements of Wolf's self-deception, is also problematic. After the peaceful dissolution of the GDR State, Pinkert can maintain that the relationship between dissident writers and the State was mutable, but the fear that maintains complicity to a State like the GDR or the Third Reich, appears as self-deception only after the fact.

Despite the perverse pleasure and the shyness/shame between perpetrators and victims of fascism, it is clear that Wolf uses sexuality as a means of portraying an important link in Kindheitsmuster between the perpetrators and victims of fascism. Sexuality and humour also play a large part in shaping the identity of the child that becomes the narrator in Kindheitsmuster. Kindheitsmuster focuses on a kind of rudimentary material, very much in tune with the texture of the experience of the time and demonstrating the link between autobiography and a kind of raw emotion, associated with early childhood and fundamental instinctual experiences. The humour
and sexual reference emphasized in *Kindheitsmuster* strongly reinforces the vibrant, rough-hewn texture of the search for identity in autobiography.

3.5. Lenka: The Generational Legacy

Lenka’s presence during the writing of *Kindheitsmuster* has a powerful effect on the second and third layers of the work (the trip to G. in 1971 and the writing of the manuscript between 1972-1975). Though she cannot feature in Wolf’s original autobiographical story as such, she comments on its representation and she is critical to the impetus in writing the narrative. Wolf feels compelled to formulate her story about National Socialism in *Kindheitsmuster* for a ‘new generation’ and wants to deliberate on the ‘genetic susceptibility’ of Lenka’s generation towards recreating the conditions of racism and callousness prevalent in Nazi Germany. Lenka also acts as a relief figure to allow the reader a sharper look at Nelly in different contexts, growing up in a different time frame, with different parents. As a relief figure, she has both ‘authentic’ and fictional qualities. Lenka has an ‘authentic’ dimension as the teenage daughter of an autobiographical figure, but she also ‘represents her generation’ and appears to be mentioned, at times, as an indicator of a younger generation. The portrayal of Lenka is critical to the outcome of *Kindheitsmuster*’s central question of whether ‘genetic susceptibility’ can be avoided or whether there can be real *change* in a person’s lifetime or from generation to generation. Wolf’s interest in issues of generation in *Kindheitsmuster* (the text places obvious emphasis on three or four generations of a family) echoes a more recent, specific interest in generation, tradition, evolution and genetics, discussed by Sigrid Weigel in *Genea-Logik.*
The many different strands of the understanding of the term generation lead Weigel to review interesting, underrepresented links between the fields of literary interpretation and sociological, medical, scientific and popular discussion of the concept:

Doch keinen Begriff teilen sich so viele und unterschiedliche Fachwissenschaften, wie den der Generation. Das Stichwort >Generation< hat einen angestammten Platz in so verschiedenen Disziplinen wie Anthropologie, Soziologie, Biologie, Medizin, Psychologie, Geschichtswissenschaft, Pädagogik etc. – ganz abgesehen vom populären Sprachgebrauch in Feuilleton und Werbung einerseits und der Verwendung als terminus technicus in Labors und Werkstätten anderseits, wo die Abfolge von Experimenten und Modellen in Generationen erfaßt wird.44

Particularly interesting is Weigel’s discussion of “Generationsdiskurs und Identitätspolitik” and the understanding of generation “als Titel – wenn nicht Label – einer Jahrgangsgruppe, […] für die eine bestimmte historische Erfahrung oder Situation mentalitäts – und stilbildend ist.” 45

Weigel mentions the ludicrous, recent generational clusterings, lurking in the shadow of the vocal 1968 generation:


These ‘generations’ change names and definitions very quickly and have a confused sense of self. Weigel quotes Florian Illies’ Generation Golf: “Wir haben, obwohl kaum erwachsen, schon jetzt einen merkwürdigen Hang zur Retrospektive, und manche von uns schreiben schon mit 28 Jahren ein Buch über ihre eigene Kindheit, im eitlen Glauben, daran lasse sich die Geschichte einer ganzen Generation erzählen.” 47

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46 Ibid.
The confusion echoes the confusion of the "junge Generation" of the *Gruppe 47* after 1945, who tried to rebuff their heritage so vehemently. Weigel sees this 'schuldlöse,' "weiße Generation" as much more culpable than its name would suggest. Many of its proponents (Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch) were in their thirties at the end of the war. The notion of splitting off from a heritage is also highly suspect and led to a further revision of the question of guilt as the next generation tried to define its identity:

Das Bild der jungfräulichen Kopfbildung für diese junge Generation trennt die Nabelschnur einer eigenen Herkunft aus dem Krieg durch, um sich derart als Beginn einer neuen, nicht gezeugten Genealogie zu definieren [...]. Vor dem Horizont dieses Diskurs wird die 68er-Bewegung als deren Nachhall und nachgetragene, forcierte Auseinandersetzung zwischen den Generationen lesbar. Stand der Aufbruch und Protest 1968 u.a. unter dem Titel eines Generationskonflikts, so wurde die ältere Generation der Kriegsteilnehmer hier explizit mit ihrer Position als Täter konfrontiert [...]. Insofern die Kinder sich darin selbst als Opfer der »Täter-Väter« begreifen, sind sie an die Stelle der realen Opfer der NS-Geschichte getreten und haben auf diese Weise zur wiederholten Verdrängung der historischen Opfer beigetragen.**

The question of guilt and lineage/genealogy is clearly an issue in the understanding of generation here, although the term 'generation' is always tenuous. Weigel writes: "Seit den 80er Jahren [...] wurde die Geschichte dann zunehmend im Narrativ der zweiten und dritten Generation entworfen, d.h. nach Generationen erzählt und gezählt. Dabei läßt sich eigentlich nichts weniger zählen als Generationen, da doch keine 'natürlich' gegebenen Grenzen zwischen den Generationen existieren." The second generation, Christa Wolf’s generation, interestingly, spans those born at the end of the 1920s, who were children during National Socialism, to those born immediately after the war: “Die zweite Generation ist eher eine Metapher für die Kinder der Täter, Mitläufer und der Überlebenden im weitesten Sinne." The second and third generations are defined by a kind of "Erbsünde" which Weigel claims has less to do with the events of the war than with the "Trauer- und Schuldabwehr" of the war generation. In the 1980s, psychoanalysts diagnosed “transgenerationelle Traumatisierung,” a trauma which seemed to

**Ibid, p.100.
have skipped a generation and exhibited traumatic symptoms long after the usual time frame for such symptoms had elapsed. Here, Weigel claims, the term generation has different connotations:

Während der traditionelle geschichtsphilosophische Begriff der Generation den Schnittpunkt von Kontinuum und Periodisierung markiert, vereinigt die Figur des 'Transgenerationellen' dagegen Bruch und Genealogie in sich: nicht als Bruch in der Genealogie, sondern vielmehr als Vorstellung einer Art Vererbung des 'Zivilisationsbruch' und seiner Folgen. 49

The question of inheritance of guilt or "Zivilisationsbruch" is critical to the question Wolf asks in *Kindheitsmuster* in her emphasis on the issue of change and her close observation of Lenka's generation for signs of continuity. Inevitably, she finds both change and continuity. The changes are encouraging, but the continuity is a cause for concern.

Some of the changes are evident in the contrast between Lenka's younger, freer manner and her mother's tendency towards weariness. Lenka interrupts the 'memoir' tendency of the first level in *Kindheitsmuster*, with its setting in pre-war times, much as Rosalind Polkowski interrupts Herbert Beerenbaum's style as she attempts to assist him in writing his memoirs in Monika Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs*. 50 Lenka's reaction, commentary and inclusion are also refreshingly unusual features in autobiographical writing. Estelle Jelinek maintains that "few autobiographers write about their children" but for some women writers "the emotional and physical needs of children are essential aspects of their life studies." 51 Wolf's inclusion of Lenka supports her claim to an interest in education and young people as a deep source of strength for a writer. Lenka's inclusion also validates Wolf's insistence on having learnt from her children and her emphasis on the positive aspects of this experience for a writer:

Mir war immer klar: Wenn ich zu wählen gehabt hätte, etwa zwischen meinen Kindern und dem Schreiben, ich hätte mich immer für die Kinder entschieden. Das ist für manche Autorinnen

49 Ibid, p. 102.
50 Monika Maron, *Stille Zeile Sechs* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991).
Lenka’s presence in *Kindheitsmuster*, then, disrupts an undesirable wallowing in a very distant-seeming, inaccessible past, a kind of nostalgia often regrettably associated with autobiography. Lenka’s personal questions also help to reinforce Wolf’s point that this highly unusual time had an everyday quality. Lenka’s presence lends a different dimension to the autobiography, accentuating the ‘authenticity’ of the daughter’s critical and incongruous commentary and the immediacy of this commentary as a sounding board for the narrator’s dialogue with herself. Despite *Kindheitsmuster*’s rootedness, in some respects, in a tradition of confessional literature, Lenka interrupts this tendency and inverts the tradition. Lenka’s most obvious advantage is her aloofness and indifference, an intangible carefree attitude which the narrator also experienced in 1945. This attitude is liberating and amusing, yet at times, frustrating and ultimately short-lived. The older narrator appears, to some degree, irritated, yet tolerant of Lenka’s indifference: “Lenka, nicht sonderlich interessiert an der Ehe ihrer Großeltern, hätte doch aufgehört bei dem Wort ’Vagabund’ […]” (KM 170) “Lenka, in diesem mühseligen Alter zwischen Kindheit und Erwachsensein, will nicht mit fremden und kann nicht ohne eigene Geheimnisse leben.” (KM 111) Lenka’s attitude towards parental advice is interestingly defiant. In a note pinned to her door, she writes: “Ja – ich habe wieder nicht Mathematik gemacht, ich habe wieder nicht mein Zimmer aufgeräumt, wieder nicht geduscht. Könnt ihr nicht begreifen, daß mir ganz andere Sachen wichtig sind?” (KM 456) Not the sense of these words, but the tone and the questioning seem to interest the narrator.

53 The narrator’s dialogue with herself in *Kindheitsmuster* has a parallel in Wolf’s “Selbstinterview” in reference to *Nachdenken über Christa T*. “Selbstinterview” was published separately to *Nachdenken über Christa T*. Here Wolf seems to incorporate the self-dialogue into the text achieving a more direct self-probing.
The narrator also takes note that, despite her haphazard manner, Lenka takes some issues very seriously. She insists on a “Liste der Wohltaten [...] >Essen< [...] >Schlafen<, >Lieben<. (Lenka beantragte, Lieben an die Spitze zu stellen [...] )” (KM 436) She also persists in asking questions about her parents’ priorities:


Lenka does not understand the answer she provokes, but her questioning elicits a vitriolic attack from the narrator’s husband, H:


Although Lenka is often a catalyst in the provocation of the narrator’s thought processes, she sometimes introduces interesting concepts herself. She claims that she has identified “das Pseudo am Leben,” for example. She is getting used to the idea “[...] daß alles Pseudo ist, am Ende auch ich selbst. Pseudo-Menschen [...] die sich darüber keine Gedanken machen.” (KM 301) This “Pseudo” notion of lack of agency is one that the narrator mentions a number of times as it seems to echo the lack of agency of the war generation and questions whether any generation can avoid generational patterns and is active in preventing atrocities such as those in Auschwitz or Vietnam.
The contrast between Lenka’s generation and Nelly’s lingers perpetually in the background of the text. Lenka asks: “Warum lieben eigentlich Eltern ihre Kinder?” (KM 171) and the narrator wonders when Nelly asked similar questions: “Wann ist Nelly auf solche Fragen gestoßen? Über die Maßen spät. Elternliebe war unantastbar wie auch Gattenliebe.” (KM 172) The similarities between Lenka and Nelly are sometimes evident, but the adult narrator has lost many of Lenka’s traits: “Sie (Lenka) sagt nicht, was sie nicht sagen will, im Gegensatz zu dir; Nelly in Lenkas Alter, hat auch kein Wort gesagt, das sie nicht sagen wollte. Es wäre des Überlegens wert, wann man anfängt, die ungewollten Wörter zu sagen.” (KM 238) Lenka, with youth and flexibility, is much quicker to accept the desecration of the German cemetery in Gorzow Wielkopolski than her mother, but the narrator follows suit:

Jetzt sahst du den Grund für Bestürzung und Trauer; Sie galt nicht diesen Toten, die deutsche Namen getragen hatten, sondern jenen Lebenden, Überlebenden, die hergehen mussten […] die Gräber niederzutrampeln, weil ein Haß wie der […] nicht einzugrenzen, nicht vor Gräbern einzuhalten ist. – Selten ist dir so wie in der halben Stunde auf dem alten deutschen Friedhof in L., heute G., die vollständige Umkehr deiner Gefühle bewußt geworden […]. Gefühle, die sich frei und ungezwungen auf der Seite der einstmal ›anderen‹ bewegen […]. Lenka, das sahst du an ihrem Gesicht, brauchte keine Nachhilfe, um zu verstehen. (KM 423)

Despite the advantages of youthful exuberance and flexibility, Lenka does not comprehend many of the intricacies of her mother’s past. She judges her grandfather harshly, lacking personal experience of challenging situations. On hearing Bruno Jordan’s postwar assessment: “Was haben die mit uns gemacht,” Lenka is critical. She will not accept a denial of responsibility from her grandfather who had been active in the war effort:

The narrator is torn between approving of Lenka’s desire for honesty and knowing that the truth is more complicated than Lenka’s assessment. The narrator seems to believe that neither wholly blaming nor wholly exonerating figures such as Bruno Jordan can explain how the atrocities in Auschwitz could have happened or prevent them from occurring again. The narrator takes on the difficult role in *Kindheitsmuster* of withholding the kind of judgement that apportions blame or exonerates individuals, while nonetheless attempting to address the question of how fascism could have thrived in Germany in the 1940s.

Lenka also makes the generation gap clear and represents her ‘postwar generation’ in her lack of understanding of the significance of knowing about leading figures of National Socialism. She innocently asks: “Dieser Eichmann, fragte Lenka neulich, wer ist denn das eigentlich. Ihr verstummtet. Dann verlangt du, ihr Geschichtsbuch zu sehen [...]. Der faschistischen Diktatur in Deutschland sind fast hundert Seiten gewidmet. Der Name Adolf Eichmann [...] wird nicht genannt.” (KM 316) Here Wolf is clearly criticizing the complacency of the GDR’s antifascist program. The State has assumed that fascism has been suppressed in the GDR without paying sufficient attention to the education of the postwar generation and the blatant ability of fascism to regenerate. This oversight is a factor in the resurgence of fascist tendencies, Nazi songs and a lack of respect for Auschwitz, which became evident in the 1970s. Lenka also seems naively to hold the sentiment that “damals habe man im Gegensatz zu heute etwas erlebt.” (KM 427) Her sense of her parents having ‘experienced something’ is representative of the lack of awareness of the gravity of wartime events and of Lenka’s perspective from within the genealogy of the supporters of fascism, not the perspective of its victims.

The narrator seems most frustrated by Lenka’s response to her mother’s attempt at answering an important question about happiness:

The narrator is disturbed by the patterns of aging, physically and mentally, by the decline of the older generation as the younger generation blooms:

Du weinst um alles, was einmal vergessen sein wird – nicht erst nach dir und mit dir zusammen, sondern solange du da bist und von dir selbst. Um das Schwinden der hochgespannten Erwartungen. Um den allmählichen, doch unaufhaltsamen Verlust jener Verzauberung, die Dinge und Menschen bisher gesteigert hat und die das Älterwerden ihnen entzieht. Um das Nachlassen der Spannung, die aus Übertreibung kommt und die Wahrheit, Wirklichkeit, Fülle gibt. Um das Schrumpfen der Neugier. Die Schwächung der Liebesfähigkeit [...]. Das Ersticken ungebändigter Hoffnung [...]. Die Unfähigkeit überrascht zu werden [...]. (KM 405)

This litany of losses and failures emphasizes the differences between younger and older generations, but for all the sadness about the losses in aging, the ‘aging’ narrator is conscious of a sense of control in the narrative. As Augustine and Rousseau also emphasize, the narrator of an autobiography may decline and wither, but the autobiographer has the power to shape the personal history and create the work for posterity. Wolf is unusual in that she tries to accommodate a new generation in her autobiography. She tries to learn from the younger generation as well as recognising the more traditional notion that the new generation must learn the lessons of the previous generation. The narrator in Kindheitsmuster takes note of links and departures between herself and her daughter and is open to reappraisal, particularly with respect to Lenka’s unbiased approach to the Polish people on their trip to Gorzow Wielkopolski. The narrator is, at first, reticent and reflective about Lenka and Lutz’s interpretation of ‘the Polish’:

The narrator is generally wary of the Polish, unsure of the reception she will receive in Poland. She is surprised when the hotel receptionist and a police officer treat them cordially. She is unsure of her exact relationship with the natives of her hometown of L., now G. Friendships with Russian and Jewish (also American and British) writers and readers, seem more clear, but her relationship to the Polish is uncertain. Ultimately the narrator’s instinct is to take her cue from her daughter and oppose Lutz’s ‘scientific’ assessment of the paltry Polish “Lebensstandard.”

The inclusion of Lenka, appreciation of her attitude to the Polish and her critical approach towards the war, serve to underline the positive relationship the narrator enjoys with her daughter, a more open and equal relationship than that of Nelly and Charlotte Jordan. Christel Zahlmann, in her psychological analysis of *Kindheitsmuster*, believes the mother is seen as an internalized power, an “Übemutter,” who elicits fear and the craving for love, and who also promotes inferiority complexes and insecurity. Zahlmann claims even adult daughters harbour a tendency and yearning for a harmonious agreement as an attempt to overcome their experience of the loss of the initial symbiotic relationship with the mother. She claims that the mothers in Wolf’s works stand out strongly and play centre stage, whereas the fathers remain in the background.

Charlotte Jordan is not a ‘traditional’ mother. She is not solely concerned with “Kinder, Küche, Kirche,” as Helga Kraft has claimed of many mothers at the time. She does not embody the characteristics of an imagined feminity at that time, such as passivity, self-sacrifice and

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54 Christel Zahlmann, *Christa Wolfs Reise »ins Tertiär«* (Würzburg, 1986).
dependency.” But although Charlotte criticizes Hitler, she does not generally tend toward the unconventional. She communicates a negative view of the body to Nelly, in keeping with a generational tendency at the time. She takes a dismissive, practical approach towards a miscarriage that she suffers and Nelly can hear her rejecting her husband’s sexual advances after the war. Kraft claims: “The mother is bound to a system that promotes a negative image of the female body and its desires, and such repression is transmitted to the girl.” The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* is conscious of her mother’s repressed attitude to the female body, and she notes that Lenka (aged fourteen in 1971) seems to have avoided this fate. Here Lenka seems to break successfully generational chains and avoids her mother and grandmother’s negative image of the body. In Lenka, Wolf finds a positive outcome to *Kindheitsmuster*’s question of whether change is possible: Lenka can avoid undesirable inhibitions, she can avoid her uncle’s prejudice towards the Polish way of life and can escape her mother’s profession of belief in Nazi and Communist systems at a young age.

Despite the positive influence of Lenka in *Kindheitsmuster* and the interesting generational contrast she provides, her position lies outside the essential experience of childhood and memory work of the text. She lies outside the primary autobiographical level of *Kindheitsmuster* and her influence is limited by Wolf’s reluctance to portray any person other than an “ich” in a sustained manner in her writing (Wolf claims the need to protect her family from public exposure). Lenka provides contrast and diversion (*Ablenkung*), but in *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf moves ultimately towards self-representation and the self-analytical function of autobiography. She also moves towards the questioning of the conventions of autobiographical writing itself.

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3.6. *Kindheitsmuster*: Inverting the Tradition

*Kindheitsmuster* is often seen as a text that challenges not only the notions of generational guilt and generational change, but also the writing process of autobiography. The focus on pronouns, naming and self-conscious language has often been mentioned as a characteristic of Wolf’s autobiographical enterprise. Michael Jopling claims that *Kindheitsmuster* “resembles a fictional treatment of the theoretical consensus on autobiography that has become prevalent in recent years.”\(^7\) Paramount to this notion is the suspicion of language and the focus on voice:

[...] the text echoes recent autobiography theory in its self-conscious, interpenetrating “erzählende” and “erzählte” voices. [...] autobiography begins with self-colloquy. The autobiographer is not simply writing about the self [...] but writing to the self in the internal vocative mode."\(^8\)

Jopling claims that *Kindheitsmuster*’s opening line, Faulkner’s “Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd,” seems to call the autobiographical enterprise into question by highlighting the ‘presence’ of the past and the instability of memory. The often quoted: “sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen,” (KM 11) introduces the question of the exasperated “Wer spricht?” which frames Wolf’s *Kein Ort. Nirgendes*. The reader, Jopling claims, comes to realize that the “du” referred to is the narrator and “the uncertain location of the self is to be the subject of the text.”\(^9\) The mention of grammatical reference indicates the “theoretical discursivity” of the text: “[...] eine fatale Veränderung der grammatischen Bezüge. Ich, du, sie, in Gedanken ineinanderschwimmend, sollen im ausgesprochenen Satz einander entfremdet werden.” (KM 11)

\(^7\) Michael Jopling, *Re-placing the Self*, op. cit., p.237.
\(^8\) Ibid, p.238.
\(^9\) Ibid, p.240.
The focus on the use or non-use of the “ich” has noticeable connotations for Jopling:

The alienation from the “ich” recalls its characterization as a “grammatical fiction” in Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon* where the use of the first person singular is presented as an act of rebellion against the prevailing and mendacious “wir” of communist ideology. Wolf’s use of clashing second and third person forms is similar in that it draws attention to her avoidance of the “ich”, which becomes the text’s unifying goal and as such prompted condemnation for “Ich-Fazination” [...].

The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* refers to her childhood self in the third person, as Nelly, and this naming process is strangely artificial: “der Name, der hier gelten soll.” Wolf tries to clarify this choice in “Erfahrungsmuster”:


Sandra Frieden also sees Wolf’s deconstruction of the system of the conventions of pronoun reference as the most significant of her departures from expected form:

Within our framework of communication, the literary text itself is narrated in a primary discourse between author as sender and reader as receiver [...] conventionally an “I” and a “you” conversing about a she/he [...]. Wolf deconstructs this system by not referring to herself as “I” until the final pages of the book: she addresses both her writing self and the remembering self from 1971 as “you” [...] the use of “we” is, of course, ambiguous [...] “you” and others of her generation, “you” and the reader, and finally, people in general [...]. Wolf’s use of “you” for self-address startles and imposes itself on the reader [...] the “you” [...] leaves free the pronoun “I” to serve at a different level [...]. Wolf problematizes reference at the outset, both thematically and structurally.

The problematizing of reference with the unconventional use of pronouns is accompanied by a growing suspicion that language cannot represent experience, a common characteristic of recent autobiographical writing, evidenced, on a simple level, in the changing of once familiar names, Landsberg is Gorzow Wielkopolski, “Muster” is “monstrum.” Nazi terminology seems unreal.

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60 Ibid.
because some of the more ominous terms, such as, *Konzentrationslager*, Auschwitz and *Endlösung*, only gain meaning after the end of the war. Jopling reads this suspicion of language as a wider attempt to move beyond language:

In attempting to recapture a pre-linguistic state of innocence, Wolf, Weiss and Canetti all try paradoxically to move beyond language. Of course all of these writers play on the irony that such insights can only be communicated linguistically [...]. The text is full of instances of self-doubt, where the narrator loses confidence in language’s capacity effectively to render experience.\(^{63}\)

As the text moves towards its conclusion, Jopling feels that the sense of “Riß” “will prevent the expected Proustian reconciliation of Nelly and narrator […] yet at the end of the text the two selves do come together, if reluctantly. This both confirms and undermines the narrator’s conviction that identity is a dynamic process, rather than a fixed goal […] the text overcomes “die Schwierigkeit “ich” zu sagen” and concludes with a tentative acceptance of “die Grenzen des Sagbaren”[...].”\(^{64}\)

Das Kind, das in mir verkrochen war – ist es hervorgekommen? [...] Und die Vergangenheit, die noch Sprachregelung verfügen, die erste Person in eine zweite und dritte spalten konnte – ist ihre Vormacht gebrochen? Werden die Stimmen sich beruhigen?
Ich weiß es nicht. (KM 549)

The question of the interpretation of the text’s ending is important to Wolf’s goal of self-representation in autobiography. Anna Kuhn observes that many critics have read *Kindheitsmuster*’s ending as a failure to synthesize her two selves, but believes this should not be seen as a shortcoming, but “as a courageous confession that her self-alienation has not yet been completely overcome.”\(^{65}\) By leaving the process open, Wolf invites readers to confront their own childhoods. Wolf’s final words also reflect on the *process* as the end in itself or as Shoshana Felman puts it, a story that must become a story:

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\(^{63}\) Michael Jopling, *Re-placing the Self*, op. cit., p.246.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, p.254.
\(^{65}\) Anna Kuhn, *Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision*, op. cit., p.99.
I will suggest that none of us, as women, has, as yet, precisely, an autobiography. Trained to see ourselves as objects […] estranged to ourselves, we have a story […] that, in other words, is not a story, but must become a story.66

Kindheitsmuster is an autobiography that deviates from expected form, in its self-conscious use of language and questioning of autobiographical conventions. It evades the one-time mainstays of the definition of autobiography: verifiability, autobiographical intent and referential authority.

Sandra Frieden explains how the force of these terms have diminished following Roy Pascal’s discovery that “truth” is tempered by the imagination:

Once Roy Pascal and his successors began to see autobiographical “truth” as tempered by imaginative (or even unconscious) design, autobiographical writings became subject in part […] to statements regarding works of fiction, so that verifiability was relativized as a defining characteristic of autobiography. Wimsatt and Beardsley’s declaration of the indeterminacy and irrelevance of authorial intent for works of fiction had implications for autobiography as well […] and the historical identity behind autobiographical referential authority has exploded under deconstructionist and linguistic dynamiting: Jacques Derrida questions the system in which referential authority functions as a term; and Emile Benveniste’s linguistic analyses posit the “I” of written discourse as an “empty form” constituted at any moment by the discourse in which it occurs.67

Wolf circumvents most of the traditional prerequisites of verifiability, intent and referential authority, by referring to the text as a novel (it has already been noted that Wolfgang Türkis claims that no text in German between 1977 and 1981 designated itself as autobiography68), yet claiming it is autobiographical, and by writing in the third person. This third person autobiographical mode is increasingly common and is often seen as support for Philippe Lejeune’s claim that autobiography has always depended on distance: “The first person, then,

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always conceals a hidden third person, and in this sense every autobiography is by definition indirect.\textsuperscript{69}

Wolf’s notion of the third person concealing a first person is an inversion of the autobiographical tradition, as conventional form dictates the use of first person narration which may then be perceived to conceal a third person narrative. Though undoubtedly outside the tradition in its third person narration, interruption of autobiographical chronology, its controversial inclusion of some of the details of the writing process and its questioning of the functioning of language and memory, \textit{Kindheitsmuster} also displays many conventional characteristics. It clings to chronological order in Nelly’s life story. The reader is warned that details about individuals will be provided in chronological order: “Mehr nicht über Fraulein Dr. Strauch, noch nicht.” (KM 290) Wolf’s depiction of childhood transgressions, the important role of the mother for the child, the emphasis on the theme of sexual initiation and the perspective of the aging narrator ‘restaging’ the life, are patterns reminiscent of the autobiographical tradition. It is clear that Wolf not only departs from the autobiographical tradition, but depends on it for artistic creation and inversion. Wolf weaves the pattern of autobiographical tradition into the fabric of inversion in \textit{Kindheitsmuster}.


If Christa Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968) can be construed as an indirect account of the years 1951 to 1963, and *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) relates autobiographical experience from the years 1929 to 1947, *Ein Tag im Jahr* (2003) can be read as the culmination of an autobiographical project providing autobiographical testimony to the years 1960 to 2000, albeit in a radical, interrupted form. Wolf’s release of each year’s journal entry suggests, on the one hand, a harking back to an essentially disused and less engaging (less fictional) genre than Wolf’s prior autobiographical narrative form, indicating respect for the preservation of the everyday experience of journal writing as “ein zuverlässiger Stützpfeiler für das Gedächtnis.” On the other hand, the journal text ‘unintended for publication’ is described on the cover as Wolf’s ‘most personal’ work to date and focuses on an extreme form of personal revelation “mit seinen problematischen Zügen, mit Irrtümern und Fehlern” in the detail of everyday description. Given Wolf’s penchant for reading journals by women writers in recent history, such as those of Günterrode, Sachs, Nin, Langgässer and Woolf. Wolf seems to see *Ein Tag im Jahr* partially as a historical deposition, a provision for posterity, a position Günter Grass also claims he has been manoeuvred into in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel* (2006). This is a

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notion that, on a superficial level, accounts for many of the reasons authors cite for writing autobiography. This provision of an account for future generations, Wolf writes: “Von einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt an [...] sich selbst historisch zu sehen” can also be read in a more compelling light, as a version of what Laura Marcus terms the ‘insider quality’ of autobiography, attractive to contemporary readers. Wolf is aware of a limited amount of time available for “Zeitzeugen,” hence there is a ‘historical’ dimension to Ein Tag im Jahr, albeit a ‘literary historical’ dimension, but it is also true that readers have been exposed to many and varied retrospective accounts of the time 1960-2000 in Germany. The appeal of Wolf’s journal, published in 2003, may therefore lie in the more contemporary ‘insider quality’ to the text.

Ein Tag im Jahr’s tedious journal format and compulsive breakfast and weather references often mean that the text seems two-dimensional, in comparison to Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster as semi-fictional, multi-layered, provocative reading experiences. Ein Tag im Jahr does not seem to invert the journal writing tradition as Christa T. does for biography and Kindheitsmuster for autobiography, reminding the reader that form is very important for the transmission of meaning. Ein Tag im Jahr is also not traditional journal writing with daily progression and suspense in an account such as the anonymously written Eine Frau in Berlin. Ein Tag im Jahr takes on different goals, seeming to aim at wider historical time frames and demanding an amount of deductive (detective) work (and psychoanalytical work on the detail selected) on the part of the

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5 Laura Marcus, Auto/biographical Discourses. Theory, Criticism, Practice (Manchester, 1994) p.5
6 Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20 April bis 22 Juni 1945 Anonyma mit einem Nachwort von Kurt W. Marek (Frankfurt am Main, 2003).
7 Christa Wolf, Ein Tag im Jahr, op. cit., pp. 587 and 559: Wolf refers to her penchant for “Dick-Francis-Krimis” and the “Kommissar-Beck-Serie” and her general interest in detective stories, though she claims
reader, delving into the history of the events taking place in the time between journal entries, events that Wolf refers to obliquely. In this sense, *Ein Tag im Jahr* functions fully only if the reader is aware of the events of the years 1960-2000 in an intense manner and is sensitive to the references to Wolf’s involvement in conflicts in the GDR in the 1970s and the literary debates in the German media in 1990 and 1993. Similar to the premise of writing a biography of Christa Wolf, as Jörg Magenau does in 2002, the publication of *Ein Tag im Jahr* is dependent on the assumption that most readers are cognizant with the laden significance of Wolf’s texts, pre- and post-Wende, and with the fact that critical reports of Wolf’s political activities and statements have frequently been published in German (and international) newspapers. *Ein Tag im Jahr* also acts as a personal perspective and discrete inversion of Jörg Magenau’s portrait in *Christa Wolf Eine Biographie* (2002). It seems likely that Magenau’s portrayal of Wolf as a cult symbol and living legend precipitated Wolf’s publication of ‘authentic’ documents from the period concerned, in order to tell a different ‘story’ to the one Magenau puts forward.

An issue familiar to autobiographical criticism arises with Wolf’s claim to ‘authenticity’ and the reader’s inevitable pondering on the degree of manipulation possible in such a project. Wolf claims in the Preface to *Ein Tag im Jahr* that the journal is to present “Aufzeichnungen [...] in denen das »Ich« kein Kunst-Ich ist, sich ungeschützt darstellt und auslieft – auch jenen Blicken, die nicht von Verständnis und Sympathie geleitet sind.” And she claims only minor changes were made to the original texts:

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she could not write a crime story, as she is unable to comprehend the mindset of a killer, in her interview with Hanns-Bruno Kammertöns and Stephan Lebert in *Die Zeit* 40, 2005.


An der Authentizität der Texte habe ich festgehalten. Leichte Kürzungen wurden vorgenommen. In einigen Fällen mußten Sätze aus Gründen des Personenschutzes gestrichen werden.\textsuperscript{10}

Given the political controversies that have accompanied Wolf’s literary output for many years, it seems improbable that inflammatory ideology might not have been edited out of \textit{Ein Tag im Jahr} and mitigating commentary added. The notion of an “Ich” that is “kein Kunst-Ich” seems to defy logic. Ultimately it is the persistence of the insatiable search for the ‘truth’ that readers of personal texts undertake that is made explicit in Wolf’s tantalizing claims of “leichte Kürzungen” in the Preface to \textit{Ein Tag im Jahr}. The notion of finding the ‘truth’ in reading about the individual’s self-representation, meets its limit and reveals itself as impossible in the question of ‘authenticity’ or ‘editing’ in personal literature. Personal writing usually entails a claim towards authenticity, yet as ‘personal’ literature, it has always been edited. It depends on a suspension of disbelief for a limited time on the part of the reader allowing the reader to be drawn in and immersed in the text in a specific way, as many critics have described.\textsuperscript{11} Philippe Lejeune in “The Autobiographical Pact (bis),” refers to the issue of ‘truth’ in autobiography. As discussed in Chapter 1, he writes that he believes that “we can promise to tell the truth […] and in the existence of a complete subject […]. But of course it also happens that I believe the contrary […]. In spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p.8.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Lauren Rusk, \textit{The Life Writing of Otherness: Woolf, Baldwin, Kingston, and Winterson} (New York and London, 2002) p.7: “With life writing, I believe, our initial resistance to identification is greater, because we are more prone to approach the narrator as we would another person, to wonder, “Do I like her? Do I trust his account of himself? Do I want to become an intimate of this person?” If we find that the speaker overcomes this wariness and wins our sympathy, however, the knowledge that the work concerns a real person can strengthen our identification with the narrative consciousness.”
\end{itemize}
prevents it from existing.” Similarly Wolf’s claim to authenticity for Ein Tag im Jahr has an impossible dimension, but this does not prevent Wolf’s statement from influencing the readers’ reception of the text.

Upon completing Christa T. in 1968, Wolf battled GDR censorship and the difficulty of getting her works published in the GDR, but she also frequently mentions an inevitable artistic or internal censorship, the exercising of which is a dimension of all writing and publication, though particularly in evidence in Wolf’s choice of notation on one day of each year in Ein Tag im Jahr. The reader sifts through Ein Tag im Jahr, bearing in mind the possibility that the text may have been edited for political or literary reasons.

Here I will look firstly at the lukewarm reception that Ein Tag im Jahr seems to have elicited, in a review in Die Zeit, because this kind of dismissive critique of Wolf’s diary meant that many did not read the book subsequently. Because of Wolf’s notoriety and frequent press coverage, many readers and critics were aware of the book’s reception in the press and seem to have dismissed Ein Tag im Jahr along the lines of Evelyn Finger’s conclusion that Wolf’s text is melancholic and unrevealing (nothing much happens in the diaries). This widespread verdict influences Wolf’s readers’ reactions to the work and colours critical response to the diary. Ein Tag im Jahr’s innocuous initial entries also serve to discourage readers from fully engaging with the book. Early negative response is difficult to revoke as interest in reading a diary is often highest on immediate publication. The initial reaction also sets the tone of the work’s reception and needs to be closely considered in order to proceed to alternative interpretations and to try to understand the importance of initial responses of readers and critics to individual texts.

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Following the initial response to *Ein Tag im Jahr*, I look at Jörg Magenau’s biography of Christa Wolf as a portrait that sets the scene for the publication of *Ein Tag im Jahr* and provides an image of Wolf which can be compared and contrasted to the image Wolf suggests in the diaries of *Ein Tag im Jahr*. The biography, published in 2002, seems generally to have had a singular purpose – to reinvoke the atmosphere of Wolf’s intense cult status in the early 1980s and reverse the effects of some of the negative media coverage of Wolf’s writing and personal activities. Wolf’s reaction to Magenau’s biography is crucial to this interpretation of her release of the diary entries in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and to the question of Wolf’s possible editing of her journal. If this journal has been edited, it is likely to be in response to Magenau’s portrayal of Wolf, rather than as a justification of her position before and after the 1990 *Literaturstreit*.

Following Magenau’s portrayal of Wolf, I consider Wolf’s understanding of the importance of the journal form as her prime interest in releasing the diary entries in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and try to justify Wolf’s adherence to and belief in this limitedly popular literary genre. I see the journal as an extreme form of personal writing in the sense of its attempt at limiting the notion of fiction in the text, but the journal is also part of a continuum of life writing, beginning with *Nachdenken über Christa T.* through *Kindheitsmuster* to *Ein Tag im Jahr*. I consider that Wolf’s most important motivation in releasing *Ein Tag im Jahr* lies in her emphasis on the irreplaceable, interior quality of the journal and its link to women’s writing and life writing. Who else, if not a writer with Wolf’s stature and ability, could resuscitate interest in the female tradition of journal writing and try to revive the relevance of the literary journal form? In the Preface to *Ein
Tag im Jahr Wolf wonders if the time has come for such a project: “Es wird sich zeigen, ob die Zeit für ein solches Wagnis schon gekommen ist.”

I then discuss how Wolf attempts to adjust Magenau’s version of her cult status as a secondary motive for her publication of Ein Tag im Jahr or how the image Wolf seems to construct of herself varies from the vignette Magenau produces. I also look at the popular interpretation that Wolf has released this book as a discrete justification and clarification of her behaviour in the GDR culminating in the 1990 Literaturstreit. I consider the view that Ein Tag im Jahr must surreptitiously provide an account (“Rechenschaft”) of accusations referring to her pre-Wende conduct and is interesting in Wolf’s presentation of herself pre- and post-Wende, as the text explicitly covers the time period 1960 to 2000 and not 1949 to 1989, for example, as Günter de Bruyn does in his Vierzig Jahre.13

Lastly, I conclude that Ein Tag im Jahr is essentially significant in its unusual, detailed and dense personal style and its juxtaposition of micro and macro narrative. Although the text reverts to a writing tradition closely associated with women writers through the years and Romantic writers, such as Bettine von Arnim, through Virginia Woolf to Nelly Sachs, it also speaks to the up-to-the-minute obsession of recent authors with detail and micro narratives and the elusive texture of ‘otherness’ in autobiographical writing.

13 Günter de Bruyn, Vierzig Jahre (Frankfurt am Main, 2001).
Ein Tag im Jahr received a lukewarm greeting by Evelyn Finger in her review in Die Zeit 42 in 2003: she stresses “die mangelnde Fröhlichkeit dieser Schriftstellerin.” Finger finds that critics have been unhappy with this characteristic of Wolf’s writing for the past half century:

[man] fand bereits im Geteilten Himmel die Helden nicht positiv genug. An Nachdenken über Christa T. schalt man die Art der Vergangenheitsbetrachtung rückwärts gewandt, an Kindheitsmuster monierte man die Rigorosität, mir der die Erzählerin den Zweifel zum Darstellungsprinzip erhob, und ihre zunehmende Sympathie für selbstmörderische Figuren (Kleist, Günterrode, Kassandra) brachte ihr noch schärfere Tadel ein.¹⁴

The West had viewed her melancholy as “ein Kranken am System.” When she was even less enamoured with the capitalist state, she was accused of identification with the GDR State, “eine Anschuldigung, auf die zuvor, komischerweise, selten jemand verfallen war.”

Christa Wolf had not proven her fear and pain under the GDR regime:

Sie war weder in den Westen noch in die innere Emigration gegangen. Ihre Kritiker vergaßen jedoch, dass dies für die redliche Durchführung der intellektuellen Biographie Christa Wolfs gar nicht nötig gewesen war, denn (und davon handeln all ihre Bücher) Identifikation war etwas, wozu sie tatsächlich nicht in der Lage war: mit sich in Übereinstimmung sein, geschweige denn mit anderen.¹⁵

Finger claims Wolf’s Ein Tag im Jahr is obsessed with subjectivity and “Ich”:

[...] davon berichtet ihr Tagebuch: wie sich die Schriftstellerin unablässig damit quält, was dieses verfluchte Ich eigentlich sei. Sie kann natürlich nicht dahinterkommen, denn dafür müsste es im Verlauf des Denkaktes immer dasselbe sein, dafür müsste der Unterschied zwischen Subjekt und Objekt als überwindbar gedacht werden.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
Maxim Gorki’s 1936 and the Moscow *Iswestija* newspaper’s 1960 intention in the suggestion that writers of the world describe September 27 is at a far remove from Wolf’s book, according to Finger:

Krasser könnte die Diskrepanz der beiden Anliegen nicht zutage treten als im Vergleich zwischen Christa Wolfs rechtschaffener Dokumentation *Ein Tag im Jahr* und dem pseudodokumentarischen Projekt, das ihr die Idee lieferte.\(^{17}\)

By contrast, Wolf takes the idea and writes a personal text: “Christa Wolf hat, ganz privat, Gorkijs Idee ernst genommen und sich Rechenschaft über ihr Leben abgelegt.”

But Finger interprets *Ein Tag im Jahr* as too discrete and ultimately depressing:

Dieses Tagebuch ist kein Bekenntnisbuch, es gibt bei aller Intimität (Enkel Anton im Schlafanzug, Oma Wolf beim Zähneputzen, ihre Treffen mit Max Frisch und Anna Seghers), nichts Ungewöhnliches preis. Vielleicht ist nichts Ungewöhnliches passiert, vielleicht fand es an anderen Tagen statt. Die Abwesenheit des Schreckens ist ja das eigentlich Deprimierende, man kennt das aus Becketts Endspielen. Wo kein Atomkrieg ausbricht, kein plötzlicher Kindstod eintritt, nicht wenigstens eine Liebestragödie sich ereignet, dort gibt es auch keine Katharsis und keinen Trost.\(^{18}\)

Political events mentioned remain trivial when the private dominates. For Finger, the diary fails in its lack of fiction:

Die subjektive Authentizität jedenfalls, die Christa Wolf schon früh gegen die Objektivität des sozialistischen Realismus ins Feld führte, diese radikale Innerlichkeit braucht den Spielraum der Fiktion. Im Tagebuch bleibt die Wirklichkeit von der Wahrheit, wie Christa Wolf sie anstrebt, noch weiter entfernt als im Roman […] . Was bleibt stiften noch immer die Dichter und nicht die Tagebuchschreiber.\(^{19}\)

There is an insipid dimension to *Ein Tag im Jahr*, when compared to Wolf’s more ‘fictional,’ ‘storyline’ autobiographical texts and there is a sense, at times, in which inconsequential events are being foregrounded and interesting issues abbreviated,

\(^{17}\) Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
reminiscent of a text in note form. But, from another perspective, the diary is aimed at the tension between everyday routine and longer term historical developments, at the preservation of the detail and texture of 'historical moments,' even when this is at odds with the gravity of the historical moment, similar to the sense of alienation in *Kindheitsmuster* in the recognition that crucial historical turning points such as the 1942 conference at Wannsee were simultaneous with Nelly lying in a furrow in Landsberg looking up at the sky.

Similar to the negative tone of Finger's review of *Ein Tag im Jahr* in 2003, Wolf's *Sommerstück* was read as insipid and monotonous by many West German critics on its release in March 1989, yet from another perspective, the text has been interpreted as uniquely preserving a specific moment of GDR society. Jörg Magenau in *Christa Wolf Eine Biographie*, locates a certain unparalleled atmosphere in *Sommerstück*, which captures the tone of a vanishing era and predicts its passing. The unique, intangible quality to *Sommerstück* also echoes the tone of *Ein Tag im Jahr*, prior to 1990.

Wolf's works are generally distinct from their predecessors in theme or genre, though the language and style may be familiar. Wolf seeks new ground in each text from *Christa T.* to *Kein Ort. Nirgends* to *Störfall* and does not usually re-visit time periods from previous works. *Ein Tag im Jahr* is, therefore, significant, in that it covers new ground in theme and genre, which Finger does not seem to recognize: a broad time period according to its title, 1960-2000. The lack of focus in *Ein Tag im Jahr* on traumatic events such as *Christa T.*'s death of a friend or *Kindheitsmuster*’s war and exile, may exclude catharsis and thwart hope in its lack of sensational survival and recovery, but the longer term survival of trends and details in *Ein Tag im Jahr* are aimed at a varied presentation of
historical events, a ‘behind the wall’ portrait and an internal perspective. The narrator’s reflection on aging, though at times melancholic, is pitted against ongoing literary projects and interests, contact with fellow writers and publishers and the savouring of time spent with family and friends. In some sense, the critics’ claims about Wolf’s “mangelnde Fröhlichkeit” and lack of sensational disclosure, are confirmed in Ein Tag im Jahr, yet her relishing of life through travel and discussion with friends and family members has never been more in evidence. Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s claim that Wolf is “Deutschlands humorloseste Schriftstellerin” seems to have influenced many critics’ responses to Wolf’s work in Germany, yet consistently building on this assumption, as Finger seems to do, seems unsubstantiated and unwarranted.

Finger’s dismissive review does pinpoint certain drawbacks to a diary text like Ein Tag im Jahr, but she finds fault with the text mainly because she compares it resolutely to Wolf’s previous non-diary works and therefore misses the advantages of the text. If Ein Tag im Jahr were to be situated in a journal and personal writing tradition and measured by the appropriate yardstick, the merits of the text could more readily be reviewed.

4.2. Christa Wolf Eine Biographie: Cult portrait

In the Preface to Ein Tag im Jahr, Christa Wolf writes:

Das Bedürfnis, gekannt zu werden, auch mit seinen problematischen Zügen, mit Irrtümern und Fehlern, liegt aller Literatur zugrunde und ist auch ein Antriebsmotiv für dieses Buch.²⁰

This desire to be recognized may be an element of autobiographical and personal writing, but is only indirectly a motive in fictional literature where the author attempts to withdraw or disguise identity, though Wolf seems to imply on occasion in *Ein Tag im Jahr* that the writer’s disguise is something the reader uncovers and the reader gets to know something about the person of the author in reading the text. The difficulty with Wolf’s claim that the need to be recognized underpins literature, arises in readers believing they *know* the author, though s/he is ever changing, and biographers believing they are exposing the *real* subject beneath the mask, though ultimately being forced to make choices and produce one of many portraits possible.

If Wolf wants to be recognized, intact with problematic features and errors, she emphasizes, in her statement above, that she wants to provide the testimony herself. She seems to have watched and internalized Jörg Magenau’s assessment of ‘Christa Wolf’ in his biography, and seems to have felt some misrepresentation, to be revised, from her perspective, by her personal diary, the ‘authentic’ personal documentation. Here the continuity between the premises of *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster* and *Ein Tag im Jahr* is clear: to evolve autobiographically, Wolf believes the autobiographical text must juxtapose ‘original’ material (often newspaper reports or Christa T.’s journal) written in the time period involved, with Wolf’s own personal annotation, and the interruptions in the autobiographical narrative help emphasize the all-important variety of perspective on a subject.

Jörg Magenau published an intense, detailed and flattering biography of Wolf in 2002. The idea that a biography of Christa Wolf should be written and the detailed research and intelligent analysis that Magenau provides appears to have had an impact on Wolf’s self-
image and prompted a creative response, such as the publication of the diaries in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Magenau describes Wolf’s reaction to his confronting her with the idea of writing her biography as understandably reluctant, yet ultimately compliant:

Als ich Christa Wolf mit dem Plan einer Biographie konfrontierte, lehnte sie höflich, aber bestimmt ab. Dafür sei es noch zu früh, man möge sich doch gedulden, bis sie einmal nicht mehr da sei... Die Erfahrungen, die sie nach der Wende mit der (west)deutschen Öffentlichkeit gemacht hatte, trugen dazu bei, dass ihr die Vorstellung einer Biographie unbehaglich wurde. Doch wem ginge es anders? Man muss nicht allzu viel Phantasie aufbringen, um sich vorzustellen, dass es nicht sehr angenehm ist, zum Gegenstand erhoben und zum Objekt gemacht zu werden. Dabei wollte sie gegen einen Autor, der als Westler, als Mann und einer jüngeren Generation zugehörig ihr denkbar fremd gegenübertrat, noch nicht einmal Einwände erheben. Christa Wolf, deren Literatur stets auf die Stärkung des Subjekts gerichtet ist und allen Versuchen entgegenarbeitet, den Anderen zum Objekt zu machen, hätte es gerne mit Anna Seghers gehalten und allein das Werk sprechen lassen. Schließlich aber akzeptierte sie, dass sie als wichtige Figur der Zeitgeschichte und als Autorin von überragender Bedeutung auch ein biographisches Interesse ertragen müsse. Und da sie es nicht verhindern könne, wolle sie wenigstens dazu beitragen, dass die Fakten stimmen.21

This is an interesting capsule of Wolf’s reaction in the face of lack of agency. She rejected the idea of Magenau writing her biography on many fronts, having rejected biography as a literary genre in abandoning her notion of writing a biography of Anna Seghers in 1973, yet was forced to admit that she has played a central role in recent German literary history, and faced with the fact that she is unable to prevent Magenau’s writing, she becomes partially involved with the project. It is specifically the historical dimension, similar to Grass’ ‘Zeitzeuge’ argument in *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*, that seems to sway Wolf towards acceptance in the final analysis. There are few satisfactory alternative responses to the suggestion of a biographical project for a living author, but one can imagine Frisch or Grass or Seghers reacting less obligingly and more authoritatively. This description of Wolf’s reaction is reminiscent of her reluctant

compliance with GDR literary politics in the 1960s, when she seems to support some of the objectives, yet does not actually endorse the policies.

Perhaps Wolf’s compliance with this project was not a mistake. Magenau produced an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Christa Wolf with minimal personal criticism, and is perhaps more complimentary than Wolf’s own clarificatory self-portrait in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, or perhaps more is expected of Wolf’s writing than of the journalist biographer or *after* the biographer has portrayed Wolf to be such an inspirational cult figure. Magenau’s is a portrait based on a specific historical climate, Wolf’s *Ein Tag im Jahr* has a very different agenda. *Ein Tag im Jahr* aims at personal representation, investigating identity and subjectivity, whereas Magenau concentrates on the fabric of the time with Wolf’s public life in focus. Magenau claims to have had access to many documents made available to him by Christa and Gerhard Wolf, including the diaries to appear in *Ein Tag im Jahr* (he mentions awareness of the possibility of these diaries being published in his biography[^22]), and has perceptive insight into Wolf’s fate in the media, her works and the reception of her work in public and literary spheres in Germany. He is, however, more concerned with the wider reception of her works and the general political debates around her writing, than in the merits of individual texts for readers of literature. He is admirably aware of concepts of perspective and time, to which Wolf’s critics often seem oblivious:


Though overwhelmingly positive, Magenau’s few points of criticism are interesting in their selection and piercing quality. He is caught up in criticism of Wolf’s attitude to the state and family as similar endeavours:

Wolf’s claim that poor generational relationships contributed to the dissolution of GDR society is implausible: failing contact between generations in other societies does not lead to comparable opposition to the state. Wolf’s comments may have been put forward as an initial response to questions of social problems in GDR family structures. She may tend toward an unconventional view of the state (along with other GDR writers and their familial relationships to certain state figures and each other), but she does not believe that her amiable familial relationships are similar to the relationships of others. She is accepting and seems to learn from deviating, individual solutions, as evidenced in her reaction to Brigitte Reimann in Sei gegrüßt und lebe or Gabriele Kachold, “das Mädchen” in Was bleibt.

The 1950s is, interestingly, a period that Wolf has not directly or extensively written about autobiographically, though she mentions this time as central in answer to the

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23 Ibid, p.17.
question of her most poignant memory of the GDR in an interview in Die Zeit 40, September 29, 2005:


Here Wolf singles out the 1950s as a significant time, but it is unclear why this period does not feature strongly in her autobiographical writing. Magenau is at pains to emphasize Wolf’s sense of repression and shame about her analyses and book reviews from this period: “Christa Wolf lehnte es stets ab, Aufsätze aus den funziger Jahren nachzudrucken. Diese Phase gehört für sie nicht zum Werk, sondern zu einer journalistischen Vorzeit.”26 For Magenau, however, this phase is interesting because it is under-represented and because it has a strange nature and he devotes three chapters of his biography to Wolf’s ‘less familiar’ respect for the antifascists, party-political literary critiques, early anti-Western sentiment and the infamous contact with the Stasi. Magenau’s description is not without comic effect:

In dem Aufsatz »Achtung, Rauschgifthandel!« vom Februar 1955 berichtete sie von einem Krankenhausaufenthalt, bei dem sie als Angehörige einer literarischen Verwaltungselite schockhaft mit dem alltäglichen Literaturverständnis draußen im Lande im Berührung kam. Ihre Zimmergenossin las doch – man denke! – tatsächlich lieber billige Stella-Romane als Scholochows Werke.27

26 Jörg Magenau, Christa Wolf Eine Biographie, op. cit., p.68.
27 Ibid, p.70.
Some sense of this shocked sentiment at the 'worker's' reading preferences is still tangible in the diary entries of the early 1960s in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and demonstrate Wolf's utopian blindness, naivety and complicity with state policy in this period. Wolf's first indications of a will to write herself were greeted by Louis Fünberg "mit einem emphatischen Ermutigungs-Furor, der sich heute nicht ohne Komik lesen lässt": "Selber schreiben möchtest Du können und wüstest vielleicht sogar, was? Christa!! Ja, wer soll denn schreiben können, wenn nicht Du? So schreib doch!"²⁸

Also the detailed *Stasi* reports on Wolf's apartment seem alien and comic in retrospect, in their insinuating detail:

Das Wohnzimmer, in dem sich die Bibliothek befindet, ist exklusiv eingerichtet und lässt auf Wohlhabenheit schließen. Sie besitzen auch einen Fernsehempfänger. Auf dem Schreibtisch liegen viele kleinere Bücher, die Kunstcharakter tragen, z.B. >PICASSO< usw.²⁹

Less humourous is Wolf's *Stasi* informant status as "Margarete." The use of Wolf's second name indicates to Magenau that it is questionable as a cover name. The three meetings are sinister in the sense that Wolf seems to have been intimidated and "ideologieglaubig," indebted to the returning antifascist writers. In a discussion with Günter Gaus in 1993, she claims she was stuck. Magenau writes: "Sie habe sich »in der Klemme« gefühlt und nicht gewusst, wie sie da herauskommen sollte, gleichzeitig aber versucht, die Kontakte auf ein Minimum zu reduzieren."³⁰ The *Stasi* view of Wolf is ludicrous in its strangeness; the *Stasi* officials were alarmed when she told them she would have to tell her husband about their meeting "weil es in ihrer Ehe noch nie

²⁸ ibid, p.79.
²⁹ ibid, p.85.
³⁰ ibid, p.100.

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Geheimnisse gegeben habe," and her *Stasi* contact Paroch writes of her "»größere Zurückhaltung und überbetonte Vorsicht« [...] die Paroch mit einer »gewissen intellektuellen Ängstlichkeit« zu erklären suchte."³¹ Magenau claims that Wolf is mentioned under the rubric "Perspektivlosigkeit, Ineffizienz" in Joachim Walther’s study on writers and the *Staats sicherheit*.

Though Wolf published her file openly, she suffered bad public reaction to the news that she had been involved with the *Stasi* as an informant. She seems reticent on this matter in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, but in a discussion with Günter Gaus, admits her own alienation towards her mindset in this period:

Die Schuldgefühle sind weggeschmolzen. Schuldgefühle sind oft etwas, was man vor die tieferen Einsichten schiebt, und ich bemühe mich jetzt um die tieferen Einsichten. Wer war ich damals eigentlich? Es ist ein schreckliches Entfremdungsgefühl, das mich überkommt, wenn ich das lese."³²

Magenau attempts to put this issue into perspective by mentioning the many other writers implicated in informant issues and by pointing out that Wolf’s informant activities seem harmless when compared to the energy expended by the *Stasi* in approaching and implicating practically all GDR writers who achieved Western recognition. The follow-up tactic of intimidating writers with intense observation also tempers the status of those who ‘cooperated’ with the *Stasi*:

Bei Christa Wolf stehen der IM-Akte mit 130 Seiten 42 Aktenordner mit Beobachtungsmaterial gegenüber – und das allein aus den siebziger Jahre, während die Akten aus den Achtzigern vermutlich vernichtet wurden."³³

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³¹ Ibid, p.104.
Wolf’s short, complete file, closed thirty years before the dissolution of the GDR state, its lack of usefulness to the Stasi, and the 42 folders of observation material compiled on Christa Wolf, tend towards settling the debate on whether Wolf helped to sustain the GDR state with her support for socialism or whether she was a threat to the state in her criticism of its ways.

Magenau’s criticism of Wolf in Christa Wolf. Eine Biographie is strikingly limited and lenient. As well as her confessedly politically motivated essays and reviews from the 1950s, he points out blindness in other areas. He is irritated by her lack of mention of the wall in her 1962 novel Der geteilte Himmel: “Es wird so getan, als sei im Jahr 1962 immer noch eine freie Entscheidung darüber möglich, ob man bleiben oder weggehen will, als werde da tatsächlich ein offener Konflikt verhandelt, der doch de facto durch den Mauerbau entschieden ist.” Similarly, she seems oblivious to the importance of the privileges she enjoyed as a writer in a socialist state, in terms of political attention allocated to her, further enhanced by travel and reading rights:

Wichtiger noch als die Reisemöglichkeiten war ein anderes Privileg, das ihr eingeräumt wurde, ohne dass sie es beantragt hätte: eine Sondergenehmigung zur Einfuhr von Literatur aus dem Westen. Das ging vom Kulturministerium aus und war als Maßnahme zu verstehen, Intellektuelle im Land zu halten. Denn es war durchaus bekannt, dass ihnen weniger das Auto als der geistige Austausch fehlte. Christa Wolf ließ ein Teil ihres Honorars beim westdeutschen Luchterhand Verlag stehen, um damit Bücher und Zeitschriften zu kaufen.

She does not seem to recognize that her special position in the GDR made her life there bearable. She claims her reasons for staying in the GDR were based on a belief in socialism (though increasingly not in the SED), a lack of alternative in the FRG or an

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34 Ibid, p.130.
ability to write there, family, home and community reasons and very often because she felt needed at readings and public events. Criticism of blindness can also be levelled against certain positions in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, where Wolf seems oblivious to some of the deep sources of resentment towards her in 1990: she held a 'special position' in the GDR, which was not applicable to other writers who were relentlessly intimidated by the *Stasi* and forced to leave the GDR. Wolf continues to claim she did not want to abandon her readers. She tries to offer people an alternative to leaving the GDR in her television address on November 8, 1989:


Here again Wolf seems blind to the justification for the lack of patience and trust in the state on the part of ordinary GDR citizens, blind to the idea that they have no reason to trust a state that impedes their travel and prevents freedom of the press. The outcome of the flight of citizens through Prague and Budapest and the fate of demonstrators in the GDR is unclear at the point of Wolf's intervention and she fears a 'Chinese' solution. Though her statements seem unrealistic, Magenau's primary defence of Wolf is that she is not alone in this appeal, but is part of an attempt, along with Volker Braun, Christoph Hein, Stefan Heym and Ulrich Plenzdorf, to prevent a tragedy in a dangerous situation. Magenau's defence of Wolf's 1989 position and other actions is often based on the little noticed fact that many of Christa Wolf's more questionable statements are taken out of

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the context of the activities of other GDR writers (and writers in general), who are not politicians, though they had been forced into that role to a certain extent in the GDR.

Magenau’s awareness of the sole interest of the press in controversy and the absence of real press interest in Wolf’s Akteneinsicht, for instance, is an interesting contrast to Wolf’s lack of understanding of the free press as a contorting instrument. The late publication date of Was bleibt was not attributed to the impossibility of publishing the text prior to 1989, Wolf’s involvement with the Stasi was not compared by the press to other writers’ greater culpability in this respect and Wolf’s statements about exile in Los Angeles were taken out of context by the press and ignored as soon as the story did not develop into a debate. Magenau mentions, for example, the Bild-Zeitung report on the news of Wolf’s informant status:


Inconsistencies in the reactions of reviewers of Wolf’s works also interestingly abound in Magenau’s portrait of Christa Wolf. Hans Mayer seems to have tempered or withdrawn his criticism of Kindheitsmuster in his influential article “Der Mut zur Unaufrichtigkeit” in Der Spiegel, 1976, as he and Wolf became personal friends. Franz Schirrmacher, whose article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung precipitated the Literaturstreit on Was bleibt in 1990, makes no incitive remarks in 1993:


Wolf seems to have or have had close ties to several generations of authors, mostly based in East Germany, but many living in the West, from Wolf Biermann, Heiner Müller, Volker Braun, Günter Grass and Günter Gaus, and is mentioned as having personally financially supported writers who had fallen on hard times in the GDR and personally met with and hidden the writings of authors leaving the GDR, under threat by the GDR state. Wolf’s vacillating position within the GDR, as a critical figure, but unscathed by stronger intimidatory tactics and her status with reviewers as a target of attack, but on friendly terms with the critic, exemplifies the complexity of the reaction to Wolf’s writing (and person) and the complexity of the portrait Magenau paints on the literary and personal front.

Despite Magenau’s discrete criticism of Wolf’s naivety, at times, and loyal dissidence, at others, the lasting impression of Christa Wolf Eine Biographie is that of the resounding success and popularity that Wolf’s writings seem to have induced. There is a shared sense of Brigitte Reimann’s awe and envy in Magenau’s reports of unprecedented sales figures and overwhelming interest in Wolf’s readings and book signings. Beginning with Der geteilte Himmel, Wolf’s writing struck a chord with readers and was “massenkompatabel” in a striking manner. The reaction to the reprinting of Nachdenken über Christa T. in 1972 was surprisingly positive in the East:

Die Fülle der Leserbriefe, die Christa Wolf auf diese Ausgabe erhielt, waren überwiegend zustimmend, nachdenklich, selbstreflexiv […]. Seelsorgerische und therapeutische Fähigkeiten traute man ihr offenbar ohne Weiteres zu, da sie in ihrem Schreiben demonstrierte, wie gründlich und kontinuierlich sie sich mit ihrer eigenen Lebenssituation

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auseinandersetzte. Christa Wolf wurde nur deshalb zu einer moralischen Instanz, weil sie
sich selbst nicht schonte. Paradox gesagt: Sie wurde auf ein Podest gehoben, weil sie es
selbst nicht tat.\(^39\)

*Kindheitsmuster* enjoyed resounding success following its reprinting in December 1976:

Die enorme Auflage von 60 000 Exemplaren war schon im Februar vergriffen. Wieder
einmal bewies Christa Wolf das Gespür, mit ihrer schriftstellerischen Arbeit
gesellschaftliche Krisen vorauszusehen und dadurch mit ihren Büchern zielsicher in die
jeweils aktuellen Konfliktfelder zu treffen.\(^40\)

Magenau attributes cult status to Wolf’s activities when she arrives in Frankfurt to follow
in Ingeborg Bachmann’s footsteps, and gives her Frankfurt Poetry lectures in May 1982,
on a wave of recognition following the publication of *Kassandra* earlier that year:

Die Vorlesungen wurden zu einem Massenereignis von überwältigenden Ausmaßen [...] Das
tausend Zuhörer fassende Auditorium war jeweils eine Stunde vor Beginn dicht
besetzt, auch auf den Fußboden drängten sich die Studenten. Die gespannte
Aufmerksamkeit und die innige Anbetungsbereitschaft trugen durchaus religiöse Züge. Dieser
Kassandra glaubte das akademische Volk jedes Wort. In der feministischen
Zeitschrift »Emma« wurde sie als »unsere Christa« apostrophiert. Das Hessische
Fernsehen übertrug die Vorlesungen in voller Länge. Christa Wolf war Kult.\(^41\)

*Kassandra* and the Frankfurt lectures sold well. By March 1983: “Innerhalb eines Jahres
wurden 90 000 Vorlesungen und 150 000 Erzählungen abgesetzt. Das Werk avancierte in
kurzer Zeit zu einem Bestseller mit Übersetzungen in zahlreichen Sprachen.”\(^42\) In
1989, Wolf’s work was available in the GDR as never before: “»Kindheitsmuster«
erschien im Januar in einer Taschenbuchausgabe. 30 000 Exemplare wurden gedruckt,
der Buchhandel bestellte 69 000. »Kassandra« war endlich ungekürzt zu haben

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\(^{39}\) Ibid, p.244.

\(^{40}\) Ibid, p.278.

\(^{41}\) Ibid, p.335.

\(^{42}\) Ibid, p.338.
In March 1989, Wolf celebrated her sixtieth birthday and *Sommerstück* was published. Magenau notes that many reviewers in the West were bored by the work, but he convincingly locates a distinctive appeal to the book in an Eastern, elegiac, historical context, which has parallels to the appeal of *Ein Tag im Jahr*. It tells a unique story of life in the East while prophesying its short-lived nature:


There were positive reviewers in the West who praised the clear poetry and the “neuen Maßstab autobiographischen Erzählens”: “Das höchste Lob kam von Fritz J. Raddatz, der einst selbst aus der DDR in den Westen gekommen war, Er rühmte das »kleine große Meisterwerk« und meinte, es sei »endlich an der Zeit, wollte sich die Stockholm akademie dieser Schriftstellerin entsinnen. Sie ist des Nobelpreises würdig«.”

The Nobel Prize was not awarded, though Günter Grass claimed he would have been happy to share his prize with Wolf in 1999. The trauma of the 1990 *Literaturstreit* followed and Wolf withdrew from public life, spent nine months at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities in Santa Monica, and wrote “bruchhaftige Texte.”

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid, p.446.
such as those published in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou*. It was, therefore, surprising when she attended the *Leipziger Buchmesse* in 1994 to launch *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* to a tremendous response, in a 300 capacity lecture hall:

Einige hundert konnten im Nebensaal das Ereignis per Videovertragung verfolgen. Die doppelte Menge stand draußen vor der Tür und kämpfte vergeblich um Einlass. Unbeschreibliche Szenen spielten sich ab, als ginge es um den Zutritt zu einem Fußballstadion. »Wir sind das Volk«, rief das Volk in bewährter Manier und übersah vor lauter Eifer, dass Christa Wolf mit dem Megaphon in der Hand ans Fenster trat und um Verständnis für die misslichen Umstände bat [...]. Sie tat so, als wisse sie nicht um den Andrang, den sie hervorruft, egal, wo sie auftritt. Drinnen aber erhob sich das Publikum bei ihrem Eintritt von den Plätzen und intonierte ein vielstimmiges »Happy Birthday, liebe Christa«. Die Feierstunde geriet zur Huldigung. Berichterstatter beobachteten, wie ergriffene Zuhörer während der Lesung weinten. 

Magenau oscillates between his defense of Wolf’s more notorious public humiliation and his appreciation of her less publicized, yet overwhelming public popularity, building steadily from the 1968 publication of *Christa T.* to the 1994 publication of *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* (from the 1960s through 2000). Magenau makes clear that Wolf’s negative publicity in the media is *not* reflected in her publication sales or personal popularity with readers and supporters. In contrast to the impression invoked by the media frenzy in 1990, and to a lesser extent in 1993, Wolf’s readers remain supportive and steadfast. This seems to fuel the argument that her vilification in 1990 was motivated by conservative political attempts at quashing anything that might have been construed as positive remaining from the GDR. Wolf claims in *Ein Tag im Jahr* that she is not nostalgic about the GDR, though she recognizes some positive aspects of the state. The support for Wolf in 1994 has perservered, not because of GDR nostalgia, but because of the reader’s belief in the strength and resilience of her writing.


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Magenau’s portrait had important connotations for Wolf’s image and self-image and perhaps precipitated the publication of *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Magenau is ultimately concerned with the public persona and Wolf is preoccupied with the internal and personal. *Ein Tag im Jahr* is a decisive work, because Wolf situates her ‘media-infused’ self-image in an unusual journal tradition (describing only one day a year), thereby modifying the framework of the journal tradition and exuding a subtle quality of survival, which is of prime importance in Wolf’s writing of the diaries.

4.3. *Ein Tag im Jahr*: Journal Revisited

Magenau’s book, as a biography, results in a unified focus emphasizing a *public*, popular Wolf as a solitary surviving positive symbol for GDR citizens. Wolf’s *Ein Tag im Jahr*, by contrast, accentuates an *inner* life from different spacial and temporal perspectives. She accommodates the writer’s perspective of locating interesting material and working through the writing of various texts and the more private perspective of family relationships and friendships with authors through time. *Ein Tag im Jahr* is insightful in its illuminative portrayal of projects passing under Wolf’s eye as a writer: Wolf mentions a plan to write about a man “der nach der Wende unter anderem Namen weiterlebt” or her memoirs of Moscow or a text about the *Untersuchungskommission*, following the detention of demonstrators by GDR police officials on October 7, 1989. The journal format is particularly suitable to her depiction of a personal creative writing process through which works are planned, a topic is studied, material is gathered, the

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writing is begun (sometimes the result is unsatisfactory, 'Stadt der Engel' will probably not be published), and the texts are often tested at readings and reactions are gauged, Wolf's and the audiences'.

This writing process and its connection with inspiration through contact with other writers (she mentions reading texts from many and varied writers and has frequent contact with writers who are 'friends'), is aptly captured in its variety in the journal format and shows how her reading of and close contact with other authors is linked to her capacious interest in newspaper, radio and television reports, whence she locates writing material by extricating predicaments and thought processes that become instrumental in her own writing.

The 1986 entry in *Ein Tag im Jahr* relating a vignette of the meeting between Wolf and Max Frisch in Zürich is a good example of the way in which Wolf's diary entries demonstrate the intricate influence of other authors on Wolf and how this is succinctly portrayed in the diary format. The diary entries from 1985 and 1986 are both devoted to Wolf's ties with prominent Western writers, with whom she felt a close connection. She attends Heinrich Böll's funeral in 1985, and visits Max Frisch in 1986. These authors seem to be singled out, in a characteristic manner for Wolf, in a combination of recognition of their writing, appreciation of their leftist sympathies and interest in their biographies and personalities. Böll's funeral and a visit to Zürich happen to fall on or around September 27; the entries become instances of Wolf's claim that she can 'use' most 'events' to create a text. The relationships between authors mentioned in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, from East or West, is often frayed following public animosity, professional jealousy or personal incompatibility. Frisch mentions difficult relations between himself
and Jurek Becker and Uwe Johnson, amongst other literary and personal disputes. Wolf is interested not only in these authors’ writing commitments, but in their personal attributes and relationships, as she is interested in portraying her writing self and her personal self (in as much as they are sometimes separable in *Ein Tag im Jahr*) in her own writing. Her personal description of Frisch, is particularly suited to the intimate atmosphere of journal writing and is an example of her understanding of author as writer and person:

Er vermittelt mir den Eindruck eines Mannes, der eigentlich nicht weiß, wo er leben soll […]. Ich glaube es ist nicht nur ein eingebildeter Mangel, daß dieser berühmter und wohlhabender Mann im Grunde nicht weiß, wie und wo er leben soll, zwar ist er unverkennbar Schweizer, doch seine Heimatlosigkeit ist evident. Schon in den ersten Minuten betont er, daß er »nicht alleine« lebt, aber die Frau, mit der er jetzt verbunden ist, »Katrin«, wohnt nicht mit ihm zusammen […]. Mir fällt ein, daß sein leichter Sprachfehler, die gelegentliche Hemmung beim Sprechen, deutlich hervortritt. So denke ich, mag es auch Kleist gegangen sein. Frisch ist alt geworden, seine Züge sind auseinandergelaufen […]. Auf meine Frage: Ja, er langweile sich auch. Das Schreiben hat er aufgegeben, um sich nicht zu wiederholen. Die Elemente seiner Biographie sind aufgebraucht […].

This image of Frisch in 1986 resonates with the indecisiveness and paranoia (Johnson) of other writers featured in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, particularly the confusion as to where they might ‘belong,’ where to travel to and where to live and write. The “Heimatlosigkeit” echoes Wolf’s confusion as to where she should and can live and write which is prominent in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, and her daily sense of unease or “Unruhe” that Gerd criticizes, along with her fear, in common with Frisch, that she might repeat herself. The biographical elements of her life, usable in her writing, may have been exhausted.

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49 Ibid, p.401ff.
The sense of personal contact in this private meeting between Frisch and Wolf carries a distinctive atmosphere, suitably conveyed in the journal format of *Ein Tag im Jahr*.

The influence of Western authors in *Ein Tag im Jahr* is often obvious and straightforward, whereas Wolf's contact with writers from East Germany is sometimes complicated and cryptic. The significance of the diary for GDR writers, as portrayed in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, seems to be quite distinct from the cultural appreciation of journal writing for Western writers and readers in general. Wolf writes of her enjoyment of this kind of writing:

> Ich [...] setze mich an die Maschine, um dies zu schreiben. Mir ist bewusst, daß dies meine liebste Art zu schreiben ist, wenn die Arbeit sich in die Tage einmischt und sie auffrisst, eins vom anderen nicht zu trennen.51

She suggests discussing the journal genre in a poetry lecture series in Göttingen:


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51 Ibid, p.220.
52 Ibid, p.605. Page numbers hereafter refer to this edition as ETiJ.
This claim to preference for the journal genre, as a source of writing material, as an understanding of the passage of time, as a transformation of the everyday into literary material, as a preservation of important detail and as a strong source of authenticity, emphasizes the significance of the diary form for Wolf. She mentions the importance of the journal writing of *Ein Tag im Jahr* many times and with such fervour that one wonders at the vehemence:

Dann also an der Maschine, den Tag beschreiben. So frißt das Schreiben das Leben auf, an diesem Tag wird das immer am deutlichsten, es ist der Grund, warum ich an diesen Protokollen festhalte (andere Gründe: Ein vielleicht ergiebiges Material häuft sich auf, und: Ich setze Erinnerungspunkte in das Meer des Vergessens). (ETiJ 429)

On the occasion of a fire in a yard behind their apartment building in Pankow in 1998, Wolf panics in memory of the fire in their house in Meteln in 1983, when only a few pieces of furniture and Wolf’s manuscripts and journals were salvaged. Her first concern, on waking, seems to be for her journal: “Als ich endlich im Flur war, sah ich den Widerschein von Flammen in meinem Zimmer, ich dachte: Ein Glück, daß die Tagebücher im Safe sind! und fragte mich, was ich noch schnell aus dem Fenster schmeißen müßte, dann konnte ich endlich zu meinem Fenster gehen und sah, daß im Nebenhof unten ein Abfallhaufen brannte [...]”(ETiJ 597) The survival of the journal seems to have had unusual significance in the GDR, echoed in the intimations of a discussion Wolf had in 1983 with a writer referred to as E. (Gabriele Eckhart), who had been threatened with imprisonment in the GDR. Here the writer’s journals also hold inordinate significance:

Angefangen hatte unser Gespräch ja überhaupt mit der Angst wegen ihrer Tagebücher, in die sie seit ihrem 14. Lebensjahr zwanghaft jede ihrer Regungen, alles, was sie erlebt und beobachtet, einträgt, die sie versteckt hält und nur manchmal nach Hause holt, wenn sie etwas drin nachlesen will, einen Stoff, denn alles, was sie nicht eingetragen hat,
besonders alles, was sie aufgeregt hat, vergißt sie: dann hat sie eine wahnsinnige Angst, 
hat Halluzinationen, hört andauernd die Klingel gehn […]. Wenn sie mich ins Gefängnis 
bringen, das wär nicht so schlimm, da könnt ihr ja hinterher drüber schreiben, 
Gefängnisreportage […]. Aber wenn sie mir die Tagebücher wegnimmt, das übersteh 
ich nicht. (ETiJ 331)

Eckhart’s comments relate to twelve baskets of a fellow writer’s work having been 
removed from his house and not returned following his two years in 
“Untersuchungshaft.” This fear of the removal and disappearance of diaries seems to 
help explain Wolf’s adherence to her journals as irreplaceable testimonial documents and 
aides to memory. The sadness of losing the narrator’s journal in Kindheitsmuster 
contributes to the attachment to the diary:

Das Tagebuch, das Nelly in jenen Jahren geführt hat, wurde zum Glück oder Unglück bei 
Kriegsende im Kanonenofen der Gastwirtschaft des Dorfes Grünheide bei Nauen 
verbrannt […]. Das kommt mir jetzt aber weg, bestimmte Charlotte Jordan – die natürlich 
das Tagebuch ihrer Tochter heimlich mitlas […]. Mit einem Feuerhaken hob sie die drei 
inneren Eisenringe der Deckplatte des Öfchens an und überwachte den Feuertod des 
gefährlichen Heftes: Wenn der Russe das bei uns findet, sind wir erledigt, dumm und 
offenherzig wie du bist! Nie hat später >der Russe< Papiere bei der Familie Jordan 
vermutet und gesucht, doch du hast es nicht über dich gebracht, die Vernichtung dieses 
unersetzlichen, aber gewiß entlarvenden Dokumentes wirklich zu bedauern.\textsuperscript{53}

Nelly’s journal may have been incriminating, and her respect for (fear of) her mother 
prevents her from criticizing her intervention, however it seems lamentable for her that 
this document was destroyed. She does not allow herself to regret the burning of the 
journal in an outright manner. It would have been a painful reminder of her allegiance to 
Hitler. She, nonetheless, mourns the loss of the original source, particularly perhaps 
because she does not seem to have been given the option of burning the document 
herself.

\textsuperscript{53} Christa Wolf, Kindheitsmuster (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), p.307/8.
The journal, which for the Western reader often conjures up the degree of tedium that Evelyn Finger isolates in her review of *Ein Tag im Jahr*, seems to have alternative connotations for the GDR writer. Journals written in the GDR tend to mirror a precious inner life, that was carefully guarded, rarely shared and not publishable in the GDR. For Wolf, her journals represent the minute everyday tedium as a respite from the pressures of political conformity, as well as being a crucial support to memory and rich material for possible writing projects. ‘Juninachmittag,’ *Was bleibt, Störfall* and ‘Stadt der Engel’ are based on diary material or single day events.

The journal is also a hallowed form, as an ‘authentic’ document (though Western readers seem to question its ‘authenticity’ more readily than readers from the East) and for having survived thirty years of GDR censorship. Wolf values it for its key position in the inner dimension of life, its discharging of the private into the public and its privileging of the *private*, not the *public* persona, as is central to successful autobiographical writing.

The journal writing itself is an escape from ‘reality,’ having experienced ‘reality.’ It takes up time in the writer’s life which is both enjoyable and painful. One of Frisch’s regrets in 1990 when facing death from intestinal cancer is “vertrodelte Zeit,” to which Wolf exclaims: “Wie ich dieses Gefühl kenne!” (ETiJ 463) The time spent writing is also described by Wolf as her most interesting: “Das einzig Interessante im Leben ist das Schreiben, sagte ich, das hört Gerd nicht gerne.” (ETiJ 134) This dilemma of enjoying writing above all, yet losing time to writing, is familiar from *Kindheitsmuster* when the narrator writes of needing to live life to write about it, yet losing time in writing. The way that diary writing takes up time in the day to be described and thereby influences the representation of the events of the day, both takes meaning from and lends meaning to the
day, is frequently referred to in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and is significant for Wolf’s frequent preferencing of the journal format above other forms of writing. Wolf also often refers to the variation in effect resulting from starting the protocols earlier or later in the day, completing them the next day, a week later, etc. She laments the fact that as time passes, details are forgotten and events or emotions lose or change significance. The journal format has the capacity to make the dimension of time passing and changing perspective during writing more noticeable than other forms of writing.

4.4. Cult Portrait Reversed

Along with her emphasis on the advantages of journal writing, Wolf seems to need to address the issue of her public image in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, the urgency of this notion having been propelled by Jörg Magenau’s publication of *Christa Wolf Eine Biographie*. The 1960 to 2000 time frame of *Ein Tag im Jahr* is well suited to tackling this issue.

As early as 1969 and the initial reactions to the publication of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in the GDR, the scarcity of the book and the anxiety of GDR officials about it contributed to the situating of Christa Wolf as a cult figure and extraordinary woman writer, accomplished in her ability to write a book that confused a draconian establishment and struck a chord with a suppressed populace. *Christa T.* was passed from reader to reader and read and reread from its availability.54 *Kindheitsmuster*, in

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1976, continued the mission of *Christa T.*, in part in its difference and its interruption of GDR complacency about fascism, and it established Wolf as a writer of longer personal texts. *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, published in 1979, contributed to Wolf’s cult status with its poetic stance and Romantic overtones. Wolf describes a reading of the beginning of *Kein Ort* in her 1979 diary entry in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, whence it is clear that the readers find the text difficult and are forced to reread the text, only then finding ‘its meaning’, not one that can be easily put into words. One reader says:

Sie sei diese Art Literatur nicht gewöhnt. Zum Beispiel mache ich gar keine Anführungszeichen, da wisse man nicht genau, ob einer einen Satz gesagt oder nur gedacht habe, und manchmal wisse man auch nicht, wer. Sie habe das Buch dann ein zweites Mal gelesen und dabei dann auch den Titel verstanden [...] ein etwa vierzigjähriger Mann [...] Es sei ja jedem meiner Bücher der Vorwurf gemacht worden, daß es schwierig sei; für ihn hätten sie immer eine Tür aufgestoßen, sich mit etwas zu beschäftigen, hätten ihn zum Denken angeregt [...]. Eine andere Bibliothekarin, vielleicht vierzigjährig, eine sehr anziehende Frau [...] sagte was mich sehr berührte: Sie empfinde bei der Lektüre solcher Bücher wie der meinen, daß sie, die Leser, in ihren tiefsten Anliegen doch eigentlich wortlos seien und daß da ausgedrückt werde, was sie nicht sagen könnten. (ETJ 263)

The difficulty of the text, its ambivalence, the need to reread it to find meaning and the idea that it provides something the readers cannot express themselves, are qualities reminiscent of texts with cult status and Wolf’s comment above demonstrates her awareness of a specific reaction from readers of her texts. The sensation of the 1982 Frankfurt lecture series following the success of *Kassandra*, meant that Christa Wolf became patently aware of her elevation by some readers to the status of cult figure. It hardly bears mentioning that cult reverence is not a quality that literary critics tolerate well. Marcel Reich-Ranicki, in his “Macht Verfolgung kreativ?” article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1987, though aiming at Wolf’s ‘insufferable’ attitude to
the West and allowing praise for Christa T., cannot fail to mention his disgust at her effusive popularity:

Indes sollten wir nicht vergessen, daß wir ihr eines der markantesten Bücher der sechziger Jahren verdanken — den Roman »Nachdenken über Christa T.«. Was sie später verfaßt hat (»Kindheitsmuster«, »Kassandra«, »Störfall«), wurde, so gut gemeint es auch war, zusehends blasser und geschwätziger: Es kam zu gewichtig daher, um wichtig zu sein [...] doch immer noch ist man in Deutschland bereit, den Mangel an Charme und Scharfsinn zu verzeihen, wenn man genießen (um nicht zu sagen: konsumieren) darf, wonach sich viele sehnen, heute wie eh und je: das Getragene und das Weihevolle, elegisches Pathos und priesterlicher Ernst [...]. So hat Christa Wolf auch in der Bundesrepublik eine ansehnliche Gemeinde gefunden, sie ist längst eine Kultfigur.^[55]

Reich-Ranicki is more distracted by the composition of Wolf’s supporters than focused on the literary merits of her writing. His curt dismissal of Kindheitsmuster, Kassandra and Störfall, as a single body of work, yet praise for Christa T. makes little sense, though is indicative of the literary critic’s severe censorship when faced with ‘popular’ authors.

Max Frisch also grapples with Wolf’s feminist cult status and in the 1986 diary entry to Ein Tag Im Jahr Wolf describes his telling her that he got so annoyed reading Kassandra and the Lecture Notes that he threw the book at the wall:

Was ärgert dich bloß so, habe seine Freundin ihn gefragt, und er habe gesagt — das sage er jetzt auch mir: Ich erwähnte meinen Mann gar nicht, mit dem ich doch unterwegs war, der komme nur ein paar Mal kurz mit »G« vor, wenn schon Feminismus, dann bitteschön auch richtig, ich verhielte mich zu meinem Mann, wie sonst Schriftsteller zu ihren Frauen. (ETiJ 407)

Frisch’s attitude surprises and wounds Wolf; she responds:

[…] aus solchen Gründen wirft man ein Buch nicht an die Wand. Die wirklichen Gründe hat er mir nicht gesagt, dafür hat er, offenbar, weil er selbst verletzt war, versucht, mich zu verletzen, was ihm auch gelang. Ich sagte, was Gerd betreffe, unser Verhältnis zueinander, sei ich so scheu, daß ich ihn nicht in einem Buch darstellen wolle […]. Neid, Aggressivität auch von dieser Seite hatte ich wohl nicht erwartet, mir wurde erneut

Frisch is forgiven because the memory of their first encounter in 1968, on a trip on the Volga, on which Frisch had anticipated the presence of Ingeborg Bachmann, is held in high esteem for Wolf, but professional jealousy and impatience with Wolf's popularity is one of the obvious drawbacks that disturb her following her overt cult status. In 1990, gravely ill, Frisch phoned Wolf and emphasized his perspective of her cult status: "Kultfiguren, sagte er, kann man nur entweder anbeten oder stürzen. Du wirst jetzt gestürzt [...]. Schreib alles auf, sagte er noch." (ETiJ 464)

Recognizing and dealing with popularity is a dilemma that Wolf tries to address in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, but in a less clear-minded manner than Magenau's positive perspective on Wolf's success. Wolf is understandably ambivalent about the significance of the term "Kult" and the elevation of her popularity to cult status, as she experiences the serious drawbacks as well as the advantages of such status.

It is clear in *Ein Tag im Jahr* that the number of letters, invitations to events and requests for interviews, steadily increase from the late sixties through the eighties as Wolf’s fame gains momentum, waning slightly in the nineties, probably as much due to Wolf’s health and mobility difficulties as to negative media publicity. In the GDR, at events and readings, Wolf felt needed and inspired to write by readers’ responses, but increasingly, as she withdrew from GDR life following the 1976 Biermann *Ausbürgerung*, she seemed to live and write most intensely in Mecklenburg, in Meteln and Woserin. As she withdrew, her profile increased, reaching a culmination in the mid-eighties following the
repercussions of *Kassandra* and bringing with it Frisch’s and other writers’ alienation towards her popularity. Wolf tends to understand her popularity in the GDR in relation to a close identification that can’t easily be broken, one she recognizes in her own relationship to the GDR: “Aber woher eigentlich diese unauflosbare Identifizierung mit diesem Land. Warum wird man die nie los?” (ETiJ 252) She has become an identification figure for GDR citizens: “Durch ein vertracktes Verhaltensmuster biete ich mich als Identifikationsfigur an.” (ETiJ 410)

Her identification with the GDR, mainly with the people and landscape of the GDR, seems to relate to the kind of nationalism imprinted on her as a child and to the trauma of forcibly fleeing her homeland at an impressionable age, pinpointed by Helga Kraft.56 Although denying a need to find a new homeland in *Kindheitsmuster*, in *Ein Tag im Jahr* Wolf writes of a sense of having found a home in Mecklenburg in 1977:


This description of ‘Heimatgefühl’ is closely connected to the attraction of Mecklenburg and the perceived simplicity and genuine character of the people and regions of the GDR. It is also reminiscent of the occasional pastoral idealization of country life by Romantic writers. In 1981, Wolf further emphasizes her new-found fascination with country life:

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Alles das, was man »Landleben« nennt: Die Jahreszeiten neu kennenlernen. Die Veränderung einer Landschaft, ihrer Farbschattierungen, an denen ich mich nicht satt sehen kann; einzelne genau beobachtete Pflanzen im Wechsel der Jahreszeiten [...]. Alles in allem habe ich hier ganz anders als in Berlin jenes Gefühl von Lebensfülle [...] und vor allem gehört dieses Netz von Menschen dazu, das sich von Jahr zu Jahr enger knüpft [...]. Also ist, was ursprünglich als Rückzugs-Asyl angesehen wurde [...] nun doch zu einer Bewegung auf eine andere Lebensweise hin geworden [...]. Eine erstaunliche Erfahrung. (ETiJ 298)

Wolf’s identification with the GDR, bound up with the people and landscape of Mecklenburg, suggests that the need for a tie to a homeland and a sense of national affiliation has not subsided for her. The sense of familial belonging in the ‘antifascist/fascist’ state outweighed the many indications for Wolf that the GDR was not a suitable homeland. The familial relationship to the state lent Wolf a kind of protective shield that masked the bitterness also existent in the GDR that Wolf is confronted with in 1990 when a man exclaims loudly in a supermarket: “Ist das nicht [...] folgt mein Name [...] Der hat Honecker doch auch ihr Luxushaus geschenkt.” (ETiJ 480) Wolf brushes off the comment with the explanation: “Es ist kein Einheimischer,” but the awareness of resentment remains.

The close identification of GDR citizens with Wolf, that Wolf seems to enjoy and need: “Ob man nicht, sage ich später im Auto zu Gerd, um dieser Leute willen, um hierbleiben zu können, um sich dieses unvergleichliche Publikum zu erhalten, eben doch zu Kompromissen bereit sein müsse,” (ETiJ 268) led Wolf to the kind of compromise that harvested her strong criticism following the 1990 literary debate. The identification on the part of some GDR citizens with Wolf bears similarities with a mother/child relationship (Wolf has been hailed as ‘Mutter der Nation’), further inducing a kind of exalted status for Wolf only to be detrimental after 1989. This exalted status is also
reminiscent of the 1940s and 50s “Zeit des Personenkults” which Wolf mentions in a quotation from an interview with Komejtschuk in the 1966 diary entry as a time when literature failed:

Ich bin empört, wenn ich das Gerede hörte, unsere Literatur habe zur Zeit des Personenkults eingesücht geschwiegen oder sei nicht wahrheitsgetreu gewesen. Talentlose Werke entstellen das Leben in jeder beliebigen Epoche, das Talent aber sagt stets die Wahrheit. (ETiJ 85)

Wolf is aware of the strength of the appeal of a cult figure early in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and has documented its effect in *Kindheitsmuster* in Horst Binder’s allegiance to the Führer and Nelly’s comment: “Der Führer war ein süßer Druck in der Magengegend.”57 Like the residual nationalist attachment, Wolf seems to be entangled in the continuing susceptibility to cult figures, familiar to her since childhood. Though conscious of the dangers of the creation of cult figures, Wolf seems not to have avoided the fate of being exalted to cult status following the success of *Nachdenken über Christa T.* in 1969, only to be vilified twenty years later.

Wolf’s publication of *Ein Tag im Jahr* has the effect of undermining Magenau’s cult portrait by emphasizing the often mundane ‘actual’ life. The meticulous description of everyday activities, dotted with references to literary or philosophical texts or writers Wolf is involved with, is a contrast to Magenau’s emphasis on the ‘highlights’ of Wolf’s public life. Wolf mixes the ‘levels’ of public and private personae very deliberately to illuminate both textures and writing processes and to draw the reader’s attention to the existence of both extraordinary and mundane moments in the life of the ‘cult’ personality.

*Ein Tag im Jahr* indicates that Wolf recognized the true peril of the distorting cult status only after her status had been overthrown, along with the dismantling of many GDR idols after 1989, obvious in the title of Wolfgang Becker’s film *Good bye Lenin* (2002). It is clear in *Ein Tag im Jahr* that Wolf did not promote her cult positioning in any active manner, aside from writing innovative, personal texts and attending readings, mainly at small events. It is possible that her emphasis on personal texts implicated her person into the readers’ consciousness significantly, inviting intense personal admiration and intense personal criticism following 1989, though this does not seem to be a particularly common phenomenon for writers of personal texts. Wolf’s withdrawal to the Mecklenburg countryside may have heightened her appeal to her readers, in her inaccessibility and the confusion as to whether she was still in the GDR, but the move was not calculated by Wolf as anything other than as a retreat to write and live an alternative life. Once Wolf’s popularity had begun, it accelerated rapidly and became linked to political positions so closely that it was forcibly called into question in the 1990s.

Magenau’s biography emphasizes the extraordinary aspects of Wolf’s life, enumerates the accomplishments and accentuates the sensational, as might be expected of commercial biography. In *Ein Tag im Jahr*, by contrast, Wolf limits the sensational, reinvestigates the ordinary and the extraordinary and focuses on the space in between, not only the everyday and what Wolf calls the ‘authentic,’ but the ‘inner’ life, the soul searching of life writing, rather than Magenau’s awe at having sold 150 000 copies of *Kassandra*. Magenau aimed his biography at the story of the cult figure behind the media scenes, Wolf attempts to tell the story of the figure behind the media scenes and behind the cult figure. Tellingly, in the 1994 diary entry in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, Wolf mentions a
publication entitled *In Sachen Biermann*, which was written by six young publishers together with older historians as an account of the Biermann *Ausbürgung* in 1976.

Wolf describes a sense of alienation as to their version of the events:

Ich empfand [...] ein merkwürdiges Gefühl, als ich sah, wie jung die Herausgeber doch sind [...] und daß sie diese Vorgänge damals als Zehn-, Elf-, Zwölfjährige erlebt haben, daß sie sich also über abstrakte Kategorien in den Vorworten verbreiten – waren wir eine »Gruppe«, und wenn ja, nach welchen Kriterien —: daß also das Ganze für mich das Gerüst der Ereignisse wohl korrekt wiedergibt, nicht aber das Fleisch, die Atmosphäre, das wir wirklich erlebt haben, das, was nicht dokumentiert ist. (ETIJ 525)

This description of alienation seems applicable to Magenau’s portrayal of Christa Wolf in his biography. The framework of events is familiar to the reader, but the texture of the experience is very different to the self emerging in Wolf’s *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Wolf has begun to accept Magenau’s claim that she is a ‘historical figure,’ but she reserves the right with *Ein Tag im Jahr* to present herself through her own documents, in her own voice.

4.5. Self Presentation Pre- and Post-Wende

In contrast to the story of Wolf’s popularity and publication success in *Christa Wolf Eine Biographie*, and Magenau’s emphasis on the misrepresentation of this aspect in media reports on Wolf, critical interest in *Ein Tag im Jahr* seems to focus primarily on the nature of the self-image Wolf favours pre- and post-Wende, on the ‘confessional’ aspects of *Ein Tag im Jahr*, and the justification or explanation of the issues raised in the 1990 and 1993 literary and political debates. An adequate response is often specifically sought to the accusation that despite her status as a *Staatsdichterin* in the GDR, Wolf presented
herself as a victim, persecuted by GDR officials, in publishing her short story *Was bleibt* in 1990.

Wolf’s informant status refers to the 1950s and does not specifically feature in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Reference to the *Stasi* debate in 1993 is sidelined in *Ein Tag im Jahr* to a significant extent as Wolf indicates that the details of that episode have been published in *Akteneinsicht* (1993).

The 1990 debate, on the other hand, and the question of Wolf’s involvement in the GDR state’s evolution and survival pervades the narrative of *Ein Tag im Jahr* to a significant extent, though the details of the debate are not spelt out (except in the question “Kann man einen Text so mißverstehen?” in 1990) (ETiJ 467). A definitive answer to the question of whether Wolf predominantly complied with or resisted GDR policies between 1960 and 2000 lies beyond the sphere of the text. Following the 1976 Biermann *Ausbürgerung*, which is arguably more of a turning point in *Ein Tag im Jahr* than the *Wende* of 1989, Wolf seems to want to present herself increasingly in terms of her justification for staying in the GDR. As friends and writers leave, Wolf travels more frequently to the West and is confronted by questions from GDR writers as to why she lives in the GDR. She becomes keenly aware of the issue of ‘truth and freedom.’ She is reminded of a particular incidence of this question, on her visit to Max Frisch in 1986:

[...] ich erinnere ihn an unseren einzigen Abend bei den Johnsons in West Berlin, als Uwe und seine Frau, beide intensiv, uns Vorhaltungen machten, daß wir in der DDR lebten, wo ein Schriftsteller einfach nicht die Wahrheit sagen könne. Frisch beginnt, sich an den Abend zu erinnern, ich deute an, daß mir dieses Wahrheitsproblem sehr wohl bewußt sei, auch damals schon bewußt gewesen sei [...] (ETiJ 403)

But for Wolf the answer to writing the ‘truth’ was not to *leave* the GDR, for a host of reasons. She has mentioned her parents, her daughters being dependent on her in the
West, she was ‘needed’ in the GDR and would betray readers in leaving, but these concerns can be seen as subjective reasons for remaining in the GDR. Most obviously, Wolf rejects the alternative of the FRG because she doubts that she could write there. In 1980, she presents her inability to leave the GDR in terms of doubts about the fate of the GDR writer in the West:


Johnson is a kind of tragic Eastern figure in the West for Wolf, similar to her description of Thomas Brasch in 1997:

Rechts hinter der Tür im Ganymed saß an einem winzigen Tisch, Tee trinkend, Thomas Brasch. Er rief mich an, ich drehte mich um und habe ihn, obwohl er sehr verändert war, zum Glück erkannt. Er ist gealtert, härteres Gesicht, graue Bartstoppeln. Mensch Thomas! Immer diese Verlegenheit, wenn ich ihn treffe, gemischt aus schlechtem Gewissen und der Angst, er könnte wieder aggressiv werden. Wie geht es dir? [...] Und nun höre ich, er wohne jetzt über dem Ganymed, habe sich da eine viel zu große Wohnung genommen, immer schon habe er mal so wohnen wollen, mit Blick aufs Wasser, seine Mutter habe zu ihm gesagt: Wenn du es mal zu was gebracht hast, zieh hierher. Nun habe er es zwar zu nichts gebracht, doch wenigstens sei er hierher gezogen, auch wenn er sich die Wohnung eigentlich gar nicht leisten könne. (ETiJ 583)

Wolf fears both the material and creative decline that she associates with the West. This association between decline and Western capitalism is exemplified in her tears following the reading of a manuscript in 1995, sent to her by the mother of a suicide victim, who she admits was: “Ein sensibler junger Mann, der weder in die DDR-Zeit noch in diese neue Zeit paßte.” (ETiJ 554) Reading his story about a teenager growing up amongst
poverty and crime and falling in love with a young teacher, Wolf is overwhelmed by the destructiveness of capitalism: “[...] und wie diese schöne neue Zeit der unherrschten Marktwirtschaft zu einem durchweg kriminellen Bewußtsein führen muß und was dies wiederum für die Kinder bedeutet.” (ETiJ 555)

Her dubiousness about Western capitalism takes many (sometimes exaggerated and irrational) forms in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. She fears the kind of personal decline Uwe Johnson suffered in the West, Thomas Brasch’s creative decline and the inevitable moral decline of young people faced with the evils of capitalism: poverty and uncontrolled wealth, substance abuse and antisocial behaviour and a general lack of belonging. In 1996, she is very doubtful about a viable future for the young people growing up in the new capitalist system:

 [...] man kann nicht voraussehen, wo und bei wem junge Leute etwa in zehn, zwanzig Jahren Gedächtnis und Orientierung suchen werden, wenn die Unreformbarkeit und Destruktivität des jetztigen Systems noch deutlicher geworden ist als jetzt schon, und das in einer Geschwindigkeit, die wir nicht vorausgesehen haben. (ETiJ 559)

More economic and social gloom is predicted from California:

Und was hat das alles, frage ich mich [...] damit zu tun, daß ich jetzt hier bin, im Paradies [...] Anfällen eines Gefühls durchdringender Unwirklichkeit ausgesetzt? Flucht? Das wäre zu billig. Oder will ich mal nachsehen, wie es denn in seinem Innern beschaffen ist, das Paradies, das uns allem nun bevorsteht? (ETiJ 494)

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The belief that California could represent a kind of capitalist system that will befall East Germany is a naïve theory even for Wolf’s blatant rejection of capitalist society. From the ‘paradise’ of California she seems to blame negative developments in the former East Germany on the industrialized Western society:

Gestern früh hatte ich im Fernsehen nach den Bildern über neue Ausschreitungen von neonazistischen Jugendlichen in der ehemaligen DDR – es ist das einzige, was man hier über Deutschland sieht und hört – Interviews mit Schülern gesehen [...]. Keiner und keine war für die Rechten, aber es wußte auch niemand, was zu tun sei. Und was mich quält: Auch ich weiß es nicht, weil ich denke, dieses Herausfallen von jungen Leuten aus allen sozialen Bezügen – wofür sie sich den pseudosozialen Ersatz suchen – in schlimmen Fällen aus der humanen Gesittung, ist strukturell in einer Industrie- und Leistungsgesellschaft angelegt. (ETiJ 493)

The negative effects of the industrialization of the GDR had been referred to in Nachdenken über Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster, but Wolf’s negative associations with capitalism sometimes mask the fact that ‘socialism’ had been tried and tested and though Wolf sought democratic and fairer forms of socialism in 1989, most GDR citizens were adamant that the West, with its faults and failings, was a more attractive alternative than a reformed GDR. The Neonazism Wolf associates with the newer capitalist society, lay dormant in the former GDR prior to 1989. Wolf herself pointed to residual Nazi sympathy in the GDR in Kindheitsmuster, though this kind of Neonazism was consistently censored in the GDR press. In 1989 Wolf makes utopian claims about the advantages of the GDR society over the West to the sympathetic Westeners Inge and Otl Aicher:

Aber, sagten wir, unser Staat sei, viel mehr als der ihre, ein Staat der kleinen Leute geblieben, solche Villenviertel, wie wir sie bei gelegentlichen Besuchen in Frankfurt am Main und München und Hamburg gesehen hätten, gebe es nicht bei uns [...] es gab eine Bevorzugung von Arbeiterkindern beim Zugang zu den Bildungsstätten – nicht, wie bei
ihnen, eine Benachteiligung. Und es gebe – was wir für das Wichtigste hielten – kein Privateigentum an Produktionsmitteln, keine privaten Konzerne mit ihren verheerenden Auswirkungen; das hätten wir uns immer vor Augen gehalten, wenn uns in den letzten Jahrzehnten die Verzweiflung an diesem Staat übermannen wollte [...]. (ETiJ 439)

But it is clear from the criticism of capitalist and socialist political systems in *Ein Tag im Jahr* that Wolf is dissatisfied with both systems, as both have faults. Despite this critical position, Wolf does reluctantly present herself as easing into and reasoning with the new system following 1990 in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. She expresses her satisfaction in 1998, for instance, when the ‘Kohl era’ comes to an end and Gerhard Schröder, Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi have electoral success.

Wolf’s criticism of capitalism, though extreme and naïve at times, is an indirect answer to the question of whether she was a dangerous critic and resister in the GDR or the compliant *Staatsdichterin* as she is alternatively construed. In *Ein Tag im Jahr* she is critical of the faults of the Western political system more openly, but just as vehemently and relentlessly as she undermined the GDR regime. The fervour of the media debates in 1990 and 1993 and Wolf’s reticence in response, suggested that her image and self-image post-*Wende* would be predominantly subdued and withdrawn. *Ein Tag im Jahr* confirms Wolf’s withdrawal from political debates at times, but also demonstrates her involvement with the Green Party and emphasizes her flexibility and survival through illness and medical procedures, through strife and success. Wolf often mentions Gerd’s warnings not to take the political debates too seriously in *Ein Tag im Jahr.*

She responds to her

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daughter Tinka’s suggestion she write about the good things in the year in 1990, and she listens to Annette as she reminds her, in the same diary entry, that the GDR is returning to ‘normality’:


Wolf presents herself as changing in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. She changes her routine to survive tachycardia, appendicitis and a hip replacement operation, she wills herself to a positive outlook, through Gerd’s prompting and her belief in positive conditioning, and she modifies her negativity towards the *Wende* because she listens to others and adapts in response. Wolf doesn’t change her opposition to capitalism, similar to her relentless opposition to GDR policies following 1976, and her opposition to capitalism may be the key to understanding the criticism she faced in 1990. Nonetheless, she presents herself as surviving the media debates and the *Wende* as she did the Second World War, relatively unscathed, surprised at her good fortune and resilience. She writes in the 1976 entry to *Ein Tag im Jahr*:

Natürlich erlebe ich einiges, auch Schlimmes, gebe aber aus solchen Lebenskrisen, heil wieder hervor. Die Tbc hätte schlimmer sein, im Krieg oder auf der Flucht hätten wir ein Familienmitglied verlieren können, ich hätte in ganz andere Auseinandersetzungen verwickelt werden können, meine Tachycardie hätte weniger gutmütig verlaufen können – um nur das zu nennen, was mir gerade einfällt. (ETiJ 212)

würde – was natürlich Unsinn ist und nur beweist, daß ich mich von der Schablone, ich sei verpflichtet, mich zu engagieren, nur schwer lösen kann.”

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This sense of having survived relatively unharmed also applies to the turning point of 1989. When many fall prey to the *Wendekrebs*, Wolf survives and persists mentally, often strengthened by her belief in the therapeutic effects of writing. She does consider ending the *Ein Tag im Jahr* project in 1990, but resists this temptation as the diary entries have survived a difficult thirty-year period and she has developed a particular attachment to the irreplaceable diaries. Wolf recognizes the new challenges that the political transformation that followed the *Wende* has posed for her, as an individual and as a writer, but she presents herself as surviving the tumult and adapting.

Following 1979, as Wolf frequently mentions in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, she withdrew from involvement with the socialist party, so the 1989 collapse of the SED did not have the cataclysmic effect on Wolf that many commentators thought they would decipher in 1990. Her criticism of capitalism may have confused commentators into concluding that she had been closely associated with the GDR state. Wolf presents herself as changing in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, but she does continue to rally against a conversion to capitalism and on that front she incurs criticism from supporters of capitalism, though it is possible that she is simply as uncompromising in this respect as she was in her opposition to many aspects of the GDR state.

4.6. Hintertext

In the 1982 diary entry to *Ein Tag im Jahr*, Wolf writes of a common experience while writing, a sense of a text behind the text:

Dies ist eine Alltagserfahrung beim Schreiben. Augenblicklich zum Beispiel – das heißt, seit drei, vier Tagen – habe ich das Gefühl, daß hinter dem Text, den ich bis jetzt
This sense of a text behind the text is applicable to Ein Tag im Jahr, as it was to Sommerstück. Magenau’s assessment of Sommerstück as a kind of rare masterpiece that survived the GDR, applies to Ein Tag im Jahr to some extent in Magenau’s description: “Es war die Feier des Alltags, die gesteigerte Intensität des gelebten Augenblicks, die Bedeutung der Freundschaften, das Glück im Winkel, das um seine Flüchtigkeit weiß.”

Ein Tag im Jahr, like Sommerstück, can be seen to represent what remains of the GDR and therefore inhabits a space unfamiliar to Western readers in the sense that Martin Ahrends conjures up in the title of his article “Ach, ihr süßen Wessis.” Frank Schirrmacher’s frustration with Wolf’s “Schuldgefühl” mingled with “Kaffee, selbsteingekochter Konfitüre und Schwarzbrot” in Was bleibt, exemplifies the gap between GDR and FRG cultures. In reading Ein Tag im Jahr, the reader is at times baffled at the emphases of Wolf’s unusual priorities. The details of meals being meticulously prepared and enjoyed with friends can be understood as culinary and social interest, but Wolf places extraordinary emphasis on breakfast descriptions, as well as on Gerd’s culinary routine (the ‘everyday’). As an ensemble, these details intensify the notion of a significance behind the text, an inner life predicated on friendship and the joys

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60 Jörg Magenau, Christa Wolf Eine Biographie, op. cit., p.365.
62 Wolf’s breakfast descriptions in Ein Tag im Jahr seem compulsive. Breakfast descriptions are never omitted though other meals are. This may be a fetish that has survived following wartime starvation, or a continuous thread, a baseline, or small indication of the writer’s mood at the time. Depending on the tolerance level of the narrator on the day, the description is extended or truncated.
of rustic life exuding a timeless quality, all the more obvious in the knowledge that *Ein Tag im Jahr* is situated in the very specific and unparalleled historical time frame of the GDR. The emphasis on detail and rustic retreat might represent an escape from or alternative to the fear of observation and detainment and to the language of “Parteilichkeit” in the GDR press, that Wolf mentions:

[...] man müßte einmal eine Untersuchung machen über die primitive Form von Parteilichkeit, wie sie sich in unsere Presse an der Vergabe von Adjektiven äußert. Der geübte – und nicht nur der geübte – Leser weiß sofort, ob er es mit Freund oder Feind zu tun hat, je nach dem, ob in einer Überschrift eine Trauerkundgebung »bewegend«, Kontakte »intensiv«, Vorschläge »konkret« genannt werden. (ETiJ 204)

The betrayal of readers in the East with this kind of primitive use of adjectives irritates Wolf in her own sophisticated use of language as a writer in the GDR. Her reference to her relationship with Gerd also has unexpected emphasis from a Western perspective:

Wie wäre eigentlich unsere Ehe geworden, wenn wir in der Bundesrepublik leben würden? Wäre sie dann überhaupt »geworden«? Hätte sie so gehalten wie hier, wo der äußere Druck den Wunsch nach einer Sicherheit, einer Festigkeit so stark werden läßt; nach einem Menschen, auf den man sich blindlings und absolut und unter allen Umständen verlassen kann. (ETiJ 440)

This need for security, for trust in one person, due to a lack of trust in a wider community, has a bearing on the importance of the personal journal, personal relationships to other writers and the sustenance of the detail of personal life in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, as this appears to have been absent or suppressed in the GDR press, for example. Wolf writes of being “süchtig nach den Einzelheiten des Alltags.” (ETiJ 493) This addiction to everyday detail is related to the GDR’s (and not only GDR’s) suppression of the inner experience of history and emphasis on the outer events of a historical time
period. Wolf mentions the superior durability of the exterior details of historical events, as opposed to the fragility of inner life and personal detail:

Die äußeren Geschehnisse, Handlungen bleiben schärfer in der Erinnerung als das, was an innerem Leben – oft nicht synchron damit – abläuft. Ebenso, man sagt es mir auch von »Kindheitsmuster« immer wieder: Die fast konventionell erzählten Partien, die dort entwickelten Figuren prägen das Erinnerungsbild des Buches bei vielen Lesern, viel stärker jedenfalls als die Reflektionen. (ETiJ 222)

Wolf's interest in the fragile inner detail is reflected in the fascination with the micro, the specific and the everyday in Ein Tag im Jahr similar to the recent renewed interest in the micro, the idiosyncratic and the banal characterizing the wider definition of autobiography currently, according to Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord in Temporalities, Autobiography and Everyday Life (2002). Campbell and Harbord claim that in an essay on Walter Benjamin, Frederic Jameson defends the macro "as a crucial conceptual framework for comprehending and critiquing, global capitalism." But Campbell and Harbord argue that a focus on micro narratives does not signify an automatic evacuation of theory:

This is not to say that subjective accounts have come to supercede either theory or macro narratives of the present or past, but the emergence of autobiography in various cultural forms forces a dialogue between the conventionally oppositional terms of private-public, ontology-epistemology, micro-macro.

These conventionally oppositional terms of "private-public, ontology-epistemology, micro-macro" play a significant role in Wolf's project in Ein Tag im Jahr. Wolf presents

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63 Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord, Temporalities, Autobiography and Everyday Life (Manchester, 2002) p.1: "What was once contained within a discrete literary genre is now surfacing in diverse and multiple forms, in video diaries, docu-dramas, the Internet [...]. Stories of the self, whether told by protagonists accounting for the décor of their front room on television, subjects filming their own lives, and deaths, transmitted over the Internet, or academics writing their own encounters with life outside of the institution – there appears to be a need to tell and a market for the telling."

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid, p.2.
aspects of her public and private life in *Ein Tag im Jahr*, juxtaposing a macro and a micro narrative in putting forward a text like one-day diaries from a time period from 1960 to 2000.

Cambell and Harbord suggest that the question of translation between experience and theory, between micro and macro narratives, has a famous antecedent in the exchanges between Adorno and Benjamin:

Where Benjamin presented the montage of texts and exhibits for the reader to interpret at will, Adorno argued for the writer to articulate the connections between them, to utilize the conceptual language that makes the dialectic explicit. Many of the debates in the present moment echo the exchange between Adorno and Benjamin, an exchange that found no resolution.\(^6\)

*Ein Tag im Jahr* combines micro and macro narrative, wavering between everyday specifics and Wolf’s quotation of the theories of wider historical, medical, psychological and political theorists. Wolf seems to lean towards Benjamin’s argument that texts should be compiled for the reader to interpret at will in her montage of *Ein Tag im Jahr*.

The suppression of the micro, the inner and individual experience within the broader public domain, extremely visible in the GDR, is related to the significance of women’s journal writing for Wolf and the notion of women telling their own story in opposition to the often broader emphases of male writing.

In her book *The Life Writing of Otherness*, Lauren Rusk writes a chapter entitled “The Common Life of Uncommon Women” on Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*. This chapter title is not inappropriate for some aspects of Wolf’s undertaking in *Ein Tag im Jahr*. Rusk discusses Woolf’s radical challenge “to build a culture in which women’s as

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\(^6\) Ibid.
well as men’s talent for writing thrives.” Woolf believed that women’s creativity has been constrained and deflected. She writes in the opening to A Room:

I pondered it [the lecture topic of women and fiction], and made it work in and out of my daily life. I need not say that what I am about to describe has no existence [...]. “I” is only a convenient term for somebody who has no real being [...].

Woolf claims she writes about “the common life which is the real life.” Rusk notes that readers have objected that “Woolf’s idea of the common life does not include the life of the commoner.” Woolf is writing to women with the opportunity to hear her and to write, women aware of the space or ‘Raum’ of writing, but she also considers women collectively “as an underclass in relation to the men with whom they associate.” Rusk finds that A Room stresses three spheres of activity for women:

[...] private, interpersonal and public. Collectively, women have lived their life in the interpersonal realm. But Woolf finds them mostly absent from the other two, enjoying neither solitude nor public presence. A Room urges women to expand intellectually in both directions, into the more private and more public realms.

These three spheres are interesting with respect to Christa Wolf’s writing, as she has been projected into the public realm in her status as cult figure and in the media debates of 1990 and 1993, more forcefully than many male writers, and has also attempted to make important forays into the private sphere of women’s writing. From Nachdenken über Christa T. to Ein Tag im Jahr, many of her works have been described as extremely ‘personal.’ Wolf mentions the similarity in approach to writing between herself and Virginia Woolf in Ein Tag im Jahr: “Las vorhin ein paar Zeilen aus den Tagebüchern der

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67 Lauren Rusk, The Life Writing of Otherness, op. cit., p.15.
69 Lauren Rusk, The Life Writing of Otherness, op. cit., p.18.
70 Wolf makes reference to an “Erzählton” or “Raum” in the description of writing Kindheitsmuster in “Erfahrungsmuster,” discussed in Chapter 2.
71 Lauren Rusk, The Life Writing of Otherness, op. cit., p.27.
Virginia Woolf und war eigenartig berührt von mancher Ähnlichkeit in den Empfindungen.” (ETiJ 413)

In her introduction to The Life Writing of Otherness, Rusk describes a style of writing she calls innovative personal writing of the other. It harks back — in structure, theme or style — to orality:

The invoking of orality may reflect a subculture’s ethnic roots, its history of exclusion from the dominant media, or its members’ need to cluster together and gain strength by talking among themselves. On the other hand, invoking orality can also express the inclusive aspect of the self, since dialogue brings us together, and since sound — unlike books, which make us solitary readers — unifies its audience.72

Rusk finds that Woolf writes as if speaking, and in that mode, speaks as if conversing. This conversational, verbal writing style is also reminiscent of Ein Tag im Jahr’s informal style and related to Wolf’s interest in the tone and ‘connectedness’ of women’s journal writing. Wolf is acutely conscious of her status as ‘other’ in Ein Tag im Jahr, particularly in her more official capacity as a writer at public events, as “die einzige Frau” speaking at Böll’s funeral, for example, and her status as GDR writer, singles out her experience among well-known contemporary German writers. Her writing style has often been described as dialogic, invoking orality as a reference to women’s interpersonal skills and journal writing styles and as a way of emphasizing women’s lack of inclusion in other writing styles.73 Rusk finds that Virginia Woolf’s mimicking of orality points to the need for women to change writing styles: “Moreover, this mimicking of

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72 Ibid, p.4.
73 Wolf’s subtle feminist discourse in Ein Tag im Jahr is a good example of a text behind the text or between the lines in her writing. Her discretion has solid justification as in the 1970s she often mentions her awareness and skepticism of the off-putting and exclusionary effect of ‘feminist’ approaches.
orality exemplifies Woolf’s point that women need to change literary forms to reflect the ways they think and live.”

Rusk also mentions Woolf’s frequent interruptions with the word but, which “resonates with the multiple interruptions in women’s lives and the resultant openness created by these breaks.”

Wolf’s Ein Tag im Jahr can also be characterized as a text of interruptions, written frequently in note form, following an interruption of her September 27 through care of a grandchild or a doctor’s appointment, leaving the reader more uncertain about the effect of the text than following readings of Wolf’s more ‘traditional’ texts. Estelle Jelinek writes that women have long written “personal, searching, disjunctive works, rather than more public, progressive, linear accounts that have predominated in the masculine tradition of autobiography.”

The disjunctive quality of Ein Tag im Jahr makes the text difficult to characterize in terms of genre, intent, or effect. The reader is jolted by an idea plucked from an article or family member’s comment to another, in a radical manner. It is difficult to exclusively read Ein Tag im Jahr as Wolf’s presentation of her GDR and post-Wende experience (1960-2000), or as her contribution to what was positive in the GDR or as a diurnal journal in the tradition of women writers since the Romantics, who commit their inner thoughts to paper. Ein Tag im Jahr reads, as an ensemble, sometimes like a complicated Freudian dream text (many dream texts are also included in the text). Wolf relates so much detail of apparently varying relevance as in a dream text, that the reader struggles to assign meaning and group relevant ideas together. As with dream texts, there is a

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75 Ibid.
sense in which the text is dense with details of psychological significance, yet wider conclusions drawn from a detail in the text, leave the reader unsure of their reliability, due to the apparent randomness of the single comment (often in note form) within the ensemble.

This reading experience illuminates the way in which the writer ordinarily organizes and limits the text so as to produce a sense of directed signification and continuity, with the result that the reader’s usual methods of assigning meaning are not very productive with *Ein Tag im Jahr*. The micro detail of each entry to the years 1960-2000 in *Ein Tag im Jahr* and the macro undertaking of the project as a whole, as a search for trends over a long time period, defy the notion of securing meaning and the ‘goal’ of getting to ‘know’ the author in reading this text (a goal that Wolf mentions in the Preface to *Ein Tag im Jahr*). The open-endedness and lack of order in *Ein Tag im Jahr* leave the reader with no one line of understanding of the author, as critics thought they could extract from *Was bleibt* in 1990. *Was bleibt* was predominantly read as Wolf’s presentation of persecution by the *Stasi*. *Ein Tag im Jahr’s* style discourages such facile conclusions about the person of Christa Wolf and makes the reader aware of the expectations of the process of textual interpretation. The openness of the journal form also prevents the reader from taking the usual paths towards analyzing the text, confounded by its interruptive style and lack of conclusion and closure.

*Ein Tag im Jahr* is in this sense a radical autobiographical project because it seems to draw the reader in, in its personal tone and sense of personal disclosure, yet patently keeps the reader at bay at the same time, in awareness of its *choice* of notation and *limited* personal disclosure. As with Wolf’s other autobiographical writing, *Nachdenken*
über Christa T. and Kindheitsmuster, the reader has a strong sense of a text behind the
text, a sense of a need to read between the lines and reread the text to accommodate its
density. The reader is in search of a meaning that is always plural and changing. Lauren
Rusk claims that the hybrid works of the personal writing by the ‘other’ that she
examines “challenge their various readers to work through puzzles in ways that mirror the
writers’ own struggles to wrest sense from the contradictions they’ve faced.” Ein Tag
im Jahr seems, likewise, to challenge its readers to work through its puzzles, which seem
to mirror the contradictions of the struggles Wolf has experienced in surviving the many

Conclusion

Nachdenken über Christa T. was the result in 1968 of a protest from an unlikely source to the understanding of the ‘scope’ and ‘purpose’ of literature emanating from countries in support of the ideals of Socialist Realism. Christa Wolf saw herself as generally in sympathy with the Communist intellectuals advocating the foundation of the GDR state in the late 1940s, having mentioned more than once the attraction of the vitality and commitment of prominent intellectuals returning to the eastern part of Germany from exile abroad during these years. She mentions the ideas and writing of Louis Fürnberg, Anna Seghers, KuBa (Kurt Barthel), Konrad Wolf and others as extremely compelling as she negotiated her own position in terms of a political stance and a literary style in the 1950s and 60s. Christa Wolf also initially displayed sympathy with the state’s attempt at situating literature in working class environments and attended meetings with a brigade of factory workers in 1960 in order to familiarize herself with the plight of the worker and include a reflection of this experience in her literary output. Der geteilte Himmel appeared in 1963, but by 1965¹ and the writing of Nachdenken über Christa T., Wolf had modified her thinking on literary goals, placing significant emphasis on individual conflicts rather than on the cohesion of society as a whole.² The revolution that Christa T. exemplifies survives substantially in the emphasis on the needs of the individual (within

¹ A version of Nachdenken über Christa T. existed as early as 1965, according to Anna Kuhn in Christa Wolf’s Utopian Vision From Marxism to Feminism (New York, 1989) p.235.
society) and the accessibility of modes of self-expression, conjured up in Wolf's text. The overwhelmingly negative reaction of literary critics in the GDR and the manifestly positive reaction of readers in East and West, bolstered Christa Wolf's sense of having succeeded in capturing an important viewpoint in Christa T. Wolf's sudden recognition in Christa T. (as discussed in “Selbstinterview”), that she was in fact confronting herself in writing the text and her conviction that the text merited publication, represents the moment of the birth of an autobiographical impulse for Wolf and the first step on a path towards sustained interest in various forms of personal writing.

Kindheitsmuster is an extension of Wolf's new-found faith in autobiographical expression, albeit tempered by a strongly socially motivated understanding of the necessity of the project. The question of how a childhood in Germany in the 1930s and 40s may have been experienced (‘wie war es wirklich?’) and the question of how a new generation can respond to a calamitous past, led Wolf to choose an autobiographical avenue for a complicated subject. Only the claim that the text is 'autobiographical' could provide Wolf with a defence against the multifaceted criticism that erupted when she claimed that her childhood during Nazi Germany seemed 'normal' (at least until the close of the war). An autobiographical account also contributes to the success of portraying the difficulties encountered by a subsequent generation in learning about a past in part so horrific that many of those who experienced it are unable to find a means of apprehending it or discussing it at all (‘wie man zugleich anwesend und nicht dabeigewesen sein kann, das schauerliche Geheimnis der Menschen dieses Jahrhunderts’ KM 60). The autobiographical genre also allows Wolf a particular kind of access to the representation of this complicated historical period, access which historical accounts
generally fail to achieve and, significantly for Wolf, had she been reticent on this subject, as were many of her contemporaries, this story of the everyday experience of fascism would have been lost to silence.\(^3\)

By 2003, Wolf’s interest in autobiographical expression had evolved. She felt the need to respond to an increasing range of writing on her work and person and specifically to a biography by Jörg Magenau, *Christa Wolf. Eine Biographie*, published in 2002. *Ein Tag im Jahr* seems to lend personal insight into a long and tumultuous period from 1960 to 2000, to provoke readers into fostering their own understanding of how a ‘life’ might consist of days and moments of varying significance and interest that have to be meticulously compiled in order to produce the effect of a ‘life’ or an autobiography.

Each of Wolf’s texts has a different relationship to the tradition of literary autobiography. *Nachdenken über Christa T.* remains on the borderline of the autobiographical realm in its questioning of its relationship to ‘real’ characters and its ‘biographical’ slant. It is at best tentatively autobiographical, alternating between consciously fictional narration and more autobiographically-sourced writing. The narrator struggles with forms of address, with “ich,” “du” and “sie” and refers to the predicaments of the personal text in the emphasis on the constantly changing positioning of the narrator. *Christa T.* emphasizes the difficulty of saying ‘I.’ The narrator claims that the third person seems more real than the first (‘In ihren nachgelassenen Manuskripten lese ich die Stücke in der dritten Person: SIE, mit der sie sich zusammentat [...]. Ich begreife das Geheimnis der dritten Person [...] , die [...] mehr Wirklichkeit auf sich ziehen kann als die erste: ich.’ N 187) The use

\(^3\) Wolf also makes a similar point in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Without her emphasis on Christa T. and her treatise on Christa T.’s life and predicament in writing, an important dimension of women’s life stories might have been lost.
of ‘I’ conjures up the critical question of who am ‘I’? Wolf is aware that the answer here is extremely complicated. The experience of the marginalization of women from dominant culture has led to an obscure sense of who ‘she’ might be. Patricia Waugh mentions the ‘constructedness’ of a sense of identity for the marginalized rather than a sense of identity as a reflection of an inner essence: “[…] for those marginalized by the dominant culture, a sense of identity as constructed through impersonal and social relations of power (rather than a sense of identity as the reflection of an inner ‘essence’) has been a major aspect of their self-concept […]”⁴ Wolf grapples with her general sense of identity for women very succinctly in *Nachdenken über Christa T*.

The difficulty of saying ‘I’ also addresses many of the dilemmas of autobiographical writing featuring in the theoretical discussions on the definition and interpretation of autobiography. It addresses the issues of who is speaking?, what does it mean to say ‘I’?, and how is ‘I’ self-interested and ‘self-indulgent’?

*Kindheitsmuster* approaches the appearance of conventional autobiographical writing in its clear emphasis on childhood and its chronological sequencing of childhood events, albeit interrupted by reflections on the time period of the writing of the text and elements of the account of a trip to Gorzow Wielkopolski in 1971.⁵ In this sense *Kindheitsmuster*

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⁵ Wolf includes the second and third levels in *Kindheitsmuster* as an interruption in style, but she is aware of their lack of effect in many cases. She mentions in *Ein Tag im Jahr* her experience of readers claiming that when they think of *Kindheitsmuster* only the events of the child’s story remain in their memory, though the critics of the book make much of the ‘intrusive’ second and third levels in the book: “Die äußeren Geschehnisse, Handlungen bleiben scharfer in der Erinnerung als das, was an innerem Leben – oft nicht synchron damit – ablauft. Ebenso, man sagt es mir auch von »Kindheitsmuster« immer wieder: Die fast konventionell erzählten Partien, die dort entwickelten Figuren prägen das Erinnerungsbild des Buches bei vielen Lesern, viel stärker als die Reflektionen. Die Frage einer jungen Polin vorgestern auf dem Übersetzerseminar: Man lebe so mit der Familie Jordan mit, man identifiziere sich so mit ihr – könne man da nicht die sechs Millionen Toten in Polen darüber vergessen.” p.222.
approximates a pattern (‘Muster’) and a tradition of autobiographical writing echoing Augustine, Rousseau, Goethe or Woolf. It follows a path between consciously submitting to a pattern or tradition and attempting to interrupt that expectation by creating a juncture in the appealing childhood narrative with changes of time frame and perspective and the jarring questions of a younger generation. Kindheitsmuster shows awareness of the tradition, yet shows a further attempt at exposing and altering its workings. Its avoidance of ‘ich’ and its questioning of the ability of autobiography to unite the child with the adult also inverts the autobiographical tradition in its insistence on the portrayal of a ‘unified’ person in the writing of autobiography.

Like Nachdenken über Christa T., Ein Tag im Jahr positions itself on the margins of autobiographical expression in its diary form. It seems not to interrupt the expectation of the diary form in itself, but because of its position as an abridged diary over a forty-year period, it challenges expectations in its attestation to wider historical time frames. It also seems to re-assess the value of the journal between personal writing and historical documentation as Wolf seems to offer this text consciously as occupying the interface between personal testimony and historical chronicle.

On the whole, Wolf’s involvement with autobiographical writing seems to be closely linked to her absorptive interest in women’s writing. Along with the proponents of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s, Wolf recognized that women’s rights and equality issues represented only the exterior dimension of feminist goals. The repercussions of a lack of a tradition of women’s writing, the lack of women’s incisive involvement in the accumulation of knowledge and differences within women’s needs, are also issues that occupied Wolf’s interest in pursuing feminist aims. Kassandra may
have appeared as Wolf’s most acclaimed contribution to the feminist cause in 1982, but it may succumb to some of the limitations of second wave feminism from a latter day perspective. It seems to emphasize patriarchal oppression as a cause of women’s oppression, conceptualizing power as concentrated in an identifiable place or group, ignoring the question of why women may have conceded to patriarchal power or how patriarchal oppression could have survived unopposed. Postfeminism or feminism’s ‘coming of age’ seeks to challenge the possibility of specifying a cause of women’s oppression believing, following Foucault, that power is highly dispersed, not concentrated in identifiable places and groups. Ann Brooks in Postfeminisms points out that Foucault has claimed that “Power is operated through institutional arrangements, but it is exercised, not possessed […]. Power is not attached to agents and interests, but is incorporated in numerous practices.”^6 Christa Wolf’s involvement with feminist awareness in Kassandra resulted in her being heralded as “unsere Christa,” in the feminist journal Emma in 1982,^7 but her work in Christa T., Kindheitsmuster and Ein Tag im Jahr brings her closer to being instrumental in feminist achievement on another dimension. Here she addresses critical notions such as identity for women, writing traditions for women and women’s ability to write high-profile autobiography, notions that allow for the recognition that the subject is decentred and power is dispersed and work towards establishing an alternative knowledge base for women.

The important link between feminism and autobiography has long been apparent. It is associated in Feminism and Autobiography with autobiography’s position on the

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^7 Ibid., pp.6 and 48.
borderline between fact and fiction, the personal and the social, the everyday and the literary: “Autobiography makes trouble.”9 ‘Disruptive interdisciplinarity’ has long been central to the feminist project, according to Tess Cosslett, and there has long been a strong feminist interest in the autobiographical, beginning with the attempt to link the ‘personal’ with the ‘political.’ Feminism offers a distinctive platform from which to view various concerns about autobiography as it emphasizes the “gendered constructions of self” that women often assume. And while feminism has “posed a challenge to the genre of autobiography, feminism’s engagement with the genre has contributed to a critical re-evaluation of its own long-standing concerns including subjectivity, knowledge and power, differences and collective identity.”10 Awareness has shifted in feminism from women’s experience as a given to the “complex construction of gendered subjectivities” so that the field of autobiography has “become a central preoccupation and testing-ground for feminism.”11

If autobiography is a central preoccupation and testing ground for feminism, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* can be read as an early text instrumental in the highlighting of the gendered construction of self that women assume. Clearly interested in the border between fact and fiction, the personal and the social, and aware, at an early stage, of some of the complications of equal working rights uniquely accessible to women in the GDR in

10 Ibid, p.2.
11 Ibid.
the 1960s\textsuperscript{12}, Wolf raises some key questions for feminism and autobiography in the complicated textual positionings of \textit{Christa T}.

Tess Cosslett also claims that as the absence of women's voices from the canon became apparent, women's texts began to be read and discussed and this unsettled and problematized the genre:

[...]

if women have more relational, or more fragmented selves [...]

as Patricia Waugh has argued, their stories will take a different shape [...]. Their selfhood and what it will report will not be so simple: fiction and the biography of others, will enter their autobiographies. Feminist questioning of universalist assumptions has thus unsettled the definition of the literary genre of 'autobiography.'\textsuperscript{13}

Christa Wolf's \textit{Nachdenken über Christa T.}, \textit{Kindheitsmuster} and \textit{Ein Tag im Jahr} can thus be seen as crucial to this unsettling and problematizing of the definition of autobiography and the attempt to integrate the 'personal' and the 'political,' the everyday and the literary. This is not a minor task, if it is to be convincingly approached. Women writers have long been associated with the domestic sphere, the "affective curve in the plot of love,"\textsuperscript{14} the narrow, the limited, neither the profound nor the significant; Christa Wolf sets about altering this conception without losing the closeness and connectedness that she interprets as crucial in women's mindset and writing. \textit{Nachdenken über Christa T.} touches upon the notion of the difficulty of women writing, \textit{Kindheitsmuster} questions the universalist assumptions of autobiographical writing from the notion of the unified writing subject to the historical, heroic storyline and \textit{Ein Tag im Jahr} most closely questions the nature of the borderline between the everyday and the literary.

\textsuperscript{12} Lorna Martens, \textit{The Promised Land. Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic} (Albany, 2001).

\textsuperscript{13} Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield, (eds.) \textit{Feminism and Autobiography}, op. cit. p.2.

\textsuperscript{14} Sidonie Smith, \textit{A Poetics of Women's Autobiography} (New York, 1987) p.17.
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