

THE GENDER OF AUTHORSHIP: HEINER MÜLLER AND CHRISTA WOLF

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I

The relationship between sexuality and politics has always been an underlying assumption of the literary avant-garde. Within East German literature, which rests on the notion of a fairly comprehensive social theory and rises out of a relatively homogeneous cultural sphere, this relationship takes on a distinct form which is different from its counterparts in the West, but which in its paradigmatic quality can nevertheless shed light on contemporary discussions of this subject in general. The relationship between sexuality and politics manifests itself within the creative literary process as an interdependence between authorship and gender. In East German literature the question of authorship is inherently linked to the notion of art as a form of societal production and the identity of the artist as a producer. Given the rootedness of East German culture in the Marxist concept of life as production and the human being as an ensemble of production relationships, the question of the author as producer is no longer a matter of controversy but accepted fact. As formulated by Walter Benjamin and demonstrated by the theater of Brecht, revolutionary art manifests itself not in its representational quality but in its functionality, not in how it characterizes the production relationships of a given time but in what function it assumes within those relationships.¹

In the thirty years since the founding of the GDR, East German literature has witnessed the transition from an early phase of revolutionary socialism to the gradual establishment of a technocratic state socialism. In this context avant-garde writing in the GDR no longer critiques primarily the traditional impediments to socialism, such as remnants of capitalism, bourgeois individualism, etc., but rather those aspects of the revolutionary

tradition itself which have contributed to the solidification of state socialism: the heritage of instrumental rationality, patriarchy, and the totalitarianism of Enlightenment discourse. As a result, the notion of the author as producer is no longer linked to the revolutionary project of the operative writer, but has become associated with technological rationality, domination and the authoritarian state. Narrative omniscience no longer represents the radical cunning of the masses as it did for Brecht, but suggests rather the logistics of elitism and the discourses of power. The problem of the operative writer is no longer how effectively he can proselytize, but to what extent his instrumental productivism reinforces the power relationships of the society in which he lives. Authorial sovereignty and perfection ultimately betray the society and the self: «With the elimination of private ownership of property and the private ownership of the self within socialism, wisdom becomes narrow-minded, aphorisms become reactionary; the pose of the classical author requires Homeric blindness. ...The collision of historical epochs strikes deeply, and painfully, into the individual who still is an author but can no longer be one.»² Today in the GDR the radical writer is imperfect, vulnerable and often at a loss. The primary concern of this writer is no longer the teleology of a better future, but the deformations and hopes of the past repressed by the historical machine that has cemented the present.

For the contemporary East German avant-garde the metaphor of sexuality expresses most fundamentally the yearning for a repressed past. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno pointed out in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the sexuality represented by the Sirens is the ultimate threat to Odysseus' mastery over nature and his return home into the stability of institutions and civilization. Not coincidentally, the Odyssean figure has been one of the most frequent characters in East German drama and literature. Odysseus is the prototypical Leninist functionary, the cunning pragmatist who in the name of enlightened progress turns everything that threatens his goal into the Other. «The Sirens have their own quality,» write Horkheimer and Adorno, «but in primitive bourgeois history it is neutralized to become merely the wistful longing of the passer-by.»³ Odysseus acts out the ideology of the survivor; his price is the rationalization of life and the repression of the self. While others act, his weapon is the dialectics of reason and language. In East German literature he suggests the Party secretary, the technocratic ideologue, and the operative

author as producer himself. Finally, Odysseus is the enlightened patriarch who seeks to territorialize all areas that encroach upon the boundaries of his logocentric voyage into the future called historical revolution.

The field of sexuality is one of the last open spaces that defies the universalizing ambitions of classical Marxist theory and the Prussian heritage of obedience to authority which is specific to East German culture. Small wonder that sexuality has become a main theme of East German drama, poetry and prose in recent years. One of the most significant theatrical events of the 1970s, for example, was a production of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* which was based on improvisation rather than theory and, instead of language and plot, was guided by the physicalization of concepts and the tensions of sexuality itself.⁴ The literature of young writers that circulates in samizdat form is filled with sexual fantasies and all kinds of so-called polymorphous perversions. There is even an anthology of short stories by some of East Germany's best-known writers devoted entirely to the subject of sex changes.⁵ Most recently, in his play *Sappha* the dramatist Stefan Schütz transfers his sexual identity as author to female experience; the play concerns a Lysistrata-like rebellion of a group of women who abort their fetuses rather than reproducing life for the technocratic advancement of the state.⁶ The concern with sexuality in East German literature is fundamentally political, and calls into question the social hegemony of patriarchal authority and the specifically male-identified character of Marxist-Leninist history. With respect to the process of writing, the relationship between sexuality and politics has necessarily called forth a reflection upon the gender of authorship as well.

II

This reflection upon the gender of authorship is represented most paradigmatically by the writers Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf. When viewed as Marxist writers and from a sex-neutral perspective, the aesthetic, philosophical and political developments of these two writers are strikingly similar. Both were born in 1929; for both fascism was the formative experience of their childhood years. After the War they became communists, settled in East Ger-

many, and committed their work to the building of socialism in that country. Both began working as journalists and started producing their literary works in the late 1950s. Characteristically, the male author Müller took up the more public, abstract and globally-oriented form of drama and theater, while Christa Wolf devoted herself to the more private, descriptive and personalized forms of the novel and short prose. Today both Wolf and Müller stand at the experimental forefront of their respective genres and have attained an international stature that no other East German writers enjoy. Both have a large following of younger writers in both East and West. What the novelist Anna Seghers and the playwright Bertolt Brecht meant to the development of a radical socialist aesthetic in the Germany of their time is represented by Wolf and Müller in the GDR today.⁷

The political landscape of their society and its philosophical tradition of Marxism have guided the development of both writers. They represent the generation whose literature matured in dialectical relationship to the development of socialism in the GDR. Consistent with the political and economic reality of the early reconstruction years in the GDR, Müller's and Wolf's early works centered on the themes of agricultural and industrial production. With the gradual liberalization and popularization of culture in the 1960s, both writers turned to a reflection upon the authenticity of individual experience within socialism. Not coincidentally, Wolf's texts were consciously peopled by women, Müller's by men. Müller drew upon Brecht's theory of the learning play that relinquishes didacticism and allows characters to play out and expand the possibilities of a given situation. Wolf wrote *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968), a novel in the tradition of modernist stream-of-consciousness in which a narrator who has accommodated herself to the social system searches for the enigmatic female alter-ego that she has repressed. With the transition to state socialism in the early 1970s and the experience of Prague in 1968 behind them, both Wolf and Müller became increasingly critical of the state. Müller's *Cement* (1972), a play about the transition from Leninism to a bureaucratic and technocratic socialism in early Soviet Russia, was the author's farewell to the productivist ideology of Marxist-Leninist revolution and the rationalistic heritage of the Enlightenment. Similarly, Wolf's prose centered on the institutionalization of life in the GDR and the internalization of dominant power structures within the individual. Her prose collection during this time

was appropriately entitled *Unter den Linden* (1974), the name of East Berlin's parade street of institutionalized government and high culture. In the mid-70s both Wolf and Müller took up the theme of German history to point up the links between authoritarian forms of socialization in the GDR and its Prussian and fascist past. Müller's plays *Germania*, (1971) *The Slaughter* (1974), *Life of Gundling* (1975), and Wolf's novel *Patterns of Childhood* (1976) delineate the psychological and social forms of «everyday fascism» which are not eliminated by the economic transition to socialism. In the course of time, both Wolf's and Müller's writing became increasingly autobiographical. Most recently, their works have directly addressed the radical dimensions of sexuality and the politics of gender.

The thematic framework of Wolf's and Müller's literary development is by no means untypical of a general trend of avant-garde writing in the GDR. What distinguishes their work in particular, however, is that their critique of the dominant tradition of their culture has been consistently accompanied by a reflection upon their own participation as narrative authorities within this tradition. «I/GDR cannot write about myself without writing about GDR/politics,» said Heiner Müller recently. And conversely: «It is no longer permissible not to talk about oneself when one writes.»⁸ A similar conviction holds true for Christa Wolf who repeatedly emphasizes the need for the honesty of the writer and the authenticity of authorship.⁹ As communist writers, Müller and Wolf exhibit a remarkably similar literary development. As two writers of opposite sex, the aesthetic questions surrounding their work take on an entirely new quality.

III

The male author Müller has become increasingly aware that the quality of his writing and his success as an author are fundamentally connected to male-defined values of literary history and production. Within patriarchy, male authorship is inherently based on privilege. The metaphors, myths and topoi of the literary tradition which the author employs are rooted in a dominant male culture and aesthetic. In this sense, an unreflected male authorship

is by its very nature an exercise of authority and power. Müller's response to this realization has been the aesthetics of deconstruction, an attempt to erode the dominant structures of the literary text in order to find the authentic subject which male history has repressed. The emergence of this subject is ultimately prohibited by the omniscience of male authorship itself. For this reason Müller sees the elimination of the author, that is, the classical male author, as the hope of literature and the future. In a recent essay on post-modernism he writes: «As long as freedom is based on violence and the practice of art on privileges, works of art will tend to be prisons; the great works, accomplices of power. The outstanding literary products of this century work toward the liquidation of their autonomy, toward the expropriation and finally the disappearance of the author. Rimbaud and his escape to Africa. Lautréamont, the anonymous catastrophe. Kafka, who wrote to burn his works because he did not want to keep his soul as Marlowe's Faust did. Literature participates in the movement of language first evident in common language and not on paper. In this sense literature is an affair of the people, and the illiterates are the hope of literature. Work toward the disappearance of the author is resistance against the disappearance of humankind.»¹⁰

In the GDR, which is a highly developed industrial nation and not part of the Third World, the possibilities of common language and so-called illiteracy are most effectively represented by women. Like Müller, and in a similar effort to erode the dominant structures of the literary text and its tradition, Christa Wolf has turned increasingly to an aesthetic of deconstruction. Indeed, a main theme of Wolf's work has been her rootedness as author in the male tradition of literature and, as a female author, her difficulty in «saying I,» as she terms it.¹¹ The «I» of male authorship is the history of the literary canon: the world of Homer, the Greeks, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoy, and the contemporary avant-garde writer who, since Joyce, has found innumerable methods of pondering why he no longer exists. This canon is the landscape of war, the revolution, the return home, the conflict between the individual and the state, the stormy and stressful escape into nature, the laborious journey into the lonely psyche, the glory and the meaninglessness of death. Indeed, what woman writer or reader recognizes herself in the idealism, melancholy and insanity of an Orestes or Hamlet, in the political power complex of a Macbeth or Richard III, in the destructive obsession with knowledge of an

Oedipus or Faust, in the poetic solipsism of Tasso or Malte Laurids Brigge, or in the global vision of the tragic revolutionary from Prometheus to Danton? The historical «I» of female authorship lies in what has been concealed by the literary canon, in the silent tradition of oral history, letters, diaries, autobiography, and fiction that has never been written down, let alone published. The «I» of female authorship ultimately calls for the creation of authorship, not its deconstruction. As Virginia Woolf has said, it creates itself out of the memory of Shakespeare's sister who never existed, but who will emerge when the drama of Shakespeare has run its course.¹² The ultimate consequence of Christa Wolf's aesthetic of deconstruction is the freeing of textual space for the creation of something new, a break with the patrilinear tradition of the fathers in order to unravel the hidden threads of female authorship. Whereas Heiner Müller, from the perspective of dominant male culture, speaks of this process in terms of an opposition between the literary exercise of power and illiteracy, for Christa Wolf this process involves the insistence on a literary voice which heretofore has seemed to be silent, but in fact has simply not been heard. This difference in perspective can best be explicated by a comparison of these two writers' most recent works: Müller's play *Hamletmachine* (1977) and Wolf's short novel *No. Place. Nowhere* (1979).¹³

The titles of these two texts already suggest the gender specificity of their respective authors. Müller's «Hamletmachine» assumes the existence of a literary canon, of history: the world of Shakespeare, classical drama, a global frame of literary reference. H. M. Hamletmachine is also an anagram for H. M. Heiner Müller: the contemporary male author is the natural heir to all the myths, metaphors and topoi of the literary tradition. In contrast, the identity of the female author Wolf is indicated by absence: «No Place. Nowhere.» Her natural heritage is the concealment of a literary tradition, not the overbearing presence of the literary machine suggested by Müller's play. At the same time *No Place. Nowhere* is a code for utopia. Whereas Müller's title «Hamletmachine» evidences the imprisonment of the male author within the closed system of the literary heritage and the text, Wolf's title «No Place. Nowhere» signals the infinite possibilities of redefining the past and creating the future.

IV

Let us look at Müller's play first. In the tradition of classical drama, it consists of five parts, each of them variations on the theme of Shakespeare's original play. Hamlet is the hero, the author, the human subject, the literary «I.» He is an inherited identity, an all too familiar metaphor, a classical monument. Müller's Hamlet poses as the image of himself: «I was Hamlet. I stood on the coast and talked to the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in my back. ...I'm good Hamlet Gi'me a cause for grief/Ah the whole globe for a real sorrow/Richard the Third I the princekilling king/Oh my people what have I done unto thee/I drag around my heavy brain like a hump/Second clown in the communist spring-/Something is rotten in this age of hope/Let's delve in earth and blow her at the moon.»¹⁴ The drama of Müller's Hamlet exists in his quotations of himself. Indeed, the play is made up not only of quotations and paraphrases from Shakespeare's original, but of numerous lies from Müller's earlier plays as well. Like his male character, the author has nothing more to say and resorts to quoting literary history and himself: BLABLA. In a desperate effort to avoid the entropy of silence he forces the dialogue with Shakespeare and manages to complete the play: five acts as scenes, in classical form. It is an old trick and the author shows it. The hybris of male authorship constructs a competitive dialogue between the writer and his most brilliant, hence most oppressive forefather. Ultimately, this is not dialogue but monologue: the static machinery of Hamlet, H.M., Heiner Müller, Hamlet-machine. They are all the same.

Who is Hamlet? Hamlet represents the paradigmatic situation of the male dramatic hero. Like Orestes in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* he returns home to find disorder in the house and his patrilinear inheritance threatened. He is obsessed with the ghost of his father, the betrayal of his mother, and he vacillates between the affections of his sister/lover and his friend. His ambition is to save Denmark; his emotional engagement is with himself. The drama of Hamlet is a monologue with the self. For five acts he cannot act. The tragedy of Hamlet is his self-involvement; it produces a stage full of corpses at the end of the play. The melancholy and idealizing ambitions of the male hero turn ultimately into violence. For the playwright Müller, Hamlet is the paradigm of the radical intellectual for whom

the revolution always ends with the appearance of Fortinbras, with Napoleon, with Stalin. The play suggests that Hamlet is not only a victim of but also an accomplice in this process.

Müller's entire play concerns itself with the author's effort to find a way out of being, acting out, rewriting the paradigm of Hamlet. His effort fails. Hamlet is not only the past but the present as well. Hamlet's inability to change makes him a machine: «I am the soldier in the tank turret, my head is empty under the helmet, the stifled scream under the chains. I am the typewriter. I am my own prisoner. I feed the computer with my data. My roles are spit and spitoon knife and wound tooth and gullet neck and noose. I am the data bank. Bleeding in the crowd. My drama has not taken place. The text got lost. The actors have hung up their faces on the nail in the dressing room. The souffleur is rotting in his box. The stuffed corpses in the audience don't move a finger. I go home and kill time, at one with my divided self.»¹⁵ At the end Hamlet, in full armor, takes an axe and splits open the heads of Marx, Lenin and Mao. The original Hamlet had never acted and failed because he was obsessed with the ghost of his father. Müller's Hamlet survives by destroying the ghosts of his political fathers, and the inspirational ghost of Shakespeare as well. But he survives as a machine, without a past and a future, a machine that is at once self-perpetuating and self-annihilating. The author as technocrat, the text as the machine.

Hamlet passes. The author passes. What remains? Ophelia, of course. The revolutionary project that fails and ends with the Hamletmachine is transferred to the Other, the woman. In Müller's play Ophelia no longer turns violence against herself but sets into motion the task relinquished by Hamlet. At the end of the play Ophelia in bondage sits in the water underworld in a wheelchair: «Electra speaking. In the name of the sacrifices. I expel all the semen which I have received. I transform the milk of my breasts into deadly poison. I strangle the world which I have born between my thighs. Down with the joy of subjection. Long live hate, spite, the revolution, death. When she comes through your bedrooms with butcher's knives you'll know the truth.»¹⁶ Ophelia as Electra, as the Ulrike Meinhof who survived, or as the insane terrorism of Susan Atkins and the Charles Manson clan. Ophelia as the brutal possibility of illiteracy and female authorship. Ophelia with the knife as the tortured vision of the future, so that Hamlet can finally put down his pen and exit. The ultimate cynicism of Müller's play is

that Ophelia is not autonomous but a conscious projection of the Hamletmachine—as she was the unconscious projection of Hamlet in Shakespeare's original play. For Müller, Ophelia is no longer second nature created out of Adam's rib: she is a perfect system produced and manipulated by the rationalization of the authorial machine. In her most extreme form she is the machine gone wild, which no longer needs the author who produced her and turns against him. Ophelia is as much a product of the author's fear as she is of his hope. That is why he refuses to give her up and continues systematically to colonize and to reproduce her. Hamlet still insists on telling Ophelia where she's supposed to go.

Is then Ophelia a woman or a man? For Müller, the probing of a separate gender specificity leads to an obfuscation of these categories. In the fourth scene of the play the player of Hamlet says: «My place, if my drama were still to take place, would be on both sides of the front, between the fronts, above them.»¹⁷ The transsexual dimensions of such a boundary situation are underscored and contrasted in the preceding scene by the impasses of sexual transference and the freezing of sexual identity in images. Ophelia enters, painted and dressed like a whore: «Do you want to eat my heart, Hamlet.» Hamlet covers his face with his hands and says: «I want to be a woman.» Hamlet puts on Ophelia's clothes, she creates a whore's mask for him. Hamlet poses as a whore.¹⁸ Later, Hamlet says: «I want to be a machine.»¹⁹ From this point of view, the difference at the end of the play between Hamlet posing in his armor (Hamletmachine) and Ophelia speaking out of the bondage of her wheelchair (female Other) might be seen less as the opposition between male and female than as two forms of transvestitism, as the «masculine» and «feminine» sides of the former «I» who was the character/narrator/author/Hamlet/H.M. The relationship Hamlet/Ophelia strives for a transsexual identity, but rests ultimately in a mutually exclusive confrontation of gender clichés and in transference. Hamlet/Ophelia only perceive themselves or their (Hamlet's) images of each other. For Hamlet, Ophelia is always an object of narcissistic desire, and the reverse. That is why they remain frozen in a never-ending series of oppositions and dualities. That is why the play is so appropriately entitled *Hamletmachine*: an intricate construct that distinguishes all experience according to the one quantification of Being called Hamlet.

narrative voice reiterates the dilemma of the male artist which Müller has described in a separate essay as Orpheus: «Orpheus the singer was a man who could not wait. He had lost his wife by sleeping with her too soon after she gave birth to a child, or by giving her a forbidden glance too soon during their return from the underworld after his song had liberated her from death. Thus she was turned back into dust before becoming flesh anew, whereupon Orpheus invented pederasty which excludes childbirth and is closer to death than is the love for women. Those he scorned hunted him with the weapons of their bodies, branches and stones. But the song protects the singer: what he had praised with his song could not scratch his skin. Farmers, scared by the noise of the hunt, ran away from their plows for which there had been no place in his song. So his place was under the plows.»²⁰

In Christa Wolf's short novel *No Place. Nowhere*, the paradigm of Hamlet and Ophelia is written from the point of view of the woman. Like Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf draws upon the topoi of the literary tradition in order to articulate her relationship to authorship and to the text. Unlike Müller who reaches back to the classics, Wolf takes as her literary metaphors the victims of classicism, «the avant-garde without a hinterland,» as she calls them,²¹ those who write in spite of the awareness that «they are not needed,»²² indeed because of it. This is the radicalism of the concealed literary tradition: it is by its very nature vulnerable, and persistently calls into question the self-perpetuation of the literary machine. In spite of his tendency toward self-destruction, Hamlet and his author Shakespeare have thrived over the centuries. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Virginia Woolf has suggested why:

The mind of an artist, in order to achieve the prodigious effort of freeing whole and entire the work that is in him, must be incandescent, like Shakespeare's mind. There must be no obstacle in it, no foreign matter unconsumed. For though we say that we know nothing about Shakespeare's state of mind, even as we say that, we are saying something about Shakespeare's state of mind. The reason perhaps why we know so little of Shakespeare is that his grudges and spites and antipathies are hidden from us. We are not held up by some 'revelation' which reminds us of the writer. All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance

was fired out of him and consumed. Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded. If ever a human being got his work expressed completely, it was Shakespeare. If ever a mind was incandescent, unimpeded, I thought, turning again to the bookcase, it was Shakespeare's mind.²³

Shakespeare is the male paradigm of literary sovereignty and self-assurance. For the Shakespearean writer the time is always ripe for literature. That is why he can write the tragedy of Hamlet without succumbing himself. Writing as survival, as the transcendence and objectification of human experience. Writing as putting one's crises behind oneself. Writing as safety in the abstraction of the literary machine. Writing as imprisonment.

This is the opposite of finding oneself while writing, of allowing oneself to create a literary existence which the traditional literary world cannot conceive of and hence does not need. The main characters in Christa Wolf's *No Place. Nowhere* are two such writers: Karoline von Günderrode and Heinrich von Kleist. Both of them are historical personages. Both of them wrote in Germany during the time following the French Revolution, both of them were unrecognized during their lifetimes, both of them committed suicide at an early age: Günderrode in 1806 at the age of 26, Kleist in 1811 at the age of 34. Both of them lived out an existence which Shakespeare avoided through his ability to formulate Hamlet: the inability to systematize, to maintain the boundaries of the self, to act according to the prevailing codes. This is the tradition of literary marginality which Christa Wolf asserts as her own.

In her novel, Wolf fictionalizes a meeting between Kleist and Günderrode which never actually took place. The dialogue between two isolated writers, one male, one female, is the fictional utopia of «No Place. Nowhere». Within the patriarchal code of literature, the mode of narration has assumed that maleness is the one quantifiable category of Being and Seeing and that femaleness is its very opposite: an enigmatic Other. For the female writer Christa Wolf, this assumption is by its very nature invalid. Rather than working within such a system of quantification, either by reiterating it or turning it around, Wolf creates a mode of narration that expands the perspectives of gender and the possibilities of individual experience. In his meeting with Günderrode, Kleist becomes more than Kleist, and conversely, Günderrode becomes more than Günderrode. The utopian possibilities of fiction begin where the

boundaries of these two writers' separate self-identification ends. Like Müller's play, Wolf's novel demonstrates the impasse of a holistic gender-identified optic. Where Müller attempts a new optic based on gender oppositions and transference which manifests itself in the confrontation of images, Wolf attempts a reintegration of sameness and difference within the narrative process itself. The difference between the new male optic, which sees oppositions and images, and the new female optic, which integrates in the very process of seeing, suggests the genre difference between two creative modes. The playwright Müller represents the world in the complex of images called theater; the prose author Wolf writes a world which no longer distinguishes between what is and how it is seen. Christa Wolf writes in a precise, increasingly complex narrative style which articulates the intersections of gender identification as subtly as it radically transforms them. Her prose creates the sexuality of an authorial perspective rather than abstractly representing its dramatic contradictions. Wolf writes out of a process of growth, not conflict and change. Her authorial identity is not «on both sides of the front, between the fronts, above them.» She does not see a system of fronts; she is always the boundary itself, the boundary which shifts and expands as soon as it experiences its own limitations. The authorial identity of Christa Wolf does not abstract and distinguish relationships; she is/creates the form of the relationship itself. The difference between Heiner Müller's theater and Christa Wolf's prose world perhaps suggests a divergence of male and female modes within contemporary authorship in general.

The relationship between Kleist and Günderrode is based on familiarity, not estrangement. Heinrich von Kleist is the epitome of the young poetic idealist who, after reading Kant and his critique of reason, has no place to go. The ground has moved out from under Kleist's feet; he sees himself as a «monster,» a «shipwrecked genius.»²⁴ The stability of the fathers has vanished. Kleist is reduced to himself and to articulating the experience of a distorted nature. He is himself this distorted nature. This is why he says that his head operates like a machine,²⁵ or that his plan for his next drama is an «absurd geometric construction, a crazy mechanism.»²⁶ Like Hamlet, Kleist is driven by the ghost of his literary forefather which persistently haunts him. Similarly, Kleist is unable to separate himself from the past, to make a choice between conforming or destroying, or to distinguish between separate

categories as such: «Goethe doesn't have a compulsive tendency toward tragedy. He takes care that there is harmony...I cannot divide the world into good and bad; into two branches of reason; into healthy and sick. If I wanted to divide the world I would have to take the axe to myself, split my inner self, and present the two halves to the disgusted audience.»²⁷

Kleist is a forerunner of the literary avant-garde. He is the memory of Hamlet, whose desperation turned into the self-destruction of the Hamletmachine. Christa Wolf draws her character out of love, not cynicism, out of a knowledge of limitations, and out of the conviction that Kleist is not less but more. The character of Kleist expands in the process of being perceived by his interlocutor, Günderröde. Günderröde and Kleist are the two radical possibilities of the literary tradition which Christa Wolf has inherited and which have guided her work: Kleist, the male writer whose experience of a distorted nature leads him to abstract himself and his life in art; Günderröde, the female writer whose experience as a woman of being second nature leads her to create a new world of codes in her art. Kleist and Günderröde suggest two forms of experience which the patriarchal world is unable to assimilate and therefore rejects.

Both Günderröde and Kleist wrote against the grain of classicism, a system which assumes totality and perfection and hence imposes hierarchies, expectations and rules. In this context writing against the grain also produces desperation, fear, and the urge for accommodation to what one is unable and unwilling to do. Writing against the grain is that unnatural landscape of «No Place. Nowhere,» which causes Kleist to see himself alternately as a monster and a shipwrecked genius, and allows Günderröde to vacillate between her visions of poetic grandeur and her fear and disbelief in her creative talent. Like Kleist, Günderröde lives on the edge of the world order, an experience which both distorts and expands the self. In a letter she wrote: «Often I have had the unfeminine desire to throw myself into the wild fray of battle, to die—why wasn't I a man! I have no sense for feminine virtues, for the pleasures of women. I only like what is wild, great and brilliant. There is an unfortunate, but incorrigible disproportion in my soul; and it has to stay that way because I am a woman and have the desires of a man, without the strength of a man. That is why I vacillate so much and am so at odds with myself.»²⁸

Günderröde is not wholly a woman. Kleist is not wholly a

man. Or, both of them are more. This is also the experience of «No Place. Nowhere.» The torn and tenacious poet Günderröde admires the sovereignty of her friend Bettine von Arnim, who haunts the pages of the novel. Bettine's creativity arises out of a «spirit of unimportance»²⁹ and breaks through the artificial constraints of literary ambition and convention. Günderröde knows «how necessary Bettine is for her, so that she can dispel again and again in herself that hidden feeling of superiority which has always separated her from others.»³⁰ «How light and natural things are, how much closer she is to people, when she does not want to be important.»³¹ Likewise, Kleist respects and secretly fears his sister Ulrike who dresses in men's clothing and has the courage to be that he lacks. «Yet he avoids and will continue to avoid probing more deeply into the courage, indeed the arrogance, which his sister has often demonstrated.»³² For both Günderröde and Kleist, this is «life that cannot be lived»;³³ it exists on the boundary between experience and fiction. This realization brings them closer to themselves and to each other. Where wholeness of identification disappears, the possibility of intersubjectivity becomes clearer. «Do you believe, Günderröde, that every person has an unspeakable secret? Yes, says Günderröde. In these times? Yes.»³⁴ The narrative voice no longer distinguishes between Kleist and Günderröde: «You know it, I know it too. Don't come too near. Don't stay too far. Hide. Reveal yourself. Forget what you know. Keep it. Masks come off, crusts, scabs, polish. The raw skin. Undrawn features. My face, that would be it. This yours. Essentially different. In essence similar. Woman. Man. Needless words. We, each one of us imprisoned in our sex. The touch that we demand so endlessly, it doesn't exist. It was disembodied with us. We would have to invent it. It presents itself to us in our dreams, distorted, terrible, a grimace. The fear at dawn, after the early awakening. We remain unknown to each other, unapproachable, addicted to disguises. Strange names which we assume. The cry pushed back into our throat. Mourning is not allowed, for where are the losses. I am not I. You are not you. Who is we?»³⁵

The meeting between Kleist and Günderröde takes place along the river Rhine, a landscape of flux which obscures the boundaries of the restricted self and allows for the creation of an androgynous identity; not as dissolution but as possibility, not as an end but as a beginning: «To comprehend that we are a sketch for the future—to be discarded perhaps, perhaps to be taken up again, we have no in-

fluence on that. To laugh about that is human. Sketching as a sketch. Delegated to a project which remains open, open like a wound.»³⁶

The androgynous identity transforms the representation of the world in images into a landscape of nature called «No Place. Nowhere.» The androgynous identity is ultimately G nderrode's creation, not Kleist's. She, the woman; is only once removed from the narrative voice; Kleist, both the inherited and yearned for alter-ego, is always twice removed. G nderrode: «At this time of day she often wishes to be alone and to be dead except for the one whom she does not yet know and whom she will create for herself. She tears herself apart into three people, one of them a man. Love, when it is unconditional, can fuse the three separate people. The man next to her does not have this possibility. His work is the only point at which he can become one with himself; he may not give it up for one person. As such, he is twice as lonely, twice as unfree. It cannot go well for this person, be he a genius or one unfortunate individual among many, as they are spit out by time.»³⁷

The male writer creates his work; the female writer creates a possibility of life. This is what ultimately distinguishes Kleist and G nderrode. In a separate essay Wolf has written about G nderrode: «She enters a system of codes derived from the notion of masculine Opus and Genius and which demands from her what she cannot achieve: to separate her work from her person; to create art at the expense of life; to cultivate the distance and indifference in oneself which produces The Opus, but kills the direct relationship to other people because it makes them into objects.»³⁸ G nderrode's aesthetic project transforms itself into a project of life. Indeed, for much of the novel she listens and observes, while Kleist talks and represents himself; she creates and experiences their relationship; he formulates his art. G nderrode's poetic disability is also her creative strength. While Kleist articulates the concept of his next drama, she creates a vision of the world, a vision that is «open like a wound» because it is hers and at the same time opens itself to others.

In describing the sameness and differentness between the male writer Kleist and the female writer G nderrode, the narrative voice of Christa Wolf creates an obfuscation of these two separate categories which is assimilated and crystallized by the perspective of the narrative eye. Kleist/G nderrode has more than a mere elective affinity to Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. The dis-memberment ex-

perienced by the literary characters Kleist and Günderrode is remembered by what Woolf called the «androgynous mind»: «Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine.»³⁷ It is the female androgynous mind which writes *No Place. Nowhere*. It imagines a life which is not quantifiable but qualifiable. The «life that cannot be lived» exists in the power of imagination which creates the work of fiction and in the receptivity of those who participate in it. For the female writer there is no restrictive logocentricity, hence no image or Other upon which to transfer hope. The authenticity of the self is the only place to go. Female authorship as an intersubjective expansion of the self. This landscape of «No Place. Nowhere» is also a form of freedom: «If people have to destroy certain examples of their own species out of cruelty or ignorance, out of indifference or fear, then we, relegated to destruction, incur an incredible freedom. The freedom to love people and not to hate ourselves. ...We know too much. People will think we are mad. Our inextinguishable belief, human beings are determined to complete themselves, which strictly contradicts the spirit of all times. A delusion?»³⁸

NOTES

1. Cf. Walter Benjamin, «The Author as Producer,» W. B., *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Ann Bostock; intro. Stanley Mitchell, (London: NLB, 1973).
2. Heiner Müller, «Ein Brief,» H.M., *Theater-Arbeit* (West Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1975), p. 126. My translation.
3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 59.
4. Berliner Ensemble, 1975.
5. *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*, ed. Edith Anderson (Rostock: VEB Hinstorff, 1975).
6. Manuscript, 1980.
7. Cf. in particular Seghers' and Brecht's respective contributions to the realism debate of the 1930s, contained in part in *Marxismus und Literatur: Eine Dokumentation in 3 Bänden*, ed. Fritz J. Raddatz, vol. 2 (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1969).
8. *Die Zeit*, March 17, 1978. My translation.
9. Cf. in particular Christa Wolf, *The Reader and the Writer*, trans. Joan Becker (Berlin: Seven Seas, 1977), pp. 177-212.

10. Heiner Müller, «Reflections on Post-Modernism,» *New German Critique*, 16 (Winter, 1979), 57.
11. This theme is especially evident in Wolf's novel *The Quest for Christa T.*, trans. Christopher Middleton (New York: Farrar, and Straus Giroux, 1970).
12. Cf. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York and London, 1957), pp. 117-18.
13. Heiner Müller, *Hamletmaschine*, in H.M., *Mauser* (West Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1978); Christa Wolf, *Kein Ort. Nirgends* (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979). All quotations that follow in my text are taken from these two editions and are rendered in my translation.
14. *Hamletmaschine*, pp. 89-90.
15. *Hamletmaschine*, pp. 94-95.
16. *Hamletmaschine*, p. 97.
17. *Hamletmaschine*, p. 94.
18. *Hamletmaschine*, p. 92.
19. *Hamletmaschine*, p. 96.
20. Heiner Müller, «Reflections on Post-Modernism,» p. 55.
21. Christa Wolf, «Der Schatten eines Traumes,» Karoline von Günderrode, *Gedichte, Prosa, Briefe, Zeugnisse von Zeitgenossen*, ed. Christa Wolf (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1979), p. 8. My translation.
22. Wolf, «Der Schatten,» p. 10.
23. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, pp. 58-59.
24. Wolf, *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, p. 104.
25. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 113.
26. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 108.
27. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp. 107-108.
28. Quoted in Christa Wolf, «Der Schatten eines Traumes,» p. 5. My translation.
29. Wolf, *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, p. 94.
30. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp. 92-93.
31. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp. 94.
32. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 119.
33. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 137.
34. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 137.
35. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp. 137-38.
36. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, p. 150.
37. Wolf, *Kein Ort*, pp. 148-49.
38. Christa Wolf, «Nun ja! Das nächste Leben geht aber heute an: Ein Brief über die Bettine,» C. W., *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand 1980), pp. 316-17. My translation.
39. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, p. 102.
40. *Kein Ort. Nirgends*, pp. 150-51.