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THE MARRIAGE OF MARXISM AND FEMINISM IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AS RECORDED IN MEMORY AND HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper will be trying to understand why in spite of focused governmental planning for the emancipation and development of women in the German Democratic Republic, women found it difficult to lead satisfactory personal and professional lives. In trying to do so, the paper looks into literature produced in the GDR which resolutely called itself 'not feminist', while carrying clear and recurrent feminist literary traits. Special attention has been paid to two early novels of Christa Wolf where an exploration of the plight of two women characters has made it compulsory for her to fit them into the bracket of 'working-class' problems in order to be acceptable.

Keywords: Marxism, Feminism, Socialist Literature, Women, Emancipation.

The relationship between history and memory is complicated to say the least; often people find their personal memory corresponding to the version of history propagated by the society, while at others, these contradict the prevalent version. Subversion of history, as a ploy, has been used by governments all over the world at various periods of time to secure legitimacy for themselves. At times this involves serious fabrication of evidences, and at others incompatibility of the ideal with the practical workings of the society renders recorded history and personal experience vastly different.

Statistical records would show that SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) was right in claiming that

by the 1970s "women's emancipation had largely been achieved under state socialism" in the German Democratic Republic or East Germany (Paul 3) . Article 7 of the GDR's constitution stated that men and women were equal before law and "all laws and regulations which conflict with the equality of women are abolished" ("Constitution of the German Democratic Republic," Art 7, Sec. B) . In article 12, the socialist state also ensures women, men and juveniles equal pay for equal work along with "special protection to women in employment relations" ("Constitution of the German Democratic Republic", Sec. B). This was a manifestation of the government's concern for women and it helped safeguard women's position in the society better than in most Western nations. By 1952, the SED had promoted female workers in factories and that very year a law was ratified for "establishment of places of consultation for pregnant women and mothers" (Kranz 4), 1971 saw the government concentrating on training women for jobs and higher education with special learning and caring packages for mothers with young children. Women were injected into fields that were considered 'traditionally male professions and universities even offered special classes for women to pursue education while still being a working mother. Though seemingly benevolent, the experiences of women were less than satisfactory. As it turned out, more women found it impossible to keep on "slaving" at two fronts- home and office. The

percentage of women looking for part time jobs increased to 52% by 1971 (Harsch 12)

This paper will be trying to understand why in spite of focused governmental planning for the emancipation and development of women in the GDR, women found it difficult to lead a satisfactory professional and personal life. To do so, the paper will be taking into consideration the early novels of Christa Wolf, namely *Der Geteilte Himmel* (They Divided the Sky) and *Nachdenken Über Christa T* (The Quest for Christa T), along with official figures that came out of the GDR to judge its best known the female writer's stance on the 'Fraunfragen'. What was it about the socialist state that stemmed the burgeoning of feminine consciousness in the general population and Christa Wolf, at least during the initial years of her writing career but stemmed its growth later? To gain a deeper understanding of the situation, it is essential to look at the history of the German Democratic Republic and the problems it inherited at birth.

Though Nazi Germany was a predominantly patriarchal society, women had to work as most men were away in active military service. After 1945, the women in the GDR, according to Marilyn Rueschemeyer and Hanna Schissler, experienced great upward mobility. The socialist government facing shortages of labor, due to constant desertion of people, made positive efforts to include women into the work force as "housewives comprised the only remaining labor reserves" (Harsch 6). Thus, came in Honecker's "Muttipolitik", a novel strategy of incorporating married women and mothers into the work force while still enabling them to maintain their families. A "much-publicized 'Communiqué' entitled 'Women-Peace and Socialism' criticizing the under-representation of women in leading functions and technical professions and calling for a 'major discussion' of women's place at work"

was launched in December 1961 (Harsch 5). The policy seemed to be working, and by 1965 70% of married women had a job and 48.3% of all workers were women (6). In 1967, 55% of women with three or more children worked for wages (5). It was especially notable, how women in their prime reproductive years were also part of the work force and enrolling themselves into universities. Women only had complained about the lack of institutional childcare and the scarcity of consumer goods. While the second was a difficult problem to solve, especially given the Cold War dynamics, the Socialist government took steps to solve the first. Number of crèches providing cheap services increased and 1970s saw 23.6% of 0-3-year-olds accommodated in crèches along with an increase in day care facilities with "nursery charges being trained to attend to their emotional charges and cognitive development" (7). In order to ensure that pregnant women were not ousted from the work force, training programs were "specialised, shortened, and divided into modules so a worker could interrupt a program without losing credit, return later to an interrupted course of study, easily re-train, etc" (8). Women who had children while they were studying at the university were given financial benefits by the government. Remarkably, these policies were provided by the government of their own accord without the women having to fight for them.

West Germany, controlled by three Capitalist powers, took a different approach. Although the basic law of Federal Republic of Germany stated that men and women were equal and laws discriminating against women were to be suspended, there was "an inherent tension between the principle of gender equality and the principle of freedom of contract which was guaranteed by the Basic Law to both employers and workers" (Rueschemeyer and Schissler 4). The state

was apprehensive of the level of control that it should have on the society and deemed “the relationship of men and women and the question of women’s place in the society . . . as beyond the state’s control” (4). The basic difference arose from the contrasting treatment of the “Frauenfrage” by the two ideologies prevalent. The Western, capitalist part saw men and women belonging to equal but different spheres of development, whereas, the socialist East saw women and men as equal and belonging to the same sphere- that of laborers for the state. In the West, articles 1356 and 1360 of the civil law remained in force, which “stated that women’s contribution to the support of their families consisted mainly in doing the housework, and that they were only allowed to go out to work if this decision did not interfere with their duties as mothers and wives” (5). Nor was it unusual for women to be dismissed after marriage (5).

Compared to West Germany, women in the East clearly enjoyed greater freedom. Hildegard Maria Nickel puts it aptly, “‘Hard’ statistical facts disguised, concealed, even conjured away the everyday disadvantages and discrimination with which women were, at the same time, confronted with” (3) . She goes on to elaborate how women in the GDR had very limited options when it came to choosing their profession; their fields being restricted to those recognised as ‘traditionally female domain’. Moreover, this gendered pattern of career choice was not always decided based on the needs and aspirations of the individual woman but rather on the “objective structures of the East German economy.” (Nickel 5) Though there were enough jobs to go by, men reserved for themselves the better paid jobs in the economic and managerial sectors. “Men now resisted women’s entry into technical fields, supervisory roles, or high-level positions in any sector, including highly feminized

areas such as healthcare, retail, and textiles” and were afraid of their wives “developing beyond them” (9). The Women’s Commission, appointed by the SED, to look into their grievances discovered that women had to perform the bulk of household work and the husband’s expected protection from “frenetic schedule and disarray of the two-earner family” (10).

The entry of educated women to the work force every year further aggravated the problem. These educated women were less inclined to be just housewives and preferred to further their professional careers, while companies were attempting to reduce the proportion of women entering into the technical field for the following reasons:

- A high dropout rate among women (as a result of social policies with the one-sided goal of enabling women to combine mother hood with employment, rather than offering incentives for responsible parenthood)
- Conditions and tasks with physical demands ill-suited to women.
- High rates of work force fluctuation.
- Inadequate technical interest and motivation among girls.
- Lack of appropriate social facilities for women at work. (Nickel 5)

Other than this, there was also a concentration of women at lower- and middle-income groups at the entry level and scarcity of representation at the higher levels, along with a clear disparity in the wages earned by the two genders. 63.1% of the women working population were paid between 400-500 marks and only 15.7% above 1700 marks (Kranz 8). Thus, even though women earned, it was often not enough to support themselves.

This disparity arose due to the strained relationship between Marxism and Feminism and the GDR’s ‘paternalistic and patriarchal’ premises. Application

training provided specifically for women reduced inequalities among men and women ability wise but the resources at their disposal, social conditions and opportunities were still lopsided. “The distribution of productive and reproductive labor bore gender-related features: women continued to be given the major responsibility for reproductive labor in both society and the family” (Nickel 6). Thus, demand for part-time jobs and more flexible working hours was high, regardless of a woman's qualifications. The GDR had one of the highest divorce rates in the world at the time. On the one hand, it showed that some women were financially independent enough to live alone but on the other, an investigation of the causes (violence, alcohol abuse, no responsibility towards family, inferiority complex of the working wife) showed the apathy of men towards women. Donna Harsch notes divorce rates declined among couples with no or older children while rising among those with minor children. The liberalization of divorce was harmful for the older generation of women who had no marketable skills and little chance of remarriage. The ‘pro-natalist’ agenda of the GDR was further brought into focus when following a fall in birth rate in 1963, government “banned virtually all legal abortion facilities. . .sold or prescribed few contraceptives” (Harsch 15). The state encouraged pregnancy by allowing women a year leave with payment after delivery of the child, paid holidays when the child got sick and other such facilities. “Muttipolitik” resulted in the reinforcement of “traditional organization of the nuclear family” (19). The state according to its Marxist leanings believed that emancipation of women would come with emancipation of the working class and were oblivious of the effects of patriarchy in society.

It is only natural that feminist consciousness shall remain subservient to Marxism in a state where economists like

Helga Ulbricht proclaimed, “Despite exemplary services and institutionalized childcare, woman’s role as housewife and mother still involves chores that society cannot shoulder in the current phase of socialist development. It solved nothing that the husbands shared the tasks that remain in the family for that would only push the problem into another level” (qtd. in Harsch 8).

Heidi I. Hartmann in her seminal essay points out that for Marxists the “Frauenfrage” was never a feminist question. Engels in his *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* attributes women’s marginalization to the ownership of private property. Abolition of private property will lead to women and children being incorporated into the production process as workers, the male domination in the household will end and there will be no marginalization of women. The working committee of the SED agreed, however, as examples given above show that was far from reality. Patriarchal hold on the mindset of the society ensured that women occupied a lower position in a proletarian society too. “They did not, therefore, recognize the vested interest men had in women's continued subordination” (Hartmann 3) . The article then brings Zaretsky’s idea of sexism into the question. Under capitalism, sexism becomes more virulent because there is an active separation- ‘wage work’ and ‘home work’. Capitalism creates work outside home that requires women to stay at home in order to produce the next generation of wage workers. The only solution: “Men and women should together reunite the divided spheres of their lives, to create a humane socialism that meets all our private as well as public needs” (4). However, implementation of socialism in the GDR hardly registered the desired impacts. Faced with continuous shortages of labor after the division of Germany, the GDR required women to produce the next generation of workers.

The state needed working women to fulfill their domestic duties and the GDR through its laws and regulations enforced the identity of mother upon every woman. This societal conundrum might help one judge Christa Wolf's ambivalent attitude towards women in her early novels.

Christa Wolf was an ardent supporter of the socialist ideology and had worked in close association with the state machinery. She was even put forward as a candidate for the Central Committee of the SED in 1963 and when later asked why she had joined the party, she defended "her decision as one taken in good faith, initiated by her reading of the classics-Marx, Lenin and Engels during a time. . .when she was mentally in need of guidance and emotionally most receptive." (McPherson 4) . Whereas, according to her biographer, Jorg Magenau, Wolf's turn to feminism was "'Anpassungsprozess an ihre veränderten Lebensbedingungen' and that 'Das Sein bestimmt das Bewusstsein'?" (qtd. Paul 11). However, even with all her adherence to the socialist ideology, she could not agree with the suppression of the author's individuality purported by the state and believed in the author's ability of bringing about change and development in the GDR "by drawing experiences from an individual's life." (22)

Der Geteilte Himmel (They Divided the Sky) is concerned with discussion of topical arguments such as economic reforms, drain of labor to the West, specific policy decisions in the chemical industry and yet no direct discussion of the status of women in the society or their treatment even though her protagonist-Rita, is a woman. The state had been never allowed the collectivization of women's demands and thus, consciousness regarding these issues was minimal. Lorna Martens in *The Promised Land? Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic* states "One of the peculiarities of writing in a place where there was

ensorship and potential political consequences for what you wrote is that ideological criticism was discreet to the point of being self-denying. A case in point is the very existence of a feminist literature that resolutely called itself not feminist" (Paul 3).

Rita's story is set in the context of the whole of the GDR seeking to "make the symptoms of wider social developments apparent by examining an individual case." (Smith 34) Complications in her work, environment and her relationship make severe demands upon her, finally resulting in her breakdown but the reader is not allowed to identify too closely with her suffering. Occasional glimpses of Rita at the sanatorium keep the audience from gauging the implications of the situation and sympathizing with her as a woman. She is presented as a young, simple, idealistic girl from the village who often finds herself out of depth in the big city. She has been endowed with more than average sensitivity which Manfred keeps harping on throughout the novel. There is a definite note of infantilization about the description, but the novel also burdens Rita with the responsibility of Manfred's welfare. She is to seek refuge in him and at the same time, keep him sane. Not only does it take away agency from Rita but also vests her with the duty of looking after a 'man child'. The fact that they initially have to play-act in order to get close to each other is also telling. The German nickname, "Mein braunes Fraulein" (little brown miss) has explicit links to folktales and suggests that instead of viewing her as a real person, he only sees her as a construct of his own imagination who is to exist for his pleasure alone. Much like in fairytales, he keeps her in a tower (attic) where they find it easiest to communicate. "Manfred pictures them as an isolated couple on a gondola, with the world insignificant, while Rita would rather see them as a lighthouse offering hope for other isolated couples." (Smith

38). Though Rita's vision differs from that of Manfred, she does not feel the need to assert herself; even when she does in the end and decides to stay back in the GDR, Wolf hints at Rita's political and patriotic consciousness as being the reason rather than her own sense of identity. The relationship experiences stability only as long as Manfred feels in charge and does not have to share Rita with the rest of the world. As she begins working at the factory and the teacher training school Manfred is plagued by insecurity. When Rita is strong enough to test their relationship at the factory ball, she finds Manfred unequal in rising up to the challenge. Manfred, a construct of the traditional GDR society, fails to envision Rita's life as separate from his. McPherson is right when saying that this challenge thrown in by Rita gives her a sense of equality but she remains firmly within the confines of the society in claiming that she owed her new status entirely to Manfred and finds fulfillment in her life with him.

"The magic bond between Manfred and Rita only works while they are self-sufficient, each complimenting the other, without resources to the outside world" (McPherson 39). His explicit desire of keeping Rita at home as just a wife finds expression when he writes back "but you will not see it through to the end...believe me" on being told of her desire to join the teacher's training school (Wolf 18). His self-absorption manifests itself when he contemplates Rita had taken the decision of joining it without his permission and how that would mean "Exercise books and pupils to tutor and complaining parents when I come home from work, and behavioral problems to discuss at night?" (Wolf 19). Given the government policy to encourage women to work and his own pride, Manfred does not ask Rita to leave her job, but he hopes adversities will convince her to quit and grows increasingly hostile as she succeeds in meeting each challenge head on. However,

Rita's gradual progress to awareness comes up against barriers created by Manfred's unexpressed emotions and past experiences and she "soon realizes that her previous experience will offer her no coordinates for comparison" but she continues to cling on to Manfred (McPherson 35).

Manfred's concept of the nuclear family, the building block of the Marxist society, is daunting and draining for Rita. The Herrfurth family, dysfunctional and pushing each other to the limits of emotional sanity at every meal, forces Rita to be a witness to their savage daily drama which she compares it to the "boiling unrest" of the factory where she works (Wolf 72). She has no way of walking away from the table because emotionally and economically (at least initially) she is dependent on Manfred. This is the family that Manfred wants to incorporate her into, "a house that runs like a machine" (207). Rita's way of dealing with the unrest is passive resistance where she is the silent spectator waiting for Manfred to calm down and explain everything to her in their attic room. There are times when he feels unable to explain himself and at others Rita is afraid of the revelation.

Rita's infantilization continues outside the house and into the factory. Maternagal addresses her as a 'kid' and later when they get to know each other better, his attachment comes from his emotional ties which have developed because she is almost like his own daughter. On her first day, as the workers clamber around her to show her the way, she is shown not the "most complicated way to get there, just say how she's most likely to get there." (Wolf 27). She has no one to encourage her and even though Manfred often does pick her up from her teacher training school, one of the so called 'womanly professions', he never drops her off at the factory. Hanschen who is not regarded highly at the factory, enjoys his position of superiority over her and likes asserting

himself, “it made him work faster than usual.” (29). Thus, Rita never gained an important position at the factory; the relations that she cultivates are all gained by her personal ‘womanly qualities’ and not by her professional ability.

Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy speak of Wolf’s ambiguous portrayal of Manfred as “a hero in some old legend, set out upon seemingly hopeless task” . Manfred’s professors are described as “petty, bourgeois, egotistical and opportunistic” for perpetuating the same attitude towards their own wives as Manfred does towards Rita, albeit to varying degrees, but never Manfred (7). Even when in the end, a resolute Rita leaves West Berlin and Manfred behind for good, Wolf strikes at Manfred’s compulsiveness only obliquely- he “will never be able to leave that life behind . . .” Wolf plays it off as an ideological difference, one which allows him to have no faith in Socialism unlike Rita (186). However, rather than having lost faith in Socialism, Manfred had specifically lost the faith in the directive of having to share his wife with the outside world in spite of promoting the traditional role of a nurturing mother and wife.

Rita is not the only woman overburdened by the socialist society; Manfred’s mother shares a similar fate. What Smith sees as an “imprint of petty bourgeois arrogance which cannot finally be reconciled to the new age of equality” can just be frustration arising from the non-fulfillment of her personal aspirations (35). Born in the pre-socialist era, she did not have the opportunities to seek employment training or education and thus, her aspirations have no way of expressing themselves other than through her husband and her children. She is not particularly successful as a ‘producer’ either, because Manfred is her only surviving child after several miscarriages and she tries to live vicariously through him. In the Socialist era she is too old to be recruited as a worker and none of the

newly instituted laws do her any favor. Not only does the state not regard her, but her own son refuses her any respect or obedience, in spite of her repeated attempts to win him over.

The indicators used by Gurin, Miller and Gurin (1980) to measure the level of feminine consciousness in a society can be used here to have a better understanding of the situation in the GDR (Henderson-King and Abigail 1) . Awakening of feminist consciousness in a group of women who are subjugated to a certain degree depends on the detection of ‘power discontent’ which is “the degree to which individuals experience discontent about their relative position of their group in the social hierarchy” and ‘rejection of legitimacy’, “where by, the believe that relative position of disadvantage is illegitimate as it is a result of structural forces rather than individual failings and difficulties” (Henderson-King and Abigail 1). As can be gauged from the female characters and Wolf’s own attitude, even though the first stage of detection of ‘power discontent’ has been achieved, the ‘rejection of legitimacy’ is yet to be achieved. Rita, Sigrid, Manfred’s mother all realize that they are at a disadvantageous position in the society, however, they have not yet equated it to the prevailing patriarchy of the GDR, instead, they see it part of the labor emancipation problem. Hoping for that, Rita stays back in a country which has no singular prospect for her and Manfred’s mother dies in one hoping to escape into another that might look at her as something more than a useless relic from the past.

In her next novel, *Nachdenken über Christa T*, (The Quest for Christa T) Wolf takes up the task of criticizing “the party. . .for ignoring the real experience of the individuals, in insisting on absolute validity of ideology”(Smith 72). Wolf chooses a heroine who has none of the hallmarks of the traditional socialist hero; she is in fact exemplary in her refusal to

lead a life according to conventional patterns. As Smith points out, her attempts at conformity fail miserably and unable to play an effective part in the society she falls prey to depression with suicidal overtones. Wolf delineates all of this to inefficient workings of a too stringent Marxist-Socialist policy without taking the patriarchal nature of the society into account. Under socialism, the individual is not isolated from the historical process and is an organ of the society, sharing in the decision-making policy and responding personally for the development of the whole, while the aim of the State shall be to reflect the needs and demands of the society. Wolf recognizes that the state is failing to do its part but does not comprehend the dichotomous workings of feminism and Marxism as being the reason behind it. It is Christa T's unique trumpet call that attracts the narrator's attention but he concedes later in the novel that he had never been able to really gauge her, "but we, watching, push our under lip out, for we can see what her purpose is and what she is certain to do...arrange for oneself this sort of irrational purpose" ("Quest for Christa T" 75). The inability to gauge comes from the fact that Christa T refuses to conform to the template of woman set up by the GDR, she is not successful as a wife, a mother or even as a teacher. She seems too spontaneous; over indulgent, unable to look past the present moment and is unable to fulfill her role in the socialist society. She is an outsider in the society who often claims, "I do not know what I am living for" (70) and yet Wolf encases her in a seemingly happy marriage two-thirds into the novel and describes her as feeling like "a caged animal" in it. (59) Though Wolf does concentrate on "sehnsucht", she does not elaborate on its implications.

Wolf, later, defended her character saying that she stood for everything that was wrong with the GDR but it was also what was wrong with patriarchy. Her

marriage traps her in the house, she is reduced to being "the vet's wife", which terrifies her and yet she plays the role. Rita's future could have been similar, but she manages to escape it, Christa T doesn't. Then come the children one after the other. She is not part of the work force anymore but she fulfills her reproductive function. It is worth noting that she keeps carrying the third child even when she is evidently sick, this might well have been due to abortion bans in the GDR for a period of time. Her unhealthy obsession with the new house stems from the restricted boundaries of her new life. Unable to focus her creative energies on anything new she devotes all her attention to the new house. Designing it is the only creative output left at her disposal as she had stopped writing after the birth of her children. The narrator could only find scraps of papers with unfinished stories, musings and often they were just jottings on household bills and other useless papers. Christa T who had once declared writing to be the only thing that she "found herself in", gave it up to fulfill her social duty ("Quest for Christa T" 75). While she struggles to fit in, her friend Gertrude Born excels at it. She has a new persona accompanying her new name 'Frau Dr. Dolling'. We see her in her office, performing her social duty as a teacher and unable to understand the motivations of Christa T for living the kind of life she does or the narrator's particular interest in her. She is completely homogenized and resigned to the role assigned to her.

However, it would be unfair to say that Christa T and Wolf by extension display no inkling to a feminist consciousness. The episode with the tram conductress in the hospital, who keeps going back to her husband after being repeatedly abused by her husband "forces her to re-examine her beliefs" (Smith 89). The key then lies in understanding the degree of awakening of the feminist consciousness. Downing and Roush came up with a module to measure

the positive feminist identity (Henderson-King and Abigail 2). The first stage is that of 'Passive Acceptance', which Christa T, Rita and Wolf are all guilty of. Rita acknowledges Manfred's contributions rather than her own achievements when regarding her new life in the city, Christa T knew what she would be giving up if she married and yet she chose the social role over her own happiness and Christa Wolf obviously conceived these characters and their displayed traits. The stage of 'Revelation' which is the "first stage of positive feminist identity with the women viewing the world differently," comes at different points of time for the three (2). Rita realizes that no matter where Manfred moves, he will never be able to leave his life or ideology behind. For Christa T this revelation sets in after marriage and the kids as she views her life as a mere accessory to that of her family. Wolf stumbles upon it as she tries to look for a way of incorporating the experience of the individual and the effect of ideology on the individual in Socialist literature, where the grievances of the woman have to translate to that of the working class to be acceptable. However, the third phase of 'embeddedness / emanation' where the female withdraws herself from the larger society and embeds herself in a feminine subculture never happens for either Rita or Christa T or Wolf, at least in the early stages of her literary career.

This essay does not argue that Christa Wolf had no feminist consciousness; on the contrary, it acknowledges that this work is concerned only with the initial years of her literary career, when the influence of Marxism on her was predominant and her outlook still idealistic. In later years with the publication of *Kassandra* (1983) and the work on Kathrine Von Gunderode her position as a feminist was cemented not only across the border in West Germany but throughout Europe. Infact, in the 1980s, "Wolf's feminism, which had

remained to a certain extent latent in earlier productions, comes to be overtly and forcefully expressed as one of the central focuses of the work" (Sayre and Löwy 22). Nor does this essay propound the view that socialism and feminism cannot co-exist as founding ideologies in a state but that given the conditions and the traditional set up of the GDR, feminism would always be subservient to Marxism in it. Thus, the final two stages of the positive feminist consciousness model 'synthesis' and 'active commitment', where by an individual finally makes an active commitment to social change is never reached.

Wolf's initial works, though vastly different from literature of Second Wave Feminist Literature suffered from the same problems. According to Georgina Paul, the "tendency towards individualism, towards the focus on subjective psychological strengths and weaknesses even while affirming collective (and trans-historical) solidarity through membership of a phantasmagorical group called 'women', is identifiable as a major failing." (Paul 21) Rita and Christa T are strong characters in that they are sensitive to the changes in their environment and react to those changes. However, they react passively and in the end neither have the ability to use the rights granted to them by the state nor fight against patriarchy. Their feminist consciousness does not get developed beyond the basic stages and there is no hint of solidarity amongst the women in the society; in fact, most do not even like each other. Rita and Manfred's mother are merely civil to each other and do not try to understand each other's grievances and Rita and her hairdresser friend do not have heart to heart about their respective personal relationships. Gertrude was once close to Christa T but soon she questions her inability to conform and moves away from her influence.

Even though history professes that the GDR ensured equality among the sexes, due to lack of a collective feminist consciousness and the dominance of the Marxist ideology in the society, women's experience of the State bears witness to the fact that it lacked equity among the sexes.

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