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Review of Christa Wolf "Nachdenken über Christa T." by Wolfram and Helmtrud Mauser

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Wolfram and Helmtrud Mauser. *Christa Wolf “Nachdenken über Christa T.”* (Uni- 

*Nachdenken über Christa T.* is one of the most widely discussed novels in GDR 
literature, and a reviewer therefore approaches a new book-length interpretation with 
some trepidation. However, Wolfram and Helmtrud Mauser’s study is fresh, insightful, 
and clearly written. The volume simultaneously does justice to a very difficult text and 
situates it intelligently in the context of GDR literature of the 1960s and 1970s. While 
their interpretation is not exhaustive, the authors demonstrate familiarity with the large 
body of Wolf literature, and their notes point the reader to other interpretative 
approaches.

The interpretation focuses on the complex of tensions between the provocative 
personality of Christa T. and the *realexistierender Sozialismus* of the society in which she 
lived, between the narrator and her protagonist, and between the narrator and her 
readers. The authors follow a brief introduction with an “exemplarische Lektüre” of the 
fifteenth chapter, the chapter in which the narrator reflects upon the implications of the 
Hungarian uprising of 1956 for Christa T.’s and her own — and, by extension, her 
readers’ — attitudes towards postwar Eastern European socialism. The Mausers 
use a number of words and phrases from the text, for example “Lichtwechsel,” “Nachdenken,” 
and “Versuch, man selbst zu sein,” to begin to develop their view of Christa T.

The authors see Wolf’s text as the major first step in the development of her 
“Ästhetik der Erkundung” (p. 89), an approach to narrative prose concerned not 
primarily with characters or plots, but with the thorough investigation of and reflection 
upon specific themes. In deference to their conclusion, the authors arrange the main body 
of their interpretation as a series of thematic investigations which build upon each other 
and culminate in the discussion of Wolf’s aesthetic. They again use key words and 
phrases, drawn from the text and from Wolf’s other writings, as chapter headings in order 
to establish the themes for examination. Beginning with “Die tiefe Unruhe” (p. 24) which 
prevents Christa T. from merely blending into her society and which provides the utopian 
impetus to her character, they examine variously the means the protagonist and her 
narrator use to take advantage of that restlessness, the complex relationship of 
protagonist, narrator, author, and readers, and Christa T.’s unconventionality. Most 
impressively, they discuss the utopian power of the text itself in “Produktivkraft 
Literatur” (p. 69), an elegant essay which provides a lucid answer to those who persist 
in seeing resignation and defeat in the figure of Christa T. The authors see her instead 
as a woman who, by her steadfast rejection of preconceived roles and her constant efforts 
to allow her own identity to develop and to grow, represents a consistent provocation and 
counter-example for the orthodox, technocratic, male-dominated social order of the 
German Democratic Republic.

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