



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *Hostage to feminism? The success of Christa Wolf's Cassandra in its 1984 English translation.*

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/127025/>

Version: Accepted Version

Article:

Summers, C (2018) Hostage to feminism? The success of Christa Wolf's Cassandra in its 1984 English translation. *Gender and History*, 30 (1). pp. 226-239. ISSN 0953-5233

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12345>

© 2018 John Wiley & Sons Ltd. This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Summers, C (2018) Hostage to feminism? The success of Christa Wolf's Cassandra in its 1984 English translation. *Gender and History*, 30 (1). pp. 226-239, which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12345>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Hostage to Feminism? The Success of Christa Wolf's *Kassandra* in its 1984 English Translation

Caroline Summers

Christa Wolf is amongst the best known and the most widely translated writers of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), and a figurehead of modern German literature.¹ Her work is available in over thirty languages, and amongst these it is the economically and politically powerful English language that has provided the most comprehensive translated corpus of her texts. One of the reasons for this enduring appeal and presence in the Anglophone context is that publishers, reviewers and commentators have frequently categorised her as a 'feminist writer'.² However, whilst Wolf was one of a number of female writers in the GDR who began in the 1970s and 1980s to use literature as a space in which to thematise female experience, this advocacy of the feminine has particular significance in the East German context that, I will argue, is marginalised by the labelling of her writing as 'feminist' in new social and cultural frameworks through translation.

For Wolf, engagement with female perspectives contributed to fulfilment of a literary imperative to reflect human experience and historical context. As her essays and her prose demonstrate, going against the positivist norms of Socialist Realism, she sought to lend prose what she saw as its essential subjective authenticity, or authenticity created by depiction of

events through individual emotions and perspectives; she did this by exposing the shifting, inter-dependent and often unreliable voices that construct the literary narrative.³ Rather than advocating the female at the expense of the male, Wolf explored what the 'self' might gain from better understanding the 'other'. She therefore did not identify, for example, with the more woman-centred narratives dominant in second-wave British and North American feminism. Nonetheless, especially after the publication of *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* in English translation in 1984, Wolf found popularity with feminist readers in the Anglophone world whilst other East German writers such as Irmtraud Morgner or Gabriele Stötzer, who did adopt a more gynocentric approach to gender identity, remained relatively unknown or untranslated.⁴ Wolf's selection for publication by the Anglophone literary world invites a closer examination of her appeal. Focusing on *Cassandra* and in particular on the paratextual spaces around the text that enable publishers and commentators to manage reader expectations, this article asks how an Anglophone reading of Wolf's writing as 'feminist' has contributed to her international success.

Narratives of Feminism and the Paratext as a Contested Space

The categorisation of Wolf as a feminist writer can be explained as the inclusion of the author and her writing by feminist narratives within Anglophone target cultures. Social narrative, or the organisation of selected events through the revelation of temporal, causal and relational links between them, acts as a structuring framework that mediates between the subject and experience: it is recognised as 'an ontological condition of social life'.⁵ Narratives establish

individual and group identities as tellable, fluid stories, and the dynamic relationships between these allow cohesive cultural entities to emerge and develop. Translation plays a vital role of negotiation between cultural and linguistic spaces in which different narratives dominate.⁶ Entering a new literary field, the translated (literary) text often seeks or is allocated a position coherent with target-culture narratives in order to be accepted.⁷ Wolf's position as, for the most part, an institutionally approved writer in a socialist state where art was considered a mouthpiece for politics, marked her as a potential 'other' in an Anglophone (and particularly US American) literary field.⁸ The acceptability of her work in this new context was therefore at least initially contingent on its appeal to narratives circulating in the target culture. Beginning with the translation of *The Quest for Christa T.* in 1970, a significant year for second-wave feminist publications and a time when the movement was gaining in momentum, Anglophone responses to Wolf have emphasised the relevance of her writing to target-culture narratives of feminism.⁹

However, feminism as framed by dominant narratives in North American or British discourse presents problems of identification for socialist writers such as Wolf, not only due to tensions between dominant feminist and Marxist positions, but also due to the differing priorities that informed women's struggles for recognition in the GDR and in the British and North-American contexts.¹⁰ Legislative measures taken by the governing Sozialistische Einheitspartei (SED) meant that GDR women in fact had some of the legal rights that their contemporaries elsewhere were still fighting to gain, such as access to legalised first-trimester abortion: East German women were, at least legally, able to take advantage of this from 1972, while at this point abortion remained illegal in West Germany and in most states of the USA

(though not in Britain, where it had been legalised in 1967). However, gendered stereotypes of the division of professional and domestic labour endured alongside this permissive legislation, imposing limitations on women just as it gave them freedoms. While second-wave feminists particularly in North America repeatedly confronted the state through its political institutions by organising into groups such as the National Organization for Women and through campaigning on specific issues such as equal pay and the availability of birth control, in East Germany from the mid-1970s onwards the question of equal gender rights was seen as ‘gesellschaftlich gelöst’ [socially resolved], and gender remained absent from political discourse until the early 1980s.¹¹ However, many East German women found it difficult to assimilate the ‘double burden’ they were expected to bear, as desexualised citizens in public discourse and as feminine wives and mothers at home. They sought an explicit place for the feminine in public and political discourse and its differentiation from a masculine norm; in contemporary North American or British feminism, on the other hand, the visibility of the female and women’s legitimacy as political agents was evident, and narratives of protest focused on resisting the alienation of the female caused by social and legal differentiation.

Myra Love notes that Wolf sought ‘the integration of a certain kind of subjectivity [...] into [GDR] society as a means of furthering its larger social development’: this angle in her writing sometimes attracted the attention of GDR censors, as mentioned below. Meanwhile, North American feminists such as Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich aimed at ‘furthering the development of an autonomous feminist consciousness and culture in the United States’.¹² Despite these differences in approach, Wolf enjoyed particular appeal to feminist narratives

in the Anglophone context. Lorna Martens suggests that this is thanks to Wolf's depiction of her protagonists as victims of patriarchy rather than as strong, economically independent (and therefore socialist) characters.¹³ Martens's interpretation offers an easier fit with narratives that have been powerful in the Anglophone context and especially in the wake of radical-feminist positions of the second wave, narrating feminism as a confrontation with masculine oppression and with left-wing chauvinism.¹⁴ However, while readings of Wolf's writing as separable from her socialism facilitate her alignment with non-socialist feminism, they also overlook an integral element of Wolf's arguments about female experience.

Wolf argues that the antidote to the oppression of both the feminine and the masculine by patriarchal society is an approach that recognises and accepts the other within the self and as part of a collective: her advocacy of the feminine resonates with her broader (and socialist) views on the authenticity of the subjective in literature. Since, for Wolf, authenticity refers to the sincerity of the experience narrated and not to the assumed truth of the events, she argues that the crucial fourth dimension in any narrative must be the visible engagement of the narrator, whose perspective and individual grasp of events influence the telling of the story.¹⁵ In *Kassandra. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung*, the protagonist learns that 'between killing and dying there is a third thing: living', and through the conflict between the socially constructed categories of Trojans/Greeks and male/female, Cassandra discovers the harm that humans do themselves by seeking to repress the other rather than encounter it.¹⁶ This 'third way' of encounter that emerges in the intersections of fact and fiction, self and other, reflects an aesthetic that is not female-centred. Rather, Wolf's aesthetic is motivated by what she sees as a clear link between her socialist politics and good literature: 'I see the deep root of

affinity between real literature and socialist society as this: both have the goal of helping human beings to self-realisation'.¹⁷ Subjective authenticity serves a socialist function for Wolf, who sees it as a literary method of helping reader and writer to a state of social and emotional maturity.

However, the connection between the literary text and its political context has been consistently marginalised in the English translation of Wolf's writing. This is due in part to stylistic shifts through the translation process that result in a more standardised, authoritative (and therefore less visibly subjective) narrator. Christopher Middleton's translation of Christa T. is a notable example of how these shifts can alter the interpretive potential of the text.¹⁸ Beyond the words on the page, publishers have visually framed the texts in relation to narratives recognisable in the target culture: the front cover design for Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* in its 1980 translation, for example, focused attention on the shock value of her memories of a Nazi childhood rather than on Wolf's pertinent and critical reflections on the moral ambiguities of war and the instability of memory.¹⁹ The focus on the 'story' of the text as more meaningful in a new local culture than its exploration of particular historical and social contexts is also reflected by voices outside the physical object of the book, for example in differing German and Anglophone responses to her revelation in 1993 that she had for a short period acted as a Stasi informant. Whilst she was publicly denounced and harshly criticised in Germany by those who felt she had betrayed her readers and invalidated her reputation as a self-critical socialist writer, 174 American academics and readers submitted an open letter to the weekly broadsheet *Die Zeit* in support of Wolf. They defended her on the premise that her newly revealed collusion with the East German regime did not

undermine the quality of her writing, and in particular highlighted a perceived gender bias in the German criticism of Wolf.²⁰

Whilst it is often individual translators who bear the brunt of criticism for shifts between source text and target text, the consistency and longevity with which Wolf's translated texts have been read in isolation from their socialist political context suggests that other forces have also guided the circulation of her writing. Instead of focusing on the text of the translation, this case study examines the influence of voices that more or less consciously 'narrate' authorship through comment on the translated text, in spaces that Genette has termed paratexts. Genette defines the paratext as a 'threshold' to the text, in other words a space of encounter where the reader's expectations can be formed and shaped.²¹ He identifies the two main categories of the peritext, contained within the volume of the book (e.g. cover design and preface or notes), and the epitext, which circulates independently of the text itself (e.g. interviews or letters). Genette discounts some sites of negotiation between text and receiving culture such as reviews and scholarship, which he does not count as paratexts because they are not 'authorial or more-or-less legitimated by the author'; however, it can productively be argued that the author implicitly 'legitimizes' the construction of such texts by participating in literary discourse and therefore agreeing to be 'narrated' by the institution.²² Particularly for the translated author who relies on the agency of others for the construction of her authorial identity in a new target culture, spaces such as reviews and scholarship arguably can and should be regarded as paratexts, and for that reason they will also be discussed here.

Genette's paratextual model and the theories of social narrative both seek to explain how context can contribute to identity formation. In translation especially, where institutionalised agents in the target culture are often responsible for the presentation of the 'other' identity of the author or source culture to the reader unfamiliar with these, paratexts act as 'a crucial – indeed revelatory – position at the interface of the domestic and the foreign'.²³ In Wolf's case, they reveal not only the content of the text but also the frameworks of reference that dominate in target-culture readings of the translation, and which have therefore contributed to Anglophone understandings of Wolf. This is perhaps nowhere more demonstrable than in the publication of and response to *Kassandra* in English translation.

Introducing Cassandra

Marilyn Sibley Fries observes the growth of Wolf's popularity in the West during the 1980s to the status of 'cult figure'.²⁴ This surge in popularity is contemporaneous with a significant shift towards Anglophone readings of Wolf as a feminist writer, and can at least in part be attributed to the publication of *Kassandra. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung* (1983) and its English translation (1984). The *Erzählung*, or narrative, of the title is delivered by the eponymous protagonist, through whose eyes the reader experiences the last days of the doomed city of Troy. Cassandra predicts the downfall of her society as a consequence of aggressive, competitive, patriarchal structures that exclude empathy from rational decision-making, and realises too late her own complicity in the survival of the oppressive regime that brings about Troy's fall and her own death. The story is anything but a simple reproduction

of the traditional myth, and explores for example the contradictions Wolf felt to be inherent in her position as a socialist writer.²⁵ While she saw an affinity between literature and socialism, she was uncomfortable with the censorship to which she was obliged to conform (represented in the book by the sinister character of Eumelos). Wolf also felt unable to support official policy on nuclear armament because of her pacifism and her belief in engagement rather than confrontation with the other: a number of sentences calling for disarmament and criticising the hi-jacking of socialist values as excuses for war were removed from the GDR edition.²⁶ *Kassandra* was the only one of Wolf's texts to be published in different states of entirety in East and West Germany (the uncensored West German version was used for the English translation).

As well as contributing to pacifist discourse, *Kassandra* continues the thread of self-exploration through subjective authenticity that runs through Wolf's prose and essays, beginning with the title character of *The Quest for Christa T.* and her concern with 'the difficulty of saying 'I'.²⁷ *Kassandra*'s narrative experiments with perspectives, voices and gendered identities, divided for example between reflection on the events of the Trojan War and thoughts on her imminent death at the hands of Clytemnestra: 'past and present can be seen not only to "meet" on the paper, but, as they constantly do in every one of us, to interact and be endlessly rubbing up against each other'.²⁸ This fluidity is embodied in the voice of the narrative: the narrator interrupts herself to produce irregular and complex syntax; speaking and thinking voices are not clearly distinguished from one another; and Wolf also makes use of the German third-person impersonal pronoun 'man', which distances the narrator from her experience but also reveals its unbearable immediacy. Jan van Heurck's

translation makes efforts to reproduce Wolf's shifting narrative subjectivity, though 'man' is notoriously difficult to translate into contemporary standard English, and often results in the use of the equally unsatisfactory 'you' and 'one', as here:

Der Übertritt aus der Palastwelt in die Welt der Berge und Wälder war auch der Übergang von der Tragödie in die Burleske, deren Kern es ist, dass man sich selbst nicht tragisch nimmt. Wichtig – das ja, und warum auch nicht. Aber eben nicht tragisch, wie die oberen Schichten im Palast es tun. Tun müssen.

The transition from the world of the palace to the world of the mountains and woods was also the transition from tragedy to burlesque, whose essence is that you do not treat yourself as tragic. Important, yes, and why not? But you do not treat yourself as tragic the way the upper echelons in the palace do. The way they must.²⁹

This example, in which one use of 'man' and an impersonal construction in the German become two instances of a 'you/yourself' pair, also shows the addition of explicitation and punctuation in the translation, which stabilise the narrative voice and move away from the shifting subjectivity of Wolf's narrative.

A significant role in Wolf's exploration of subjectivity and narrative is also played by the lectures, or Vorlesungen. Together with Cassandra's story, they make up the Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics delivered by Wolf in 1982. Wolf was only the third East German writer to have been invited to give the lectures since their inception in 1959, and her invitation to speak in this high-profile West German context reflects her considerable status in West as

well as East Germany, as a writer whose poetics was as important as her subject matter (though in her introduction to the Cassandra lectures she rejects the label of ‘poetics’ for her literary aesthetic). The style of the lectures is personal and reflects the spontaneous nature of spoken language, drawing the reader (or listener) into the writer’s experience. This is not always maintained by the translation, which in places reorganises Wolf’s ideas into standardised and complete syntax:

Kaum noch erhofft: Ein schmales Türchen auf das Flugfeld öffnet sich. Als ich sitze: durchsichtige, überreizte Wachheit statt der ersehnten Müdigkeit.

We have almost given up hope when a narrow door opens onto the airfield. By the time I am seated inside the plane, I feel a lucid, overstimulated wakefulness instead of the longed-for tiredness.³⁰

Here again, the translation moves away from Wolf’s distinctive style towards a standardised textual ‘voice’, diminishing the significance of the text as an exercise in a new aesthetic.

The lectures reflect on the writing process, revealing an emerging relationship of mutual influence between protagonist and author that is essential to the construction of meaning in the text. Wolf remarks on this herself in the first of the lectures, recalling: ‘Cassandra. I saw her at once. She, the captive, took me captive; herself made an object by others, she took possession of me’.³¹ Meanwhile, Cassandra’s position as seer means that she occupies a position of power of the Trojans’ understanding of self and she reflects on the power of stories to shape identity when she comments that ‘it was not my birth that made me a Trojan, it was the stories told in the inner courts’.³²

Kassandra is not primarily a feminist retelling of the myth, then, although the Anglophone reader does encounter passages suggestive of familiar feminist narratives.³³ The text juxtaposes male and female behaviour to illustrate gender inequality, for example as the war continues and the soldiers' behaviour towards women degenerates: 'If you saw it properly – only no one ventured to do that – the men of both sides seemed to have joined forces against our women'.³⁴ It is no doubt this sort of comment that led prominent East German critic Wilhelm Girnus to accuse the text of depicting history as a struggle between the sexes rather than the classes.³⁵ However, in general Kassandra was not seen by its German reviewers and critics as a feminist statement, as the East German censoring of pacifist rather than gender-focused arguments suggests. The text's appeal to West German feminist narratives seemed limited, too: Manfred Jäger (1983) claimed in his review for the West German *Titel* that 'the charge raised against Christa Wolf in the GDR, that she is an adherent of a bourgeois feminism, cannot relate to this narrative'. An extract was printed by feminist magazine *EMMA* in March 1983, but journalistic and literary commentators on Kassandra showed considerable resistance to the suggestion that Wolf's was a new, woman-centred aesthetic: 'If this is to count as a beginning for a newly imagined eroticism, then there is no such thing, sisters'.³⁶ Any claim to feminist significance on the basis of the text's female protagonist/narrator or its exploration of gendered roles and relationships seems to have been overshadowed or even discredited by Wolf's existing identity as a literary theorist and an (albeit critical) socialist writer. Meanwhile, at a greater remove from East German literary discourse and fault lines of politics that divided East and West, those involved with

the publication and promotion of the text's English translation seemed to consider the positioning of the text in feminist narratives unquestionable.

Emphasising a Feminist Perspective

The presentation of the English translation reflects an important shift in the interpretation of Wolf's text: whilst Cassandra's narrative and the lectures are published together (unlike in West Germany, where Luchterhand released them as two separate volumes), the title *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* foregrounds the Cassandra narrative and frames it as a 'novel'. Inconsistent with the format used for the East German edition, which foregrounds the lectures, this emphasises the story of the protagonist over Wolf's reflections on literature, and suggests that readings of the translation focused on plot at the expense of the implications of Wolf's socio-political context, subjective-authentic aesthetic and position in source-culture literary discourse. The emphasis on the specific tale the protagonist has to tell is underlined by cover designs such as the image of a single female figure selected by Wolf's American publisher Farrar Straus Giroux (FSG) for the first USA edition (Fig. 1):³⁷

Fig. 1: Front cover of *Cassandra*, Farrar Straus Giroux edition (1984)

The cover image contrasts with the first East and West German editions, which acknowledge different local stylistic norms: the former shows the ruins of an ancient temple and the latter bears only the text of the title, author and publisher. Here, the emphasis on the protagonist is

clear from the image and is reinforced by the varying font size used for the elements of the book's title.

The inside of the dust cover frames Wolf's text as 'historical fiction [...] – but from the point of view of a woman', linking the appeal of the text to the novelty of the female perspective on a familiar story. Cassandra's narrative is described as 'a pressing monologue whose inner focal points are war and patriarchal society', claiming a unified voice for the text. The 'novel' is framed by an accessible peace/war binary, and an appeal to a familiar target-culture narrative of 'patriarchy' as antithetic to female interests. Meanwhile, Wolf's subjective-authentic aesthetic is given little attention and in fact seems to be an obstacle: the inside back cover seems to regret the intrusion of Cassandra's perspective into the writing process but claims authority for the writer with the comment that 'although Wolf is in a sense possessed by Cassandra, it is the sanity of her voice which makes us read this book with our own sense of urgency'. The translator's note by Jan van Heurck also seems to lead the reader away from an appreciation of the coming together of author and protagonist in the writing of the text: the Vorlesungen are demoted to the status of 'companion lectures, which illuminate [the narrative's] background and implications'. As Martens's reading suggests, then, the reader is not invited to view Cassandra as an active participant in the narration or in her own fate; there is also, perhaps not surprisingly, no comment on the particular relevance of the text to its East German context. The paratexts to the US edition emphasise a 'universal' reading of Wolf as a rational feminist, opposed to patriarchy and war.

The British edition from the same year, using the same translated text, takes a different approach that is arguably more sensitive to the treatment of gender in Wolf's writing. The front cover shows a male sun and a female moon above a city at sunset, suggesting the interdependence of the male and the female (Fig. 2). The image illustrates a dream of Cassandra's, in which she must judge which of the two heavenly bodies shines more brightly. She chooses the sun (Apollo), realising belatedly that in doing so she has rejected the moon (Selene). The contest reveals the destructiveness of the binary power-struggle between the sexes, and Cassandra's forced choice is dismissed by her companion Marpessa as 'a completely perverted question'.³⁸

Fig.2: Front cover of *Cassandra*, Virago edition (1984)

While the inside cover echoes the text of the American version, the binary between Wolf's possession by Cassandra and her sanity is replaced by the comment that the context of Wolf's themes 'is contemporary, yet Cassandra's voice pervades them all'. Through the presence of shared themes there is a vague sense that Wolf is one of 'us', but also a more precise awareness of her context as a socialist. This difference from the US context, in which socialism represented a powerful taboo, is articulated in the biographical note on the first page and inside back cover, which describes her as 'a committed socialist of independent temper'. Perhaps led by the context of feminist links to strong pacifist movements in the UK such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and contemporary discussions of pan-European security (e.g. strong public opposition to the NATO doubletrack decision of 1979

in the UK and countries around Europe), the Virago peritexts reflect a sense of shared European-ness that distinguishes them from the FSG peritexts. The more explicit ‘branding’ of Wolf as a leftist writer in the UK edition is significant in the context of a sizeable potential audience of left-leaning readers, with narratives of other activist groups such as trade unions and Church groups intersecting with those of pacifists and feminists to produce a climate of reception very different from that in the USA.

However, while the Virago peritext recognises some of the leftist political narratives contextualising Wolf’s writing and turns the reader’s attention to shared interests with the European continent, the design of the back cover is revealing. Simply enough, it shows a photograph of the author and a quotation of endorsement; however, this comes from a review of Wolf’s previously translated text *The Quest for Christa T.* and describes Wolf as ‘a sensitive writer of the purest water – an East German Virginia Woolf’.³⁹ It is a comment that has continued to resound in Wolf’s Anglophone authorial narrative, also resurfacing in reviews of *Cassandra*: readers were warned, for example, that ‘Christa Wolf is generally considered to be the East German Virginia Woolf, so don’t expect an easy read’.⁴⁰ The implied parallel works to Wolf’s advantage by suggesting an affinity with Woolf, whose work experienced a surge in popularity during the 1980s because of its appeal to feminist narratives.⁴¹ However, there has been very little attempt to probe the implications of this parallel. Woolf’s theory of the androgynous mind, for example, differs from Wolf’s understanding of experience as recognisably male and female, in which context her female narrators seek not to be like men but to be acknowledged as equal and essential contributors to a definition of what it is to be human.⁴² The comparison with Woolf, whilst broadly

inviting, is therefore also a potentially misleading lens through which to view Wolf's treatment of gendered experience.

As the peritexts show, Anglophone critics emphasised the resonance of Cassandra with narratives not specific to the GDR, and this was particularly significant as a frame for her pacifism. Epitexts in the form of reviews, too, were sensitive to the parallels between Cassandra's foreboding and Wolf's position as a European (rather than a German) in the Cold War arms race: Wolf's narrative of 'the threat of apocalypse hanging over us' meant that 'as a German – East or West makes little difference here – she is on the front lines of an atomic stalemate'.⁴³ What was for Wolf and her German readers clearly linked to her socialism was recontextualised by an ostensibly international narrative of pacifism, with strong links to the feminist movement. British readers in particular might have been inspired to think of the women's protests at Greenham Common starting in the early 1980s.⁴⁴

The reviews framed Cassandra's resistance to war in such a way that she (and through her, Wolf) was affiliated to a specifically feminist pacifism invoking an anti-patriarchal narrative. Joyce Crick noted that 'Wolf has moved very close to the peace movement and its feminine supporters' and Barbara Einhorn, also quoting Webb's comparison to Woolf, commented on the role of 'women as seers, as tellers of the truth they perceive and as unwelcome voices in this role: this theme of Christa Wolf's has obvious relevance for women in the peace movement today'.⁴⁵ Einhorn's article appeared in the *END Journal of Nuclear Disarmament* in an issue on 'Women and Peace' and positioned women as the powerless victims of men's patriarchal aggression: 'women today realise that they will not be "spared"

[...]: they too will be the victims, along with men, of a war ostensibly being prepared in the name of their “protection” but in reality leading to humanity’s self-destruction’.

Wolf’s resistance to nuclear armament, though censured in the GDR, was unproblematic in the context of Anglophone and especially British anti-nuclear and feminist narratives. However, the reviews’ focus on women as victims excludes a more ambiguous perspective on Cassandra’s narrative that positions her as complicit in her own downfall. It is Cassandra who, in her drive to be a priestess at any cost, leaves her sister Polyxena vulnerable to her own sexuality and thus contributes to her eventual death at the hands of the Greeks; Cassandra realises that she is blinded by her own privilege and admits that ‘I, the seeress, was owned by the palace’.⁴⁶ Cassandra’s positioning as victim obscures this ambivalence, simplifying her into an allegory for a female pacifist voice repressed by war-mongering male patriarchy. The frame of a shared nuclear threat and the emphasis on ostensibly universal themes such as the arms race and the conflict between male and female perspectives thus positions Wolf as a writer with international concerns that seem to emerge from her identity as a woman.

Genette suggests that the sex of a female author frames her writing in narratives of a gendered tradition, and he categorises this as a factual epitext, or ‘a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received’.⁴⁷ Wolf herself invokes a tradition of ‘weibliches Schreiben’ [feminine writing] in the third and fourth Vorlesungen, advocating a mode of narration and memory embedded in individual consciousness, in the interest of both male and female subjectivity.

However, as shown above, the paratexts to *Cassandra* in translation emphasise the sex of the author and her protagonist as markers of coherence with target-culture narratives of specifically female experience. In some cases, it is the specific narratives of the institutions seeking to promote Wolf that, intentionally or unintentionally, lead to this reductive categorisation: by way of conclusion, we might consider how the gendered identities of those who control the paratexts to Wolf's translated writing have also acted as factual epitexts to contextualise her in target-culture feminist narratives.

'I, The Seeress, was Owned by The Palace': The Author as a Hostage to Gender?

Grace Paley noted in 1986 that 'if [Wolf] were a male East European using love affairs as metaphors for alienation and oppression (whose?) she'd be wildly famous in this country'.⁴⁸ Implying that Wolf is less popular than she might be if she were a man, Paley condemns patriarchy in the literary field that suppresses a female aesthetic. In this context, readership, translation and scholarship of Wolf can be seen as acts of resistance to this dominant narrative. Meanwhile, conditioned in their turn by the identities of the agents who perform them, feminist reading, translation and study of Wolf might be seen to affirm in their turn a different set of norms or assumptions: those of Anglophone feminism. This can be seen, for example, in responses to Wolf's association with the UK publisher Virago, and in the agency of female scholars in the USA as advocates of Wolf's work.

Founded in 1973, by the 1980s Virago had established itself as a feminist publisher, introducing the Virago Modern Classics series in 1978 to explore a narrative of a female

literary tradition. Wolf's publication by Virago, beginning in 1982 with *Christa T. and A Model Childhood*, is a factual epitext that has manifested itself in peritexts through the appearance of the distinctive apple logo on the British translations, and in other epitexts, for example in British reviews that note Virago as publisher or refer markedly to the translation of *Cassandra* as 'Virago's edition'.⁴⁹ Michael Hulse comments in his review of *Nachdenken über Christa T. and A Model Childhood* that 'Virago have created an image for themselves, so one couldn't take it amiss if a British reader assumed that these two important novels deal with the problems of women'.⁵⁰ This interpretive frame reveals an interesting contradiction in Virago's agency as a narrator of Wolf's authorship: while the Virago peritexts to *Cassandra* were largely more sensitive to the source-culture context than those of the FSG edition, the factual epitext of her UK publisher's identity has more strongly allocated Wolf's writing to a specifically female literary tradition with strong links to second-wave feminist narratives.

Not entirely outside the publishing industry but within the academic institution, female Germanists based at various universities in the USA were also advocating Wolf's writing from the 1970s onwards. Academics such as Helen Fehervary, Sara Lennox and Marilyn Sibley Fries, as well as organisations such as *Women in German*, added to Wolf's international mobility during the 1970s and 1980s by making her the focus of their research and publications. However, just as Wolf's relationship with Virago has been a double-edged sword, Paley highlights the potential significance of this group of scholars as advocates of Wolf's writing:

Christa Wolf is an East German writer not well enough known in this country except among feminists, and then mostly at the University of Ohio where the German department and the women's studies department seem to be close enough to have invited her to teach last year.⁵¹

Paley suggests that the endorsement of Wolf's writing by feminist and female voices, whilst increasing her international profile, has pigeonholed her as a feminist and denied her a wider audience. Wolf scholar Anna Kuhn also warns that readings of Wolf's life and writing as a progression from socialism to feminism are reductive.⁵²

Just as publishers reframe texts in cover material or through the strategic positioning of the publishing house in the market, then, academic voices more or less consciously appropriate Wolf into a narrative of the 'female tradition' that has implications for readings of her texts. There is much more that could be said here: the framing of Wolf as a feminist and as an author defined by her gender not only contributed to the context in which *Cassandra* was received in 1984 but continued in the publication of her later texts, reflecting a sense that *Cassandra* was seen to consolidate the framing of Wolf's Anglophone authorship in feminist and feminist-pacifist narratives. In reviews of her 1998 text *Medea* for example, the TLS review in the UK opened with the assertion that 'Christa Wolf has made no secret of her feminist sympathies, and they have informed some of her best work, most notably *Kassandra* (1983)'.⁵³ The 'feminism' of *Cassandra* and *Medea* was also noted in Anglophone obituaries following Wolf's death in 2011, suggesting that Wolf continues to be seen in the Anglophone world as a feminist writer.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, the impact of the Virago label and the comments of Kuhn and Paley reflect the conflicted position of those who seek to promote Wolf's writing within familiar target-culture narratives. As this study has shown, publishers, journalists and even scholarly readers often do not fully control the implications of their contributions to the author's growing profile, and in Wolf's case her reframing has often been the result of attempts to advocate the author and her interests. Paradoxically, it is those who seek greater understanding for Wolf and her writing who seem to align her work more emphatically with target-culture narratives. Whilst it is easy to assume this is deliberate or see the negative implications of reframing the author and her writing in this way, Wolf's example demonstrates the inevitability of such shifts as symptoms of the way in which the writing and reading of (feminist) literature are so strongly conditioned by the sociocultural environment in which they are situated.⁵⁵ Like Cassandra, Wolf is 'owned by the palace': the (translated) author inevitably occupies a space within institutional frameworks that reshape her identity as they enable her voice to be heard.

¹ This article is an abridged and revised presentation of material included in Caroline Summers (2017) *Examining Text and Authorship in Translation: What Remains of Christa Wolf?* (London: Palgrave MacMillan). I am grateful to Palgrave MacMillan for consent to publish this material.

² Whilst recognising that this problematic term risks eliding the differences between diverse traditions, ‘Anglophone’ is used here to refer broadly to an English-speaking discursive space dominated by American and British voices.

³ See Christa Wolf, *Selbstinterview*, in Sonja Hilzinger (ed.), *Christa Wolf, Werkausgabe in 13 Bänden, Band IV* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2000), pp. 139–44; ‘Lesen und Schreiben’, in Hilzinger, *Christa Wolf, Werkausgabe in 13 Bänden*, pp. 238–282.

⁴ Christa Wolf, *Kassandra. Vier Vorlesungen. Eine Erzählung* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1983); Christa Wolf, *Cassandra. A Novel and Four Essays*, tr. Jan van Heurck (New York and London: Farrar Straus Giroux and Virago, 1984) (further references in the text).

⁵ Margaret R. Somers and Gloria D. Gibson, ‘Reclaiming the Epistemological “Other”’: Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity’, in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 37–99 (p. 38).

⁶ Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998); Pascale Casanova, ‘Consécration et accumulation de capital littéraire. La traduction comme échange inégal’ [Consecration and accumulation of literary capital.

Translation as an unequal exchange], *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 144 (2002), pp. 7–20.

⁸ On the attitude of the literary field in the USA towards politics and art, see Gisèle Sapiro, ‘The Debate on the Writer’s Responsibility in France and the United States from the 1920s to the 1950s’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 23 (2010), pp. 69–83.

⁹ Significant publications include Kate Millett’s, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); and Shulamith Firestone’s, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow, 1970).

¹⁰ See especially Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union’, in Lydia Sargent (ed.) *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (London: Pluto, 1981), pp. 1–41.

¹¹ An overview of the GDR context and some changes in the legal and social situation of East German women following 1989 are discussed in Anke Burckhardt and Uta Schlegel, ‘Frauen an ostdeutschen Hochschulen – in den gleichstellungspolitischen Koordinaten vor und nach der “Wende”’, in Edith Saurer, Margareth Lanzinger, Elisabeth Frysak. Anke Burkhardt and Uta Schlegel (eds), *Women’s Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), pp. 79–102; see also Irene Dölling, ‘Frauen- und Männerbilder: Eine Analyse von Fotos in DDR-Zeitschriften’ [Images of Women and Men: An Analysis of Photos in GDR Magazines], *Feministische Studien* 8 (1990), pp. 35–49; an overview of the GDR context and some changes in the legal and social situation of East German women following 1989 are discussed in Anke Burckhardt

and Uta Schlegel, 'Frauen an ostdeutschen Hochschulen – in den gleichstellungspolitischen Koordinaten vor und nach der "Wende"', in Saurer et al. (eds) *Women's Movements*, pp. 79–102.

¹² Myra Love, 'Christa Wolf and Feminism: Breaking the Patriarchal Connection', *New German Critique* 16 (1979), pp. 31–53, here, 43.

¹³ Lorna Martens, *The Promised Land? Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2001) p. 36.

¹⁴ See Firestone's 1969 letter to the left in the *Guardian*, quoted in Marlene Legates, *In Their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 353–354.

¹⁵ Wolf, 'Lesen und Schreiben'.

¹⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 118

¹⁷ Wolf, 'Selbstinterview', p. 141.

¹⁸ Caroline Summers, *Examining Text and Authorship in Translation: What Remains of Christa Wolf?* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).

¹⁹ For a full discussion see Caroline Summers, 'Patterns of Authorship: The Translation of Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*', *German Life and Letters* 67 (2014), pp. 378–398.

²⁰ 'Das Kind mit dem Bade: Amerikanische Germanisten solidarisieren sich mit Christa Wolf' [The Baby with the Bathwater: American Germanists show solidarity with Christa Wolf] *Zeit*, 18 June 1993.

²¹ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, tr. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2.

²² Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 2.

²³ Keith Harvey, “‘Events’ and ‘Horizons’”: Reading Ideology in the “‘Bindings’” of Translations’, in María Calzada Pérez (ed.), *Apropos of Ideology. Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2003), pp. 43–70 (p. 50).

²⁴ Marilyn Sibley Fries (ed.), *Responses to Christa Wolf* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p. 7.

²⁵ For a note on the self-evidence of this interpretation to the East German reader and a discussion of Cassandra’s complicity, see Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler, ‘Christa Wolf: *Kassandra* (1983)’, in Brigid Haines and Margaret Littler, *Contemporary Women’s Writing in German: Changing the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 78–98, here, p. 79.

²⁶ For detail of the omissions in the GDR edition, see Peter J. Graves, ‘Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra*: The Censoring of the GDR Edition’, *Modern Language Review* 81 (1986), pp. 944–56.

²⁷ Christa Wolf, *The Quest for Christa T.*, tr. Christopher Middleton (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1970), p. 169. The narrator of *A Model Childhood/Patterns of Childhood* also struggles with the first-person pronoun, confronting her experience in the second and third person until the very last page of the book.

²⁸ Christa Wolf, 'Subjective Authenticity. A Conversation with Hans Kaufmann' in 'The Fourth Dimension: Interviews with Christa Wolf', tr. Hilary Pilkington (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 17–38, here, p. 25.

²⁹ [The crossing-over from the palace world into the world of the mountains and woods was also the transition from tragedy into the burlesque, whose core is that one does not see oneself as tragic. Important – yes, and why ever not. But definitely not tragic, as the upper echelons at the palace do.] Quoted here from Christa Wolf, *Kassandra* (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 2008), p. 73; Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 54.

³⁰ [Barely still hoped for: a narrow little door onto the airfield opens. As I sit: transparent, over-wrought wakefulness instead of the longed-for tiredness.] Quoted here from Christa Wolf, *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Kassandra* (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 2008), p. 22; Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 151.

³¹ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 144.

³² Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 33.

³³ See 'Feminists should hail Wolf's accomplishment as nothing less than a revision of one of the cornerstones of Western civilization', Kenneth Harper 'Sampling Recent Soviet and Eastern-bloc Literature', *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 October (1984) (quoted on a 1990 paperback version of the FSG edition).

³⁴ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 104.

³⁵ 'History, deep down, is not the struggle between the exploiters and the exploited, but between men and women, or even more grotesque: between "male" and "female" thought'.

(My translation). Wilhelm Girnus, 'Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?' [Who Built Seven-Gated Thebes?], *Sinn und Form* 2 (1983), pp. 439–447, here, 442.

³⁶ Manfred Jäger, 'Ein kleines Bisschen Trotz' [A Small Amount of Defiance], *Titel*, June, 1983; Frauke Meyer-Gosau, 'Unsere lieben Frauen von der Literatur: Unsere Christa' [Our Dear Women of Literature: Our Christa], *EMMA* 6 (1984), pp. 44–46, here, 46.

³⁷ Other designs focusing on the solitary female figure include the Virago Classics edition (1989) and the more recent Daunt Books edition (2013).

³⁸ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 87.

³⁹ W. L. Webb, 'Complex Fatality', *Guardian*, 27 May, 1971.

⁴⁰ JF, Christa Wolf, '*Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays*', [publication unknown], London, 28 January 1985. Available in Christa-Wolf-Archiv Folder L15, Akademie der Künste, Berlin. Only the author's initials are given.

⁴¹ Academic studies also exploit and perpetuate this in their titles, for example W. E. McDonald, 'Who's Afraid of Wolf's Cassandra – or Cassandra's Wolf? Male Tradition and Women's Knowledge in Cassandra', *Journal of Narrative Technique* 20 (1990), pp. 267–283.

⁴² One study that does explore some of these questions is Anne Herrmann, *The Dialogic and Difference: An/Other Woman in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁴³ Barney Bardsley, 'East German Genius', *Tribune*, 22 February 1985, (emphasis added); Nina Bernstein, 'A Call into the Future', *Sunday*, 2 September 1984. The Bernstein article is from an unidentified Sunday supplement and is available in the Christa-Wolf-Archiv Folder

A382, Akademie der Künste, Berlin; Tribune is a London-based socialist newspaper that enjoyed strong links to CND in the 1950s in particular.

⁴⁴ This context is also reflected in Virago publications from the 1980s: see D. Thompson (ed.), *Over Our Dead Bodies: Women Against the Bomb* (London: Virago, 1989); Jill Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (London: Virago, 1989).

⁴⁵ Crick, 'The Darkness of Troy', *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 November, 1985; Barbara Einhorn, 'Special Section: Barbara Einhorn Introduces Christa Wolf', *Journal of European Disarmament* 14 (1985), pp. 16–19, here, 16.

⁴⁶ Wolf, *Cassandra*, p. 69.

⁴⁷ Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Grace Paley et al. 'Let Us Now Praise Unsung Writers', *Mother Jones*, January 1986.

⁴⁹ Webb, 'Complex Fatality'; Pat Rogers, 'Public Life', *London Review of Books*, 1 April, 1982; Marlene Schiwy, 'Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays', *Spare Rib*, July 1985.

⁵⁰ Michael Hulse, 'Fleeing the Red Army', *London Magazine*, August/September 1982.

⁵¹ Paley et al., 'Let Us Now Praise Unsung Writers'. This argument is also supported by comments made by Edith Waldstein on Wolf's primarily female readership: see Waldstein 'No Place on Earth by Christa Wolf', *The Women's Studies Review* 5 (1983), pp. 18–20.

⁵² Anna Kuhn (1988) *From Marxism to Feminism: Christa Wolf's Utopian Vision*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 3.

⁵³ Peter Graves, 'A Scapegoat, not a Sorceress', *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 October 1996.

⁵⁴ David Binder and Bruce Weber 'Christa Wolf Dies at 82; Wrote of the Germanys', *New York Times*, 1 December 2011; Carolyn Kellogg, 'German Author Christa Wolf has Died', *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 2011; Kate Webb 'Christa Wolf Obituary', *Guardian*, 1 December 2011.

⁵⁵ On this topic see e.g. André Lefevère, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge, 1992).