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Legal Tender

Urang, John Griffith

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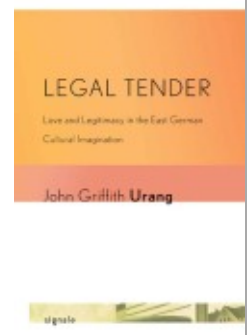
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W(H)ITHER EROS?

*Gender Trouble
in the GDR, 1975–1989*

L'amour est à réinventer.

—ARTHUR RIMBAUD, “Une saison en enfer”

Die Liebe muß wieder erfunden werden.

—One of the mottos adopted by the “Nonsense Council” (*Unsinnskollegium*) of
witches and fools in Irmtraud Morgner’s *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman*

Love must be reinvented.

In 1993, Nancy Lukens and Dorothy Rosenberg published an anthology of translations called *Daughters of Eve: Women’s Writing from the German Democratic Republic*. In their preface, they explain that the title of the anthology is borrowed from *Evastöchter*, Renate Apitz’s volume of short fiction, “whose title is a tongue-in-cheek reference to an uncomplimentary German term for a stereotypical female and, in the GDR context, clearly ironic” (vii–viii).¹ In the starkly secular GDR, this biblical reference calls attention to itself: when scientific evolutionism is doctrine, what would it mean to claim (even metaphorical) descent from Eve? To judge from the frequency of its appearance, the Eve myth retained a privileged position in the allegorical imagination of the GDR—especially, as Lukens and Rosenberg’s anthology reminds us, for authors invested in the question of women’s equality. Indeed, the Genesis story consolidates the key themes of East German feminist (or para-feminist) writing in the 1970s and 1980s.² On the one hand, the prelapsarian

1. In their *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (German Dictionary), Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm define “Eventochter” as a “vain, lightheaded girl.”

2. The term “feminist” is a perennial problem in East German cultural studies. As Patricia Herminhouse notes, “When enthusiastic readers in the West furnished GDR women writers of the new

scene of Edenic harmony and companionship resonates with the utopian impulse in these works, which never cease trying to envision a more perfect union, whether interpersonal or political. The asymmetrical punishments meted out to Adam and Eve, on the other hand, encapsulate the imbalances of historically, culturally, or biologically conditioned gender roles:

To the woman [God] said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:16–17)

Such explicit thematization of the division between "productive" and "reproductive" labor helps to account for the recurrence of this biblical leitmotif in East German gender discourse. As Julia Kristeva writes in her 1993 essay "Women's Time," this split represents a fundamental aporia in the Marxist understanding of human activity:

Socialist ideology, which is founded on the idea that human beings are determined by their relation to *production*, has ignored the role of the human being in *reproduction* and the *symbolic order*. As a result, socialist ideology has been compelled, in its totalizing, if not totalitarian, spirit, to believe that the specific nature of women is unimportant, if not nonexistent. (209–10)³

Simone de Beauvoir makes a similar observation in *The Second Sex*, where she raises questions about the role of women—or lack thereof—within socialism:

[The] fate of woman and that of socialism are intimately bound up together, as is shown also in Bebel's great work on woman. "Woman and the proletariat," he says, "are both downtrodden." Both are to be set free through the economic development consequent upon the social upheaval brought about by machinery. The problem of woman is reduced to the problem of her capacity for labour. Puissant at the time when techniques were suited to her capabilities, dethroned when she was no longer

generation with the label 'feminist,' this designation was usually rejected emphatically, since feminism was generally seen as a bourgeois attempt to reach women's liberation through the battle of the sexes rather than through an attack on the economic basis of oppression" ("Schreiben in gewendeten Verhältnissen," 478). Some cultural historians prefer a variant of the blanket term "women's writing," which has the dual disadvantage of implying a uniform agenda on the part of women writers and of excluding male authors concerned with the questions of gender equality.

3. Cheryl Dueck's study *Rifts in Time and in the Self: The Female Subject in Two Generations of East German Women Writers* alerted me to Kristeva's critique of the suppression of gender difference in socialist ideology; see esp. Dueck, 80–81.

in a position to exploit them, woman regains in the modern world her equality with man.... And when the socialist society is established throughout the world, there will no longer be men and women, but only workers on a footing of equality. (55)

The otherwise laudable analyses of Bebel and Engels, writes Beauvoir, are “disappointing” in their lack of depth and detail regarding the specificities of women’s historical conditions. As she argues later,

Woman cannot in good faith be regarded simply as a worker; for her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, no less in the social economy than in the individual life. In some periods, indeed, it is more useful to produce offspring than to plough the soil. Engels slighted the problem, simply remarking that the socialist community would abolish the family—certainly an abstract solution. (58)

According to Kristeva and Beauvoir, any advances for women brought about by socialism come at a price: an increased stake in the sphere of production is bought at the cost of a devaluation of reproduction. Though the political economy of industrial labor is laid bare by socialist social analysis, the value of both biological and social reproduction is effaced. In chapter 3 I suggested that the GDR’s reluctance to confront the pressing question of reproduction returned symptomatically in the ubiquitous broken marriages of 1970s domestic narratives. Here, following Kristeva and Beauvoir, we see the wider consequences of the GDR’s exclusive privileging of production. In disavowing reproduction, socialist ideology also elided gender difference: to paraphrase Beauvoir, where social activity is assumed to be coterminous with the sphere of work, “there will no longer be men and women.”

Like these passages from Kristeva and de Beauvoir, many of the literary texts analyzed in this chapter make the case that biological reproduction constitutes the basis of an irreducible and ineluctable difference—a difference ignored at the peril of both the individual and society. In the wake of the deconstructionist strategies epitomized by the work of Judith Butler, such an emphasis on inherent gender difference may seem to veer toward an outdated and problematic essentialism. As Butler puts it in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, “Recourse to an original or genuine femininity is a nostalgic and parochial ideal that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of gender as a complex cultural construction” (36). More specifically, Butler takes issue with the prominent position of reproduction within Kristeva’s theoretical system:

Kristeva understands the desire to give birth as a species-desire, part of a collective and archaic female libidinal drive that constitutes an ever-recurring metaphysical reality....

Insofar as Kristeva conceptualizes this maternal instinct as having an ontological status prior to the paternal law, she fails to consider the way in which that very law might well be the *cause* of the very desire it is said to *repress*. (*Gender Trouble*, 90)

In terms of the texts analyzed below, Butler's argument would suggest that it is not the case, as Kristeva claims, that socialism *represses* the archaic species-desire of women, but rather that paternalist socialism *causes* these texts to understand women's desire in terms of a repressed maternal "instinct." Do these texts, then, simply fall behind the curve set by contemporary feminist theory?

In her article "The American Feminist Reception of GDR Literature," Angelika Bammer juxtaposes developments in Western feminist theory and trends in East German literature. She suggests that 1980s East German women's writing was moving backward relative to Western feminist theory. In the 1970s, Anglo-American and West German feminists tended to focus on the problem of women's oppression as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon, a phenomenon rooted ultimately in the primary and essential difference between men and women. By the late 1980s, however, the emphasis had shifted: "The focus was now on the construction and role of gender in identity formation and its effect on the relations of power in both public and private spheres. From an insistence on the otherness of women, feminist attention had shifted to the otherness among and in women" (22). Following the signposts of deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Western feminism was dismantling universalist notions of gender and identity. Meanwhile in the East, Bammer claims, a shift in the opposite direction was underway. Where GDR literature in the 1970s had subjected universalist categories of gender difference to radical materialist critique—in contradistinction to the more ahistoricist, cultural-feminist Western approach—it reversed this trend in the following decade:

[In] the GDR [of the 1980s], precisely those writers most identified in the West with feminism, notably [Irmtraud] Morgner and [Christa] Wolf were producing texts like *Amanda* and *Kassandra* that to Western feminist ears had a distinctly cultural-feminist ring. This shift, not only in tone but, more importantly, in a view of history, is particularly striking in *Kassandra* where women are defined not only as separate from men, but in opposition to them. In *Kassandra* Wolf depicts the struggle for survival in gender terms. Moreover, as this text puts it, this struggle has the givenness of the mythic dimensions in which the narrative is cast. Gender, in other words, is not deconstructed, as had become critical practice in the West: rather, it is set in place with a vengeance. (22)

While the feminisms of West and East may indeed have been ships passing in the night, I will argue that the East German focus on "essential" difference, which seemed like a kind of theoretical atavism to Western feminists, was in fact a strategic response to the East German socialist context. In this sense, the East German example would approximate what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as "strategic essentialism": "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (205). In confronting the persistence of patriarchal domination

within “actually existing socialism,” East German feminist texts reached for the language of radical difference, a language foreclosed by socialist ideology’s very definition of the human. Human existence, in East German Marxist understanding, was defined by the labor process: as we saw in chapter 2, the 1973 *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* (Compact Political Dictionary), a standard reference for ideological correctness, endorses Engels’s designation of work as “the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself” (“Arbeit,” 47).⁴

The productionist bias exemplified by this quotation and identified by Beauvoir and Kristeva also governs Siegfried Schnabl’s description of the role of women under socialism in his canonical sex and marriage manual *Mann und Frau intim* (Husband and Wife Intimate), first published in 1971. After cataloging the ways in which women have been oppressed throughout history, Schnabl turns his attention to the new social order of the GDR:

All of these considerations culminate in the understanding that the development of the personality of every woman is dependent upon her full social equality. . . .

Therefore the professional life of women in socialist society is not the consequence of an increased need for labor power or simply a means by which to raise the living standard of the family. For every individual woman, work entails objectively and subjectively meaningful social activity, the development of her personality, and therefore also growth in her relationship with her husband and children. In other words, the right to a career is a prerequisite for the meeting of equal human beings in partnership and love. (21)

In its characterization of gender parity as a question primarily of equal access to “meaningful social activity,” that is, work outside the home, Schnabl’s officially sanctioned, state-sponsored treatise explicitly echoes party doctrine. He quotes article 20 of the GDR constitution, which declares: “Men and women have equal rights in all areas of social, political, and personal life. Society and state must strive for the advancement of women, *especially in occupational development*” (22, italics mine). Taken at its word, the GDR might indeed have seemed to be the society of sexless workers envisioned by Beauvoir.⁵

Yet, as we saw in chapter 3, the GDR’s declining birthrate highlighted the need to address the tricky question of biology: if *production* enjoys such extravagant pride of place, then how will society *reproduce* itself? Indeed, in practice genderless

4. See chapter 2, p. 61.

5. In the popular imagination of the West—and, to some extent, of the East—this stereotype launched a thousand lampoons. One thinks of the satirically unfeminine apparatchik Ninotchka in the eponymous Lubitsch film, Horst Buchholz’s fiery but innocent Otto Piffel in Wilder’s *One, Two, Three*, the caricature of the “manly” East German female athlete after the 1980 Olympic doping scandal, or the chaste socialist-realist “romance” parodied in the *Stacheltier* episode analyzed in chapter 1 (pp. 38–39).

productionism was tempered by a more pragmatic understanding of sex difference and erotic desire. East German psychologist Heinz Dannhauer's formulation of this view in his 1973 study *Geschlecht und Persönlichkeit* (Gender/Sex and Personality) deserves quotation at some length:

The relationships between men and women are not simply "natural," but rather are characterized above all by their social content. The sexes are, however, fundamentally destined for completion in partnership. This partnership is not just to be seen in the striving for bodily union, but also in the manifold emotional forms of contact between men and women. . . . Fundamental psychic sex-differentiation can be found in sexual and erotic aptency, as well as in diverse behaviors that are directed toward the opposite sex. A further psychic differentiation exists in the different biological functions of the sexes. (187)

Here the text breaks for a quotation from a previous study by Rolf Borrmann:

The woman is subject to burdens that no one can take away from her. Pregnancy and motherhood as the consequences of her biological role characterize the realm of her particular burdens and duties. Society must take the particular situation of the respective sex into consideration. (Borrmann, 27; qtd. in Dannhauer, 187)

It is interesting that Dannhauer calls in East German educator and sexologist Borrmann, author of the 1966 *Jugend und Liebe* (Youth and Love), to deliver the crux of this message. Perhaps Dannhauer wants to distance himself from the biological imperative, which is so inconvenient to his previous assertions about social conditioning. Or perhaps Borrmann functions as a kind of reverb effect, amplifying the claim into a chorus of authority. In any case, the accent here on "burdens" (*Belastungen*) and "duties" (*Pflichten*) is meant to be offset by a later emphasis on state support of working mothers:

Even in our society, women are responsible for much of the care and welfare of children in the first years of life. This societal division of labor between women and men seems sensible and natural. In antagonistic class society, the biological and social role of motherhood leads to the disadvantage of women. Only in socialist society is it possible to configure the living conditions of women in such a way that no social disadvantages arise from her duties as mother. Numerous provisions have been made in our society to aid women in their duties. . . .

Socialist society cannot create all the necessary conditions for the complete equality of women in just a few decades (full-day education for children, places in day care and kindergarten for all children, care for children in cases of sickness, creation of the necessary service industries to assist with housework). Within the objectively

existing possibilities, however, we have to push for the socially optimal version. We must create the objective conditions to help women keep up with all their commitments. (Dannhauser, 187, 193–94)

Such state assistance is necessary if women are to achieve meaningful equality, since, as it is defined here, “the realization of the equality of women demands equal standing in all social sectors, *especially in production*” (193, italics mine). Taken together, these statements present East German women with an ultimatum and a quandary. The message seems to be the following: *Real* meaning may be found in social activity, that is, work outside the home, but your duties also lie elsewhere. Fortunately, the state will help make this necessary nuisance more tolerable.

If this formulation seems extreme, it is less so than the conclusions reached by the narratives examined in this chapter. These stories and novels undertake a radical interrogation of the roles and duties imposed on women (and, as we will see, on men) in East German socialist society. The first set of texts, all taken from the 1975 anthology *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* (Bolt from the Blue), puts the universalist utopianism of socialist ideology to the test. The anthology’s stories of gender turmoil ask, what happens to interpersonal relationships, especially erotic relationships, when the variable of gender difference is changed? The results range from the disastrous to the miraculous.

When one of the stories intended for *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*, a riotous sex-change fantasy by Irmtraud Morgner, proved too racy for the censor’s sensibilities, it found its way into Morgner’s extraordinary 1974 montage novel, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* (Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice). This chapter will offer a reading of *Trobadora Beatriz* with particular emphasis on its framing love story: an 800-year search for a man worthy of love. Morgner’s *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman* (Amanda: A Witch Novel), the 1983 sequel to *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz*, radicalizes the social critique of the earlier work to suggest that the problem lies not only in contingent asymmetries in social roles, but also in the fundamentally different needs and desires of men and women. This standpoint underlies the novel’s distrustful depiction of heterosexual romantic love, which appears only in its negative instance, as one more weapon of the patriarchy. In the final section of this chapter, I consider Morgner’s unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) novel *Das heroische Testament* (The Heroic Testament), which attempts to answer the open question of the previous two works: is there hope for love in the face of so much injustice and inequality? And if not, why is its lure so irresistible? Knowing the well is poisoned, why does one drink again and again?

Eros and (S)Exchange: *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*

In 1975, the Hinstorff Verlag in Rostock published a volume of short stories called *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* (Bolt from the Blue). The anthology, which was edited by

Edith Anderson, contains short stories by three women and four men, all of which revolve around the theme of *Geschlechertausch*: women becoming men and men becoming women—literally—through scientific or magical means.⁶ As Anderson put it in the exposé she wrote to convince first the Aufbau publishing house (unsuccessfully), then Hinstorff, to take on the project, “Let us place ourselves in the skin of the opposite sex and just for once, instead of envying, resenting, despising it—or desiring, loving, worshiping it—picture how we would feel if the positions were reversed. Might this not be a salutary game for the whole of society? ... It would be an attempt to cast light on regions that have been too long in the dark, first and foremost in ourselves” (“Genesis and Adventures of the Anthology,” 4). As Anderson’s prospectus illustrates, this project belongs to the pattern identified by Bammer as characteristic of the 1970s in East Germany. In this “game for the whole of society,” one cannot speak of an “essential” male or female experience; gender, in Anderson’s description, is only skin-deep.

In this light, the publishing history of *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel* has a great deal to say about gender discourse on both sides of the Wall. When the book was republished in the West in 1980 as *Geschlechertausch* (Sex Change), it had undergone a *Geschlechertausch* of its own: only three of the stories remained, all by women. At the risk of reading too much into this editorial decision (which may have had as much to do with the vagaries of licensing as anything) we may hypothesize that it reflects the tendency of Western feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s to view the experience of gender as women’s experience—one consequence of the “essentialism” discussed in the above-quoted Bammer passage. Whatever its rationale, the decision to publish *Geschlechertausch* as a volume of women’s writings undermined the innovation of the book’s original version, which anticipated later developments in gender theory in its insistence on the universal dissemination of gender norms. Four examples from the original volume will illustrate some of the valences of this premise and set the stage for an account of its reappraisal in the literature of the following decade.

Günter de Bruyn’s contribution to *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*, which lent the volume its intended title *Geschlechertausch*, begins with a scenario that calls attention to a fundamental contradiction within the code of heterosexual romantic love. On the one hand, the distinction between men and women represents the constitutive difference of the heterosexual love story—it is what distinguishes a romantic narrative from, for instance, a story of passionate friendship. On the other hand, the existence of this gap poses a threat to the demands of romantic love for unanimity

6. *Geschlechertausch* can mean “sex change” or “sex exchange.” The original volume was to have contributions by four women, but Irmtraud Morgner’s story fell through for ideological reasons. See Wolfgang Emmerich’s afterword to *Geschlechertausch: Drei Geschichten über die Umwandlung der Verhältnisse* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1980), 101.

of understanding and emotion. In *Love as Passion*, Niklas Luhmann portrays such epistemological claims as a necessary condition of love's communicative function:

One would have to participate in the other person's self-referential information processing or at least be able to adequately reconstruct it, in order to be able to "understand" how input works in him as information and how the person in turn reconnects output (what is said, for example) and information processing.

The communicative medium of love functions to make this seemingly improbable step possible. (24)

In this light, gender distinction can be a ticklish subject for heterosexual romance: too great a disparity in outlook or experience would endanger the lovers' mutual understanding, while too little difference erodes the texts' heteronormative polarity. The stories in the *Geschlechtertausch* volume take positions all along this spectrum—often with surprising results.

At the outset of "Geschlechtertausch," de Bruyn literalizes love's claim to an absolute transcendence that would effect the "union of two souls" (Anderson, *Blitz*, 8). Lost in passion, Karl and Anna want to "traverse the empty space between them." Karl cries: "Oh, if only I were the woman! Oh, if only you were the man!" (8). The magic formula takes, and both find their bodies transformed into those of the opposite sex.

Overwhelmed by the change, Anna checks into a clinic, but Karl (now Karla) puts on Anna's clothes and heads off to work. After some initial awkwardness, Karla's coworkers come to terms with this new arrangement and eventually begin treating Karla like any other woman at the office—unfortunately for Karla. Predictably, Karl/Karla's crossover reveals inequalities that he had never noticed as a man: Karla feels objectified and patronized at the office, forced to endure unwanted advances and double standards in etiquette and appearance. After being slighted by her male peers at a professional conference, Karla decides she's had enough. She goes to the clinic to trade back with Anna. Here, though, de Bruyn's story takes an unexpected and revealing turn. Adam, it turns out, doesn't want to go back to being Anna. While staying at the clinic, Adam has fallen in love with a nurse named Karin, who explains to the dumbfounded Karl/Karla that she and Adam are looking forward to an egalitarian life together (Anderson, *Blitz*, 44).

What started, then, as a love story between Karl and Anna ends in the happy union of Adam/Anna and Karin. Though Karla is left stranded at the end, Adam/Anna and Karin seem to have resolved the paradox of heterosexual love: one is biologically a man, both are culturally women. Hope may be found in the fluidity of gender, which can be learned and, therefore, unlearned. In the end, magical *Geschlechtertausch* turns out to be less the apogee of romantic love than its only chance for survival.

Though lighter in tone than de Bruyn's, Sarah Kirsch's story "Blitz aus heiterm Himmel" is no less acute in its critique of the symbiotic relationship between romantic expectations and gender inequality. Kirsch tells the story of Katharina, who works in the research department of a factory. The first five pages of the text follow Katharina as she performs various household chores, cleaning up after her boyfriend, Albert, a long-haul trucker. Waking up one morning, Katharina discovers that she has turned into a man. His first reaction is amusement, which turns into alarm when he thinks of Albert. Ever the optimist, Katharina, who now calls himself Max, decides that he may have lost a lover, but that their friendship might be all the stronger for it (Anderson, *Blitz*, 197). When Albert comes home after an overnight delivery, the two men spend the day together doing household tasks: hauling coal to the basement, cooking, taking out the trash, washing dishes. Max connects the dots: "Now that I'm a man myself, now I'm gettin' the women's lib" (Jetzt, wo ich selbern Kerl bin, jetz kriekich die Ehmannzipatzjon) (204). Though neither says anything about Katharina's new body, Albert seems unperturbed by the change. After stacking coal in the basement, they shower together and laugh at each other's erections.

Kirsch toys with the idea of an inherently gendered psyche: after becoming a man, for instance, Max finds that he suddenly enjoys soccer and knows his way around tools. Ultimately, though, the story's resolution suggests that the warp and woof of socialized gender and sexual identity can be unraveled. Not only are Max and Albert able to share domestic work equitably and harmoniously, but there is even a suggestion that their relationship may go beyond the friendship that Max had predicted. In the story's closing scene, the men go for a drive in Albert's truck and imagine a new kind of utopia:

Protein and carbohydrates would be produced either synthetically or through hydroculture. Jungles would overgrow city and country. People would hunt in their spare time with crude weapons and wouldn't think about wars and border conflicts. [Albert and Max] were happily inventing things, talking as fast and thinking as harmoniously as they ever had when they were together. They circled the small ugly church, honked a cat out of the street, and stopped in front of the old house. Albert sat in his place. Max turned to him. His hair can stay that way, thought Albert. (Anderson, *Blitz*, 207)

With this conclusion, Kirsch offers a rendition of the parked-car-in-front-of-the-house trope, the moment of truth in the standard date narrative. The moment seems to augur a positive future for Max and Albert: they are getting along as well as ever, and Albert approves of Max's appearance, even as a man. In the intersection of social utopia and personal affirmation rendered by this passage, Kirsch offers a new permutation by which the problem of love and inequality might be solved: both partners are biologically men, one is culturally a woman.

Where Kirsch and de Bruyn discover new possibilities for interpersonal relationships in the fluidity of constructed gender roles, Christa Wolf's story of *Geschlechtertausch* seems to point toward more fixed conceptions of male and female identity. In "Selbstversuch: Traktat zu einem Protokoll" (Self-Experiment: Treatise on a Protocol), a female scientist volunteers to test a new drug designed to turn a woman into a man. The procedure works, and Anders (as the scientist's masculine self is called) discovers that he has become a man, or—in the narrator's telling correction—"runs the risk of becoming a man" (Mann zu werden droht) (Anderson, *Blitz*, 47). As the story goes on, it becomes clear that the narrator's self-experiment was motivated by more than scientific curiosity. Addressing her director at the laboratory, the inventor of "Petersein masculinum 199," the narrator admits that her main goal in making the switch was to discover what she calls his "secret" (53). This desire for knowledge, in turn, seems to be motivated by unrequited love. The narrator describes searching out the director's window in the city lights "with a woman's gaze" (58), once even calling him on the telephone just to hear him breathe (52).⁷ And so when Anders does get behind the director's "secret," the shock of this revelation convinces him to return to feminine form: "I suddenly realized . . .: your artfully constructed rule-systems, your unholy work-ethic, all your maneuvers to escape were nothing more than the attempt to safeguard yourself from discovery: that you are incapable of love and you know it" (81).

When she was asked in an interview about the view of the relationship between the sexes informing "Selbstversuch," Wolf responded:

As the material conditions allowing the sexes an equal start improve—and this must necessarily be the first step towards emancipation—so we face more acutely the problem of giving the sexes opportunities to be different from each other, to acknowledge that they have different needs, and that men and women, not just men, are the models for human beings. (*The Fourth Dimension*, 34–35; qtd. in Martens, 96)

In this answer, as in "Selbstversuch," Wolf seems to be auditioning the notion of inherent—or at least indelible—gender difference that Bammer identifies in the later novel *Kassandra*. Lorna Martens states the matter more unequivocally, claiming that Wolf's works from the period "tell us not that women are merely as good as, as capable as men; they leave us with the impression that women are better than men, and that femininity is better than masculinity" (74). Later in her study, Martens uses "Selbstversuch" to sum up the nature of this superiority: "Wolf

7. In reading these scenes as tokens of romantic longing, I follow Schmitz-Köster's cue, who remarks: "For the subject of the experiment, love toward this man, who is incapable of loving, was . . . a decisive motivation for her transformation" (78). It would also be interesting to apply Julia Hell's argument in *Post-Fascist Fantasies* to this story, reading the director not as a potential lover, but as a father figure. However compelling, such an interpretation would take us far afield of the current line of reasoning.

takes...stereotypical differences and turns them around into a set of positive attributes for women. Expressed positively, they mean that women see (the truth), while men are partially blind. Women are capable of love, while men are incapable of loving" (95).

This is not the only difference between the sexes, however. As we learn in a brief flashback in "Selbstversuch," the narrator's disappointment with the institute director recapitulates an earlier experience with a romantic partner named Bertram:

I, Anders, thought back on the former lover of the woman that I had been. My dear Bertram, who three years ago almost to the day told me on the way to the observatory that it just wouldn't work anymore: a woman as a scientist—yes, of course women have the IQ for it, but what doesn't befit a woman is the penchant for absolutes. It wouldn't work, my long nights at the institute.... And it wouldn't work as long as I kept avoiding the main problem. The main problem was a child.... I should know what I wanted. I should want a child. (Anderson, *Blitz*, 56)

Bertram's broadside, while indisputably sexist and patronizing, is also recounted by Anders with a note of ambivalence. Given the negative valuation of masculine patterns of thought in Wolf's text, the narrator's masculinization—of which actually becoming a man is only the tail end—would be highly problematic. Describing her entry into the hypermasculine world of science, the narrator says: "You were right, professor, when you joked that *scientia*, science, may be a lady, but she has a man's brain. It cost me years of my life to learn to subjugate myself to that kind of thinking, the highest virtues of which are noninterference and impassivity" (64). It is no wonder that Anders, the man with a woman's brain with a man's brain, is ambivalent:

The next morning [after breaking up with Bertram] I took over the leadership of our group, and in my first night as a man I could think about it for the first time without regret. The word "unnatural" had been uttered and could not be conjured away. A woman who rejects the trade-off that had been created especially for her sex, who cannot manage to lower her sights and turn her eyes into a piece of sky or water, who doesn't want to be lived, but wants to live: she will experience what it is to be guilty.... I did feel sorry when Bertram turned away in front of my door. And now all of a sudden as a man in the same place I no longer felt sorry. What I felt was thankfulness. (57)

What does it mean that the narrator has to become a man before she can purge her remorse at having turned down the "trade-off" Bertram had offered her: the loss of her scientific career for the comforts of family and children? If in "Selbstversuch" the masculine perspective is associated with blindness, self-deception, and pathological impassivity, then does this passage validate the narrator's previous regret?

That is, might her second thoughts have been more valid than she originally assumed? Was there some truth to Bertram's construal of her desires? It is no coincidence that the narrator's unresolved question—a feminine parallel, perhaps, to the director's masculine "secret"—revolves around the matter of biological reproduction. As we will see below, the theme of reproduction was one of the most crucial and complex nodes of contention in the evolving discourse of gender difference in the GDR.

In the end, the narrator of "Selbstversuch" presents the director—and the reader—not with a result, but with another experiment: "Now my experiment stands before us: The attempt to love. Which incidentally also leads to fantastical inventions: to the invention of a man that one is able to love" (Anderson, *Blitz*, 82).

The Gospel of Trobadora Beatriz

Perhaps the most radical interrogation of gender roles and relations in the 1980 volume *Geschlechtertausch*, Irmtraud Morgner's "Gute Botschaft der Valeska" (Gospel of Valeska), failed to make the East German censor's cut in the original anthology. Anderson, the original volume's editor, remembers how Hinstorff's head editor objected to the story's frank language and transgressive implications: "When Valeska was not experimenting with other women—this could not be termed lesbian, because she was a man—she was magically assuming her old female form in order to sleep with the husband she loved above all. She could effect this change temporarily by drinking strong coffee" ("Genesis and Adventures of the Anthology," 8). As Anderson's summary indicates, Morgner's story careens through a series of erotic permutations after its protagonist, the professionally and romantically frustrated scientist Valeska Kantus, changes her sex by uttering the magic phrase "One would have to be a man." Having undergone an overnight metamorphosis, Valeska books a flight to Moscow, where she explores the practical and erotic ramifications of her transformation with a Russian friend, a woman named Shenya.

Though Shenya is "absolutely enchanted by the miracle" (*Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice*, trans. Clausen, 463), Valeska finds that after a while her initial excitement cools: "Shenya was too familiar to her. . . . Valeska was unable, even with supreme effort, to raise narcissism to the stage of passion" (463). On the continuum of sameness and difference considered at the outset of this analysis of *Geschlechtertausch*, Valeska's relationship with Shenya has too much of the former and not enough of the latter. Significantly, the language of this passage leaves ambiguous whether the necessary difference is physical or psychological: it is not Shenya's body that is "too familiar," but Shenya herself. Either way, their uneven investment in the erotic relationship begins to erode their friendship: "I give up," Valeska says. "If I have to pay this dearly for my vision, I don't want it. Being a man isn't much use to me anyway, unless my past and my role socialization are magically removed too. One ought to be a woman with a man's past" (463). Eventually, Valeska decides

that she is still in love with Rudolf, her husband, and returns to live with him—still in her male body. “So as not to transgress prevailing concepts of morality,” the narrator says archly, “Valeska set aside her masculine body temporarily during love-making” (465). Here, once again, the corporeal specificity of the desired object is ambiguous: is it simply prevailing morality that rules out male-male desire? As the publisher’s resistance attests, this concession to the GDR’s strictly heteronormative public sphere could not stifle the riot of anarchic sexuality circulating in the text.

And it is not just sexual desire that loosens its ties to the gendered body in the “Gospel of Valeska.” For her husband, Rudolf, the phenomenon of sex difference anchors a set of assumptions about domestic roles and interpersonal relationships. And so each time Valeska assumes her female body, he hopes that she will retain it for a while, not because he finds her more desirable that way, but “because he want[s] a break from the egalitarian division of household duties that [is] now taken for granted” (*Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice*, trans. Clausen, 465). Through its fantastical scenario of *Geschlechtertausch*, the story simultaneously highlights the absurdity of the asymmetrical demands of the East German domestic sphere (the uneven expectation disappears with a minor anatomical adjustment) and acknowledges the stubbornness of gender’s “little difference.”⁸

The designation of this story as a *gute Botschaft*—“good message or news,” as in *gódspeil* (gospel) or *evangelium*—raises the question “A message to whom?” The story’s final paragraph answers this question decisively:

My teaching, which urges women to believe in themselves and in the transformation just described, is pragmatic. Shenya advised me to work miracles in order to spread word about the teaching. Since then I’ve learned a few, I can walk on my hair, make rain, multiply loaves of bread. Of course, that won’t be enough. Because people believe great truth more readily in unlikely clothing. If I had the prospect of winning over a majority of women to a temporary transformation by having myself nailed to the cross, I might accept even this means. The danger of humanity’s self-destruction through war causes me to see as right every means that can extort peace. (*Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice*, trans. Clausen, 465)

This “pragmatic” teaching seems akin to Spivak’s “strategic essentialism,” in this case a message directed specifically toward women that addresses the specificity of their experience. The recipients of Valeska’s “message” are tasked with revolutionizing gender roles; in light of the intractable—perhaps even inherent—warmongering of the patriarchal mind-set, women’s personal transformations become tantamount to the survival of humanity. This pragmatic teaching, like the

8. *Der kleine Unterschied und seine grossen Folgen* (The Little Difference and Its Big Consequences) was the title of an important book by West German feminist theorist Alice Schwarzer, published in 1975.

metamorphoses involved, is provisional. The next step, the rendering of gender difference equally as men's experience, would fall to the novel of which the "Gute Botschaft" became a part.

After the "Gute Botschaft" was rejected by Hinstorff for *Blitz aus heiterm Himmel*, it joined the likewise-censored manuscript *Rumba auf einen Herbst* (Rumba for an Autumn) in the "intermezzo" sections of Morgner's pastiche novel, *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz* (Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice).⁹ In the framing story of this dazzlingly complex work, the character Irmtraud Morgner is approached on the street by a woman who introduces herself as Laura, minstrel to the renowned Beatriz de Dia. Laura offers to sell the author a manuscript for publication that purports to be the true story of Beatriz, a twelfth-century Provençal "trobadora" who arranges with the goddess Persephone to sleep until conditions are more "sympathetic to her profession" (trans. Clausen, 26). She awakens in France in 1968 and, hearing rumors of a place where "there is equality of citizens of all races and nationalities, equality of women and men in all spheres of political, economic, and cultural life" (70), makes her way to this "promised land" (91): the GDR. The story of what she finds there is combined with asides, anecdotes, interviews, parables, political speeches, excerpts from contemporary and historical texts, and the aforementioned intermezzos to constitute the 172 sections of Morgner's sprawling novel.

Trobadora Beatriz has received a good deal of well-deserved critical attention and forms the centerpiece of a number of studies of 1970s feminist literature.¹⁰ It has been a favorite of feminist critics both for its exuberant millenarianism and for its sweeping critique of gender roles, which in many ways anticipates the most radical concerns of Western feminist theory more than a decade later.¹¹ As an object of literary analysis, Morgner's novel presents a daunting challenge. Its protean form and plurivocal structure allow it to assume contradictory positions simultaneously, frustrating any effort to shoehorn it into a given theoretical or ideological mold.¹²

9. For more on *Rumba auf einen Herbst*, see Westgate, 39–58.

10. See, for instance, Martens's *The Promised Land? Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic*, Schmitz-Köster's *Trobadora und Cassandra und—: Weibliches Schreiben in der DDR*, Sonja Hilzinger's "Als ganzer Mensch zu leben . . .": Emanzipatorische Tendenzen in der neueren Frauen-Literatur der DDR, Ilse Braatz's *Zu zweit allein, oder mehr? Liebe und Gesellschaft in der modernen Literatur*, and Beth Linklater's "Und immer zügelloser wird die Lust": *Constructions of Sexuality in East German Literatures*. For a detailed account of the mixed reception of *Trobadora Beatriz* in the GDR, FRG, and United States, see Silke von der Emde's *Entering History: Feminist Dialogues in Irmtraud Morgner's Prose*, 39–74.

11. See Bammer; also von der Emde's chapter (131–76) on *Trobadora Beatriz* as a postmodern feminist novel.

12. In an imaginary interview with the book's potential publisher, Laura advertises this adaptability as a key feature of this "novel form of the future" (trans. Clausen, 175). Obliquely acknowledging the presence of the censor in the East German publishing industry, Laura points out that in the montage novel "all the publisher's requirements in terms of figures, deletions, and additions could be taken into account; all priorities and shadings of day-to-day politics could be incorporated without serious harm to the work. The operative montage novel is an indestructible genre. . . . An absolutely ideal genre for interventions" (175).

To help untangle this Gordian knot of possible interpretations, the reading below will focus on one narrative strand in the story: the quest for romantic love. In a text as heterogeneous as Morgner's, the framing love story lends a curiously conventional structure to the novel, even if both the opening and the resolution are too ambivalent and open-ended to be mistaken for a traditional romance. At the beginning of the novel, Beatriz goes into hibernation because her conceptions of romance—which are, after all, the tools of her trade as a *trobadora*—are out of touch with the times. “A passive troubadour,” she explains to Laura at one point, “an object that sings of a subject, is logically unthinkable” (114). Here, as in Wolf's “Selbstversuch,” the matter is framed according to activity and passivity. Wolf describes a woman “who wants to live, rather than be lived” (*die nicht gelebt werden will, sondern leben*), while Morgner's Beatriz wants to love rather than simply be loved. Although Beatriz fears that a female troubadour may be “logically unthinkable,” Laura articulates a more nuanced view of the matter: “A medieval minnesinger of the female sex is historically conceivable,” she explains to the novelist I. M. “A medieval love poet of the female sex is not” (30). While the formal laws of *Minnesang* may have allowed a woman to elevate herself and her poetic object above the social conditions of her day (as Beatriz does in composing songs to “the real [read: imaginary] Raimbaut d'Aurenga, who doesn't correspond to reality” [36]), love, as Laura understands it here, demands an uncompromising equality that would have been unthinkable in the twelfth century—and perhaps in the GDR as well.

Indeed, a central question throughout the novel is whether East German socialism has created circumstances more favorable to “real love”: love between equals. The novel does not take a single, succinct position on this, tending instead to oscillate between euphoric reports of political gains (such as the GDR's legalization of abortion in 1972) and dispirited accounts of setbacks and holdovers, especially in the interpersonal sphere. Such peaks and valleys notwithstanding, the narrative gravitates toward the conclusion that the GDR provides better conditions for women than the rest of the world but still has a long way to go. Beatriz observes at one point: “A woman of character today can only be a socialist. . . . Moral relations can only be revolutionized after the revolutionizing of economic relations. One cannot take the second step before the first. In the GDR the first step has long since been taken. Now we are working on the second one, *selah*” (402).

What might this second step look like? In *Trobadora Beatriz*, as in many of the narratives from this period, the “revolutionizing of moral relations” is framed through the language of heterosexual love, through relationships that break apart under the strain of insurmountable differences or—in keeping with the utopian propensity of Morgner's novel—through the one romantic bond that might have staying power. The framing love story of *Trobadora Beatriz* begins with Beatriz dropping out of history until she can find an object worthy of her love, and ends when Laura, through supernatural means and Beatriz's help, locates one such—or

perhaps the only such—worthy object: Benno Pakulat, the younger brother of Laura's (and Beatriz's) onetime lover, Lutz.¹³

In a comically literal *deus ex machina*, Benno is displayed to Laura via a “celestial vehicle,” replete with cardboard clouds, which is lowered squeaking from the heavens as she stands on her balcony. In the celestial vehicle is a sleeping man, identified by a cardboard plaque that also gives key personal information and employment details. She later discovers that this vehicle was sent by the “beautiful Melusine,” Beatriz's sister-in-law, a supernatural agent of the goddesses Persephone and Demeter. Melusine sends Benno a few more times for questioning before Laura requests to meet him in person. Both in the somnambulant interrogations and in their face-to-face encounter, Benno proves to be a man unlike the others described in the novel. “When my second daughter started talking,” he reveals in the first interview, “she called me and my wife Mama” (267). This makes it particularly galling to him that his ex-girlfriend has denied him visitation rights: “When in hell is our state going to pass laws to protect the interests of our working fathers?” (267). Laura is so startled that she breaks the spell, and the celestial vehicle disappears. In a role reversal worthy of the stories in *Geschlechtertausch*, Benno is so dedicated to parenting that he is thrilled to be called Mama.

In the second interview, Benno explains that his first partner threw him out because he was too interested in parenting and homemaking to “qualify himself out of the working class” (278). His lack of career ambition jarred with her preconceptions about gender relations: “She needs a man to look up to,” Benno explains. “Can a master craftsman look up to a carpenter? The whole time we were together, the poor dear had to put her qualification on hold, to maintain the traditional difference” (278). Another facet of the “perfect man” is revealed: Benno does not begrudge his partner her career and social status. On the contrary, he is content—to anticipate the language of the next section—to reproduce her labor power by keeping house for her. Benno also reverses the active–passive dichotomy explored above: in his next nocturnal visit, the sleeping Benno expresses his desire “to be courted seriously for once, publicly. When women's emancipation leads to that, I'm their man” (285). At their first face-to-face meeting, Laura does just that, and within a short time she proposes marriage.

“Judging from what you're saying,” Laura says to Benno in one of their interviews, “you must be a man from a picture book. And where's the catch?” (278). A

13. The fact that Benno's role in *Trobadora Beatriz* has received little critical attention may be explained in part by Western feminist critics' suspicions toward Morgner's novels' fairly traditional romantic scenario and expectations. On this note, Patricia Herminghouse observes: “In the enthusiasm of feminist critics for Morgner's novels in the 1970s and 1980s there was . . . a tendency to forget that already in the *Trobadora*, despite the death of Beatrice, Laura's optimism derives from the happy future she expects to enjoy with Benno Pakulat” (“Taking Back the Myth and Magic,” 64).

conversation with Melusine just prior to Laura's marriage proposal reveals the fly in the ointment:

LAURA: . . . You know Benno inside and out. Is he really the way he talks and acts?

MELUSINE: Yes.

LAURA: Does he love [my son] Wesselin?

MELUSINE: Very much.

LAURA: Does he love me as a representative of my gender or personally?

MELUSINE: I believe personally as well. But if you don't love him . . .

LAURA: My marriage and all subsequent marriagelike situations were based on love. On my side, at any rate, that's certain. And love, which as you know effects a wonderful narrowing of consciousness, always cast the men in such a favorable light that I overlooked their egotism at first: I was building on sand. For me only the opposite route would be possible now, if at all. I feel friendship for Benno. If, in addition to love, he also feels friendship toward me, actively, I mean, I would risk marrying again.

MELUSINE: Without love on your side?

LAURA: It will grow if there is peaceful accommodation. (342)

Here, desire reveals itself in all its contradictions. Having finally found a man worthy of love, Laura discovers that she does not love him, at least not yet. With this conversation, Morgner suggests that desire is not as ductile as politics and ideology. Indeed, it seems to be complicit in the perpetuation of gender inequalities. Laura wants to want an equal relationship; but what if, like Benno's former girlfriend, her desire rests on a difference at odds with her rational self-understanding?¹⁴

In this light, the "Gute Botschaft der Valeska," placed just a few pages from the end of *Trobadora Beatriz*, takes on added significance. In narrating the "transformation of relations" (as the subtitle of the West German *Geschlechtertausch* anthology put it, connoting East Germanness with the Marx-inflected "Umwandlung der Verhältnisse"), the "Gute Botschaft" imagines not just a realignment of men's expectations, but a recalibration of women's desire. In Lacanian psychoanalytic

14. In this light, we may complicate von der Emde's Frankfurt-School-inflected thesis that "the emancipation of women, the main concern in Morgner's novel, figures both thematically and structurally as the emancipation of desire and imagination from the bonds of pragmatism and rationality" (88). I would argue that *Trobadora Beatriz*'s central erotic narrative betrays a suspicion that desire and imagination may in fact be always-already penetrated by patterns of social domination. To the extent that this is the case, Morgner's novel calls for a dialectical interplay between desire and rationality: the former loosening the reins of instrumental reason, the latter interrogating the deeper substrates of fantasy and desire. The novel's misgivings regarding desire, which are only amplified in *Amanda*, relate to an ambivalence in Morgner's work identified by Linklater: on the one hand, the erotic sphere is portrayed as "the domain of men" (*Trobadora Beatriz*, 112; qtd. in Linklater, 101), whose hegemony over erotic norms and imagery render sexuality highly problematic. On the other hand, all three novels appeal to the "productive power of sexuality" as a key motor of their emancipatory agendas (Linklater, 115–30).

terms, we might say that Valeska's *Geschlechtertausch* allows her to traverse the fantasy of phallic desire. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Jacques Lacan claims to "pinpoint the structures which will govern the relations between the sexes" according to "a being" and "a having" that "refer to a signifier, the phallus" (83–84). Since neither sex can actually *be* or *have* this signifier, Lacan posits "an 'appearing' which gets substituted for the 'having' so as to protect it on one side and to mask its lack on the other" (84). In the "Gute Botschaft," Valeska occupies *both* positions in Lacan's model, the impossible "being" and the illusory "having" of the phallus. And so when Rudolf returns to Valeska, who is still in her male body, the sudden discovery of the sameness of their anatomy short-circuits the Lacanian schema:

66

Rudolf stood before her. Came in as usual. Kissed Valeska as usual. Took off his and her clothes as usual.

67

Later it occurred to Valeska that she should be afraid. Later it struck Rudolf that the naked Valeska was disguised.

68

At that, they realized that if necessary they could do without the images that they had made of each other and that others had made for them.

69

Then they knew that they loved each other. Personally—miracle of all miracles. (464)

Faced with the "disguise" of Valeska's masculine body, Rudolf and Valeska decide that they will have to "make do without" the social constructions that define their gendered bodies. Here, our theoretical compass swings from Lacan to Butler, who claims:

Precisely *because* [the phallus] is an idealization, one which no body can adequately approximate, [it] is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization. That complex identificatory fantasies inform morphogenesis, and that they cannot be fully predicted, suggests that morphological idealization is both a necessary and unpredictable ingredient in the constitution of both the bodily ego and the dispositions of desire. (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 86–87)

According to Butler, even the body's ineluctable modality is created by internalized cultural and social forces. Such "aggressive reterritorialization" as that prescribed by Butler seems to be at stake in the "Gute Botschaft," as it is in many of the texts from the volume for which Morgner's story was intended. In this "transformation

of relations,” the reconfiguration of desire involves not simply an alteration of object-choice, but a reevaluation of the love object itself.

If we examine Laura’s relationship with Benno according to the psychoanalytic matrix sketched out above, we find that the same traits that establish Benno as a “man from a picture book” also place him on the “wrong” side of the phallic divide: he prefers to be pursued than to pursue; he is apathetic about social status; his daughter calls him Mama. If Laura is indeed embedded within the polarities of phallic desire, then it becomes clear why she can hope at best for “peaceful accommodation” with Benno (in the Lacanian schema: love), but not desire (which would be ruled by the phallic signifier). In this light, *Trobadora Beatriz* would suggest (in parallel with psychoanalytic theory) that the inequalities that seem again and again to undermine love relationships actually extend deeper, permeating the structure of desire itself. As we will see in the next section, this theme is taken up again in the second novel in Morgner’s “Salman” trilogy, *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman* (*Amanda: A Witch Novel*), which attacks the roots of the problem, reappraising the fundamental conditions of possibility for a desiring subject.

Benno’s eschewal of the phallic position—in plain English, his emasculation—may countervail desire in his relationship with Laura, but it is a necessary precondition for the fulfillment of his role in the novel as a whole. In the final chapter, Benno tells Laura the first of his Scheherazadian “thousand and one stories.” It begins: “Beatrice de Dia, a beautiful and noble lady, was the wife of Sir Guilhem de Poitiers” (467). This story, a condensed version of Beatriz’s slumber and awakening, duplicates long stretches of the novel’s first chapter. Benno, we may surmise, has embarked on a renarration of the entire novel. In light of the analysis above, this act of incorporation and retelling signals a shift not only in narrative perspective, but also in ideological consciousness, for, as I mentioned at the outset, one of the salient—and prescient—features of the treatment of gender difference in *Trobadora Beatriz* is the insistence that the experience of gender is universally disseminated, and is not just the province of women. As he begins the thousand and one stories, Benno literalizes this insight: he has made the transformative tale of Beatriz’s life and adventures his own.

Reclaiming Reproduction: *Amanda: Ein Hexenroman*

Given the importance Morgner assigns to the character of Benno in *Trobadora Beatriz*, it is all the more startling when she summarily kills him off near the beginning of *Amanda*. Published in 1983, this second volume of the planned Salman trilogy is in structure no less labyrinthine and in scope perhaps even grander than its predecessor. *Amanda* continues to tell the story of Laura and Beatriz, enfolding these personal histories within an epic struggle between the primordial forces of matriarchy and patriarchy. After filling in the details of Laura’s childhood and student years, *Amanda* picks up the thread of Laura and Benno’s life together, where everything

seems as we left it. Benno continues to be the “man from the picture book,” sharing equally in domestic duties and thrilled by Laura’s newfound fame after the publication of *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz*. Soon, however, his wife’s talents and accomplishments begin to chafe. Although Benno declares daily: “I admire and revere you” (122)—an ostentation that Laura finds eerie and repugnant—his envy and jealousy start to show through. In just a few sparse sentences, his part in the story is finished:

His jealousy of [her son] Wesselin grew. Soon he found himself jealous of other men.

When he realized that he was jealous of women as well, he began to drink.

On the 12th of September, 1975, he crashed his car, drunk. He died instantly. (123)

Benno’s is no grand Romantic *Liebestod*. It is quick, senseless, and final. The brevity of his appearance in this book, and the violent abruptness of his disappearance, suggest that not only the character but also the ideas and ideals he stands for are being rejected. The exemplary man, whose positioning as the “redeemer” of masculinity played counterpoint to Valeska and her redemptive miracles, turns out to be a fraud. If, in the earlier novel, Benno represented a model “male feminist,” assimilating the teachings of Beatriz and her Persephonian comrades to critique his own gendered socialization, we now see how little real transformation actually took place; Benno’s incorporation of Beatriz’s teachings seems more an arrogation than a tribute. In such chariness toward universalist notions of the tyranny of gender roles—including the big-tent approach adopted by its forerunner—*Amanda* would fit the pattern identified by Bammer in feminist texts from the 1980s. Here, gender may be universal, but the weight of the problem rests solely on the shoulders of women.

If the figure of Benno was the end goal of the love story in *Trobadora Beatriz*, his death also highlights the lack of any comparable romantic narrative in *Amanda*. When romantic love appears in the later novel, it is always in its negative instance, as a false and dangerous ideology that reinforces the patriarchal subjugation of women. Which is not to say that desire is absent from *Amanda*. Martens argues that where *Trobadora Beatriz* depicts a proliferation of possible objects of female desire, from sexualized bodies to abstract ideals like peace or communism, *Amanda* distills desire into a single object—an object, furthermore, that is portrayed as explicitly gendered. In *Amanda*, Martens points out, “Morgner suggests that women’s and men’s desires have been different from time immemorial. Men have desired, and still desire, to ‘lay the world at their feet,’ while women have wanted and still want to be undivided, indivisible, and ‘have an island at their feet.’ Thus in the later novel, Morgner does ascribe a goal, an object of desire” (71). Here I would amend Martens’s comment to suggest that, more than an *object* of desire, the “island” in question represents the very possibility of desire at all. In this regard, the notion of

desire operative in *Amanda* would dovetail with the argument, outlined in chapter 2, that desire in GDR public culture can best be understood as a “desire to desire.” In the face of a prevailing psychological model that acknowledges only determinate, object-driven desire, *Amanda*’s “island” represents a space of radical possibility, of indeterminate motivation and inchoate wants.

The “island” first appears in a passage describing Laura’s alchemical pursuits. Laura is looking for the “Philosopher’s Stone, Second Order,” which is contrasted with the “Philosopher’s Stone, First Order,” pursued by male alchemists since the beginning of the profession. The First Order stone is said to turn molten metal into gold and “lay the world at one’s feet.” The Second Order stone, also known as *argentum potabile*, “drinking silver,” would turn metals into silver and “lay an island at your feet” (*Amanda*, 113). Laura is particularly taken with the idea of this “island.” “The island is a woman’s *hinterland*” (114), Laura thinks, echoing an acquaintance’s sexist remark that “woman is the soldier’s *hinterland*” (112). She imagines the island as “a kind of Orplid” (114).

The mythical island Orplid appears in a number of works by the poet Eduard Mörike, most famously in the poem “Gesang Weylas” (Weyla’s Song), which was written in 1831 and later set to music by Hugo Wolf:

You are Orplid, my country!	Du bist Orplid, mein Land!
Gleaming far off;	Das ferne leuchtet;
Sea-fog mists your sunny strand	Vom Meere dampfet dein besonnter Strand
Moistening the cheeks of gods.	Den Nebel, so der Götter Wange feuchtet.
Ancient waters rise	Uralte Wasser steigen
Rejuvenated around your hips, child!	Verjüngt um deine Hüften, Kind!
Before your divinity	Vor deiner Gottheit beugen
Kings bow, who are your attendants.	Sich Könige, die deine Wärter sind. ¹⁵

Mörike’s Orplid is a curious mix of elements: it is a country, an island, and a child, ancient and young. Removed from the cares of the world, it still holds sway over earthly concerns; its attendants are kings. Laura’s “island” is similarly mixed, combining motifs of escape and rejuvenation, but also of childhood and child care. In one telling passage we learn of her failed relationship with the archivist Konrad Tenner:

Laura did not want any children without an island as *hinterland*. Tenner read this as a sign of inadequate love. He thought she didn’t want children from him, sank into jealousy, and pushed for marriage. Laura didn’t want to get married. Since Tenner considered her a “natural” woman, he was suspicious of her refusal of these two “natural” commitments. (*Amanda*, 115–16)

15. Mörike, “Gesang Weylas,” ed. Baumann and Grosse, 1: 73.

Tenner's thinking here recapitulates the logic of Dannhauer's *Geschlecht und Persönlichkeit*, where marriage and children are characterized as the "natural" desires of women. Laura, however, has a different understanding of her needs and wants. Significantly, her demand is poetic, not practical. She does not ask for full-day child care, longer sick leave, or laundry service: she wants Orplid. Although practical concerns play a significant role in *Amanda*—the text is filled with critiques of the system's failures to reconcile the requirements of child rearing with the demands of full-time work—the stipulation here is more abstract, more radical, and more puzzling. Why does she consider this "island" a precondition for having children?

A later conversation with Amanda helps fill in the gaps. While they work together on their grand alchemical project, distilling sleep-replacement elixir, Amanda reminds Laura of a key childhood memory, which is recounted in detail in the novel's first chapter. As the adults cower in a bomb shelter, mortally afraid of the advancing Allies, twelve-year-old Laura and her friend Inge live out a lawless idyll, romping in the grass and making a commotion with their wooden shoes on the forbidden metal grates of the courtyard. Somehow these children know instinctively, Laura says, that it is time to come out of hiding. "Ruins all around," Laura says, "the whole city a pile of rubble and it was a sunny May day, just like the calendar said. . . . High summer and shameless and crashing. But only for Laura and her friend Inge" (18–19).

This formative memory contains potent historical material, for it represents not only the period *after* the devastations of Nazi rule and the World War II, but also the moment *before* "Laura's world was turned on its head by the victory of the Soviet army and their allies" (23). For all its transience, this brief moment of pure potentiality, of anarchic autonomy, returns as a leitmotif throughout the novel and forms the core of its utopian aspirations. It is the prototype for Orplid:

"Fourteen carefree days in the sun," said Laura.

"Until we were tanned through and through," Amanda said. "Wearing the uniform of a railway worker and black as a Negus and undivided. Whoever has lived through such days is utterly unsuited to obedience. Do you want to conquer Orplid together?"

"Yes, by distilling Orplid," said Laura, gripped by the memory. "The second sphere, where I wouldn't have to wear a uniform to hide from others and myself that I am a woman cut in two; the island where I can throw myself, worn out, as men throw themselves into the arms of a woman; my *hinterland*, where I can retreat with Wesselin, to reproduce my labor power. (223)

Amanda's reference to a Negus, an Ethiopian king, echoes the attending kings in Mörike's poem. Likewise, the "child" apostrophized by Mörike's poem finds echoes in Laura's fantasy of the island: this would be a retreat with her young son, Wesselin. In this passage from *Amanda*, Orplid seems to have two functions: on the one hand, it serves as a *hinterland*, a space of remove where Laura

can “reproduce [her] labor power”—a pithy and suggestive formulation that will be unpacked below. On the other hand, it is a space of unmasking and self-knowledge, a place where Laura can reveal to herself and others that she is split in two—literally, as the following analysis will explain. Perhaps it is even a space where the two halves of her divided self might be reconciled. To understand how this reconciliation might take place, we must consider the details of the splitting.

In her reading of *Trobadora Beatriz*, Martens suggests that the characters of Morgner, Laura, and Beatriz may be read as a single individual split into three parts (61). In *Amanda* we discover that this splitting would in fact be a *subdivision* of an already-split Laura. Near the beginning of the novel, as befits a hero’s narrative, we receive an account of the unusual circumstances of Laura’s birth. No sooner is the newborn bathed and swaddled than a woman in a red robe whisks in on a broom to christen her: “What will the beautiful Amanda be named?” she asks the mother and grandmother. “Amanda Laura,” they say involuntarily. Horrified, they exorcise the witch-name Amanda with five baptisms and try to put this odd occurrence out of their heads. Once her mother, father, and grandmother have succeeded in suppressing Laura’s preternatural talents and intelligence, her childhood and school years proceed fairly normally. In college she meets a man named Konrad Tenner, who impresses her with his devil-may-care attitude: “No pleasure, no life,” he says. As we saw above, however, Tenner proves to be more conventional than his initial self-presentation. His possessiveness convinces Laura that her “island” refuge is all the more imperative. And so she begins her alchemical experiments in the kitchen of their shared apartment, hoping to distill the Philosopher’s Stone, Second Order. Since Tenner avoids kitchens, he remains in the dark about her research. One day she receives a visit from a man who introduces himself as Kolbuk. He tells her that she has made herself “liable to prosecution” and begins smashing her laboratory and destroying her books. Kolbuk tells her he needs to “operate”: “The half had to be removed. Because the half stood in the way of Laura’s happiness. After the operation she would be able to make her husband and children happy and live respectably and contentedly” (*Amanda*, 118). She will be forbidden any future contact with the excised half under penalty of eternal torture. He produces an executioner’s sword and cuts her in half, then disappears with the remainder—a tall, thin, red-haired woman: the witch Amanda.

Tenner finds that Laura’s new body (short, stout, and brown-haired) and subdued personality no longer hold the appeal of her fiery former self. “Tenner left Laura,” the narrator states laconically, “although marriage and children would have been quite welcome to her now” (120). Laura goes on to meet a graduate lecturer named Uwe Parnitzke, settles down, and has children, “as the book *The Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice* describes somewhat accurately” (120).¹⁶ When

16. In the present-time action of *Amanda*, Laura has only one child, her son Wesselin. *Trobadora Beatrice* recounts how, when her eleven-year-old daughter dies of pneumonia, Laura blames herself and her

Beatriz, resurrected in *Amanda* as a tongue-tied siren, reads the earlier novel, she bristles at Morgner's unawareness of Laura's exceptionality: "The writer . . . conventionalized Laura Salman as an exemplum of the typical working woman with an assortment of virtues: hardworking, modest, eager, nondescript, self-abnegating, devoted. [The writer did this] out of ignorance, I assumed" (23). In this way *Amanda* adds a new layer to the already trenchant critique laid out by *Trobadora Beatriz*. Now we learn that to the degree that Laura was able to abide her living conditions at all it was only because a part of her had been removed. Amanda, her witch half, was meanwhile being held captive in the Blocksberg fortress, formerly known as the Brocken, the seat of matriarchal power, now occupied by the head devil Kolbuk and the forces of patriarchy.

Amanda escapes and returns twice in the novel, both times in the wake of Laura's attempts at self-destruction. The first time, overwhelmed by the demands of life as a single mother, Laura poisons herself and her young son Wesselin:

Once . . . her shift on the S-Bahn was over she felt exhaustion, vulnerability, a need for protection. And she dragged herself to the second shift.

It took her utmost self-discipline to cope with the second shift, in which she took care of her work as a housewife and mother. She had no energy left to play with Wesselin. Her son dealt with this deficiency by pulling out his hair. His despair consumed the last of her will to live.

She requested medical help.

In the form of assisted suicide for herself and her son. (127–28)

After being turned down by three doctors, Laura brews the lethal potion herself. Amanda's intervention saves her and her son: the witch half, it turns out, has veto power if her counterpart decides to end their shared life. Laura's second near-death may be accidental. In an attempt to brew sleep-replacement elixir—once again in response to the problem of the "second shift"—Laura creates phoenix elixir, which causes her to burst into flames and return in twelve hours (an old formula, Amanda explains later, to escape burning at the stake) (222). These desperate efforts to find relief from the demands of work outside and inside the home raise the stakes of the quest to find Orplid. The initial suicide attempt in particular, which is described with a pathos otherwise foreign to Morgner's ironic tone, elevates the infamous "double burden" to a matter of life and death.¹⁷

Each time she returns, Amanda insists that there is only one solution: to take back the Brocken and reunite with Laura through the power of drinking silver. In

busy academic career and decides to transfer "into production," becoming a trolley-car driver (111). She has divorced Uwe Parnitzke before the action of *Trobadora Beatriz* takes place.

17. For a sociological-historical account of the double burden in the GDR, see Barbara Einhorn, "German Democratic Republic: Emancipated Women or Hardworking Mothers?" in *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*.

this way, she says, “the Brocken could become Orplid” (224). In Amanda’s estimation, Laura’s alchemical pursuits are a waste of time: “Distilling is impossible,” she says. “We have to conquer Orplid” (223). Amanda is not the only witch with these intentions. In one raucous scene, a supernatural television commentator describes the three factions of witches: the Red-Robed Faction, led by Isabel (the same witch who had christened Amanda-Laura), militant man-haters who believe in using military force to take back the Brocken; the Greenrobes, who know only what they don’t want, which is to be like men; and the Owl Faction, Amanda’s group, who are androgynous and want to spread their “dangerous tendencies” among the forces of the patriarchy (329–30).¹⁸

This lineup allows us to delve deeper into the status of gender identity in the metaphorical framework of Amanda-Laura’s splitting. If Amanda is the “androgynous” half, then what is Laura? To the degree that the novel’s descriptions of her daily life focus on her activities as a mother to Wesselin, she would embody the “essentially” feminine gender identification emphasized by Beauvoir and Kristeva and elucidated in the discussion above: her central symbolic role, especially in *Trobadora Beatriz*, revolves around reproduction. Yet we have also seen how, in her “first shift” as an S-Bahn engineer, Laura works “like a man.” Within the productionist value-system of the GDR’s dominant culture, it is this role that confers dignity and worth. Suspended between these two roles, Laura’s center cannot hold: her suicide attempts speak to the untenability of her position.¹⁹

In *Amanda*, the most salient aspects of gender difference play out as a conflict between modes of work, a polarity congealed in the figure of the opposing philosophers’ stones. To this degree, these stones become material answers to the loaded question posed in chapter 2 of this book: Why do we work? The first-order philosopher’s stone, the goal of masculine endeavor since time immemorial, creates value—gold from base metal—and “lays the world at one’s feet.” This is, as well, a description of “productive” labor: the SED’s *Kleines politisches Wörterbuch* (Compact Political Dictionary) defines *Arbeit* as “the purposive, conscious activity of the human being. Through the use of the means of production he [*sic*] changes objects and makes them useful for his purposes” (“Arbeit,” 47). The second-order philosopher’s stone, on the other hand, is concerned less with wealth and domination than with healing, remotion, and recuperation. It will make what is divided whole again,

18. As Lorna Martens and Monika Meier point out, these factions seem to represent various strands of feminism in East and West, though the fairness of their characterization here is the source of some dispute (Martens, 121–23; Meier, 226).

19. In this sense, Laura’s story would conform to the pattern identified by Cheryl Dueck in her book *Rifts in Time and in the Self*. In a chapter titled “A Matter of Life and Death,” Dueck calls attention to the striking number of protagonists of East German novels in the 1980s who die through accident, sickness, suicide, or at the hands of others. In these novels, Dueck points out, “the main character either finds him/herself divided, unable to maintain a single subjecthood, or fails to find a place within the societal order and dies at its hands. This dissection of the subject necessarily implies its death, because, although the separate parts continue to live, the original entity has ceased to exist” (113).

carry one away, and “lay an island at one’s feet”—an island, Laura imagines, where she could “reproduce [her] labor power.” In this way the second-order philosopher’s stone, Laura’s “Orplid,” becomes not a site of *production*, but of *reproduction*. Importantly, this is not the sex-specific capacity for biological reproduction, but rather the universal need for what Marx called the “reproduction of labor power.”

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx portrays reproduction as a kind of back-door capitalization. When the capitalist pays out wages, he is really furthering his own ends: “The individual consumption of the worker, whether it occurs inside or outside the workshop, inside or outside the labour process, remains an aspect of the production and reproduction of capital, just as the cleaning of machinery does” (718). Under socialist conditions, reproduction no longer serves the creation of profit, but it is no less necessary to the production process. Workers need to eat, sleep, and stay warm. This requirement partakes of the asymmetry of gender roles, for, in the words of *Amanda*’s “marriage swindler” (who will be described below), wives have long been held responsible for the “reproduction of the labor power of [their husbands]” (264).²⁰ But when would women reproduce their own labor power? Orplid, as Laura imagines it, would fulfill precisely this function: it becomes “the island where I can throw myself, worn out, as men throw themselves into the arms of a woman” (223).

Here, then, is one of the key valences of the discourse of gender difference in *Amanda*. In focusing attention on the problem of reproduction—all too often the sole province of women—*Amanda* calls attention to a blind spot in socialist ideology: a willful ignorance as profound as that of the capitalists. Significantly, this shift in focus represents a *reorganization*—not a rejection—of Marxist theory, as a key quotation makes clear. As one of a series of mottos attributed to the revolutionary-utopian “Nonsense Council” (*Unsinnskollegium*) of witches and fools, Morgner quotes a rarely cited passage from Marx, an essay collected in the fourth volume of *Capital: Theories of Surplus Value*: “The real wealth of a people will be measured by time which will not be absorbed in direct productive labour, but will be available for enjoyment, for leisure, thus giving scope for free activity and development” (Marx, “Source and Remedy,” 390). In Marx’s essay, real liberation is cast less as a matter of redistributing wealth than of reallocating time, for, Marx goes on to say, “free time, disposable time, is wealth itself, partly for the enjoyment of the product, partly for free activity which—unlike labour—is not dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purpose which must be fulfilled, and the fulfilment of which is

20. In a speech at the Seventh Writers’ Congress in 1973, Morgner caused a small scandal by portraying the relationship between men and women in terms of exploiter and exploited: “The largest part of the masculine half of humanity, the powerless men, have had their history expropriated for millennia; but the other half, the female half of humanity, the slaves of the slaves, have in this sense been doubly dispossessed” (qtd. in Baume, 122). Brita Baume points out that the responses to Morgner’s speech took vehement exception to the designation of women as “slaves” to men—a condition, after all, that would remain in place even after men had been freed from their bonds by socialism (122).

regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty, according to one's inclination" (391). Leisure, in other words, does not exhaust its value in reproducing labor power. Rather, it is labor that acts in the service of free time by securing the necessities of existence (food, clothing, shelter) and thereby allowing for the free unfolding of one's "faculties."

The feminist implications of this notion are becoming apparent: emancipation, seen from this standpoint, is not just a matter of equal access to the means of production. Instead, the measure of equality would be access to "disposable time"—time allotted in the productionist value-system for the "reproduction of labor power," which includes but is not limited to biological reproduction. Because of what Beauvoir starkly calls their "enslavement to the generative function" (108), women have long been forced to grapple alone with the question of reproduction—both biological (gestation and childbirth) and familial (reproducing the labor power of the family unit). If, with Morgner's *Unsinnskollegium*, we turn the productionist value-system on its head, then the biological "fact" of gender difference—the particularity of women's historical experience—would afford insight into a new understanding of the human. A standpoint that ceases to generalize from the specificity of men's experience—and the resulting overvaluation of "productive" labor—comes closer to Christa Wolf's admonition "that men and women, not just men, are the models for human beings." *Amanda's* utopian vision proposes that labor does not create the human, as Engels had it, but instead opens a space beyond necessity—an "island," an Orplid—within which the fully human can develop.

Thus it is perhaps fitting that *Amanda's* one "concrete utopia" (a dubious one at that, as we will see) is a men's community—the Gardening Commune (*Gärtnerische Produktionsgenossenschaft*, or GPG) described in the short interlude "The Marriage Swindler, or Why Must Barbara Wait for Her Day in Court?"²¹ The story of the commune's origins is elliptical and puzzling, equal parts acerbic satire, social critique, and redemption story. Tired of working on the assembly line at a lightbulb factory, Barbara, a jaundiced divorcee, places a personal ad in the paper offering her services as a diligent, devoted, indulgent housewife. She receives hundreds of applicants. She chooses one, busies herself with cooking, cleaning, and caring for him, and after he proposes marriage, absconds with all of his money. A series of bogus marriages follow, all fueled by the men's desire for what she calls "nostalgic," uncomplicated inequality. "I was the locus of their unofficial lives," she explains, "where they could recover from their ideological and moral stress" (265): as she puts it at one point, she serves to "reproduce their labor power" (264). In this capacity she is placed on a pedestal by some, humiliated and even beaten by others—for the last, she states drily, she acts as a "valve function." Eventually, Barbara decides to start covering the traces of her sham marriages. She buys a garden cottage at the edge

21. "Concrete utopia" is Ernst Bloch's designation for a realized utopian vision, as distinguished from an abstract, as-yet-unmet goal. See chapter 2, pp. 87–89.

of town and installs her most recent husband there. He is joined by a second, and a third, until twenty-seven men are living on the property, enclosed by an invisible fence and camouflaged by a magic hood. To her surprise, the men do not mutiny but instead begin improving the house and tending an ever-larger garden. Each time a new “victim” arrives, they tell him that he has been rewarded for extraordinary service by being allowed to live out his wish to become “a Robinson of the new type” (266). In good Voltairean fashion, they find satisfaction in cultivating the property into a thriving communal garden. Disgusted, Barbara decides to shut the operation down by turning herself in to the police. The case never comes to trial, as none of the men are willing to testify against her; having exchanged their roles as workers and husbands for homesteading and husbandry, the men find that they are happier and more productive.

In this way, the separatist communal society of the GPG seems to be the masculine counterpart of the women’s collectives imagined by a number of East German feminist authors in the 1970s. Christa Wolf’s eponymous heroine Cassandra, for instance, takes refuge in a women’s community hidden in the hills around Troy. A number of commentators have elucidated the utopian qualities of this matriarchal secret society.²² In a more mundane context, Sarah Kirsch’s 1974 poem “The Plot of Land” (*Das Grundstück*) describes a run-down piece of property that nonetheless serves an invaluable function for the women who own it:

On Sundays the girls come with their children to the plot of land	Sonntags kommen die Mädchen mit ihren Kindern zum Grundstück
That they bought cheap years ago. Still no money for	Das sie vor Jahren billig erwarben. Noch immer kein Geld für
Fences and solid doors; so they go and see and count	Zäune und festere Türen; so gehen sie und sehen und zählen
What has vanished: the pump, the cups, the fluffy quilt—	Was da verschwand: die Pumpe, die Tassen, die flauschige Decke—
.....
—So Sunday after Sunday the girls	—So seh’n sich die Mädchen
See the grounds disappear, lovingly roaming the grass and the pines;	Sonntag für Sonntag den Grund abgehn, das Gras und die Kiefern
They count and measure and calculate:	Liebevoll streifend; sie zählen und messen und rechnen:
A thousand Marks for a fence, who will put it in? Perhaps the woodpeckers	Eintausend Mark für den Zaun, wer setzt ihn? Etwa die Spechte

22. Sabine Wilke writes: “In contradistinction to the strictly hierarchical social stratification in Greece and Troy, [the women’s community on the outskirts of Troy] is not hierarchically organized and therefore free from structural violence. The women who meet in the cave dwellings on Mount Ida live their lives beyond the false choice of living or killing” (94). See also Chiarloni, 139.

Tomtits and jays? And is that the old woman approaching between the pines	Meisen und Häher? Und naht zwischen Kiefern die Alte
Whom they, her pension is small, fête with sausage and pudding?	Die man, die Rente ist klein, mit Wurst und Pudding bewirtet?
Whom they, good as they are, put up for the night: and what if they now had three wishes	Die man, gut wie man ist, herbergt: und hat nun drei Wünsche
Free? They'd live as in a fairy tale with the children	Frei? Wie im Märchen würden sie leben mit Kindern
And sweethearts in cottages in the summer and carefree.	Und Geliebten in Datschen im Sommer und sorglos. ²³

For these women, the poem's *Grundstück* (piece of land) is a place of togetherness and escape, a sovereign space that would allow them and their children to live "carefree," "as in a fairy tale," if they could only prevent incursion from the outside world. It is, in other words, a weekend Orplid, an island of retreat where they can relax and recuperate (or in Marxist terms reproduce their labor power). With the old woman's supernatural help, they could live like this throughout the summer, protected not just from the marauding neighbors, but from the financial worries of "measurement and calculation."

The GPG's *Grundstück* in *Amanda* is protected precisely by such witchery, in the form of Barbara's "magic hood" (*Tarnkappe*). This detail becomes significant when Laura avails herself of the commune's invisibility to hide Wesselin from Kolbuk and his minions. The forces of patriarchy, it turns out, intend to abduct her son in order to force her to marry their leader—a complicated subplot involving a Faustian wager between the head angel Zacharias and the head devil Kolbuk. While living with the men of the GPG, Laura discovers that there is a trade-off for this dubiously utopian sodality:

One day Dr. Dietrich [the chairman of the GPG] explained to Laura the theory behind the Commandment and thus also their strict rules and regulations. This moral commandment, the prime commandment—the GPG had agreed unanimously upon nine in all—reads: "The garden is your master, your friend, you shall have no women beside it." "A strange commandment, you may well say," Dr. Dietrich admitted. "But isn't the culture of love that prevails beyond our GPG equally strange? There, love means: being in love. Love in itself. Many people, men and women, are preoccupied with this feeling their whole lives. To put a finer point on it: with the production of this feeling. The so-called beloved is just a catalyst. The important thing is the intoxication. When our mens' community here was established—initially without women, for better or worse—the interchangeability of the catalyst got one clever head among us thinking that the role of the catalyst could also be played by a

23. Kirsch, "Das Grundstück," 54–55.

nonhuman entity or by a thing or by an idea. Our prime commandment suggests the garden as catalyst. (432)

What is this “utopia,” then, that the men of the GPG have created? Work in the garden, Dr. Dietrich suggests, should be so wholly fulfilling, so all-consuming, that it replaces even the need for erotic relationships. This language may seem familiar to the reader. Recalling the argument in chapter 2 of this book, it would seem that the GPG reproduces in miniature the ultraproductivist ethos of 1950s *Aufbau* culture, which imagined that a worker could be entirely satisfied by the process of production. According to this model, a proper cathexis onto work was capable even of slaking the incessant demands of desire. In this light, the GPG represents a throwback to the GDR’s early collectivist enthusiasm—a tempting utopian vision, but one that operated on a constitutive exclusion. Like the “men’s community” of the GPG, *Aufbau* culture sought value and gratification in the process of production. Yet, as we saw in chapter 3, this culture could not adequately address the question of reproduction—whether biological, social, or the reproduction of labor power in leisure time.

The GPG and Orplid, then, are worlds apart. Where the former apotheosizes productive labor as a means to social, personal, and even sexual fulfillment, the latter represents life-saving flight from labor in and outside the home. Men and women, it seems, dream very different utopias. These two visions, however, share an important trait: both the monkish gardening community and Laura’s private *locus amoenus* categorically exclude heterosexual love relationships. *Amanda*’s radical interrogation of gender roles uncovers rifts too wide even for the soaring spans of romance.

“A single advantage”: *Das heroische Testament*

It is a testament to the intractability of the problem of romantic love that Morgner returns to it again and again through three volumes of the Salman trilogy, despite all evidence of its incommensurability with the social and political aims of the novels. The cast of the final volume of the trilogy, the unfinished *Heroische Testament* (Heroic Testament), teems with archetypal romantic pairs: Hero and Leander, Titania and Oberan, Hanswurst und Grete. Even when the characters’ pursuits of romantic fulfillment falter and fail, the novel’s very structure seems to compel them into pairs. Throughout the trilogy, the figure of Beatriz de Dia embodies this tenacious attachment to love’s utopian potential: she suffers death (real or symbolic) three times, only to be resurrected each time to chase once more after this chimera.

In the *Testament*, Beatriz seems finally to fulfill her 800-year quest. Still trapped in the half-avian, half-human body of a siren, and still without a voice, Beatriz meets a young male prostitute in the red-light district of Paris. Like Benno in the

first volume of the trilogy, this man is recommended by his ambiguous gender presentation: he wears makeup, tight jeans, and a ruff. Intrigued by her wings and feathers, he asks her to fly with him over the city. They spend the night together, whereupon Beatriz finds herself featherless, human, and capable of speech. In classic fairy-tale form, the power of love has broken the enchantment that imprisons her in a false body. The man gives his name as Leander, aka Désiré, and calls himself an aspiring harlequin.

Leander/Désiré, it turns out, is the famous “man from the rib,” whose unusual origins have occasioned the flurry of letters that constitute the novel’s epistolary first chapter. In these letters, various scientists, academics, and concerned laypeople try to make sense of reports that a woman in Düsseldorf has just created a man by cutting him out of her rib. This reversal of biblical precedent seems to some letter writers a salutary event, to others a threat; to some a media hoax, to others an opportunity to earn much-needed foreign currency. The woman, Herta Kowalczyk, nicknamed Hero, is a doctoral student at the Humboldt University and intends to submit Leander as her dissertation, having smuggled him across the border after creating him in the FRG.

Because Morgner, who died of cancer in May 1990, never finished the story of Hero and Leander (or any of the other plotlines in the *Heroische Testament*), we can only speculate where it was going. From Morgner’s notes, collected and annotated by her literary executor, Rudolf Bussmann, we get a picture of the tremendous symbolic importance she assigned to the metaphor of the “man from the rib”: “In the image of the man from the rib is contained the condition: in a world without a future/utopia, one must literally excise the missing element from oneself in order not to get sick. As an individual and as a species. . . . Every individual must bring something out of themselves to create a future when ideology fails” (124).²⁴ As Morgner sketches him here, Leander represents an externalization of a lack, a negation of a negation. In order “not to get sick” in the face of ideology’s collapse, one must break one’s attachment to collective utopian visions. What hope remains, the individual must find within and externalize. In this case, Leander becomes a projection of Hero’s vestigial hope: “Hero cuts the future/hope/love—the island she stands on—out of her ribs” (124).

In this way, the process of refashioning a social utopia as an individual one becomes facilitated and symbolized by the trope of love. Revisiting the symbology of

24. “Sich (etwas) herausnehmen” means both “to take something out of oneself” and “to undertake to do something.” In the world that Morgner describes in the *Heroische Testament*, all hope of a grand future utopia has been extinguished. The world itself is divided into three kingdoms: the DDR, where Beatriz, Leander, Hero, and Laura Salman live; the “Geehrtenrepublik Avalun,” the kingdom of the “big shots” (Bonzen), now the home-in-exile of the mythical forces of patriarchy and the witches, who were forced into exile after their failed invasion of the Blocksberg; and Dschinnistan, the “land that doesn’t exist,” a world of the elemental powers of nature, ruled by Titania and Oberon. Of all the witches, Amanda is the only one who has chosen exile in Dschinnistan.

Amanda, Morgner's notes claim that "in a world of hate, struggle, fear, panic, love is an island (private)" (157). In the *Testament*, love becomes what Patricia Herminghouse describes as "a private utopia," located "not in any socio-political constellation, but in the love between two human beings" ("Taking Back the Myth and Magic," 63).

Especially in post-Cold War hindsight, the collapse of collective utopian hopes as depicted in the *Testament* maps onto the gradual dissolution of the GDR, both as a political entity and as a projection screen for the postwar socialist imagination. For East German Marxist feminists (or parafeminists) like Morgner, this breakdown was doubly laden. The evaporation of socialist aspirations toward transcending class inequality also entailed the loss of utopian socialism as a path toward overcoming patriarchal domination. Morgner's notes for the *Testament* indicate that this double disappointment would have been mirrored in the continuing separation and bodily decline of Laura and Amanda: "Laura = collapse of socialist hope; Amanda = collapse of feminist hope" (39; qtd. in Herminghouse, "Taking Back the Myth and Magic," 67). At the same time, however, Morgner suggests that the troubled relationship between feminism and socialism offers a way out. If women were excluded from socialist history in the first place, then they are also shielded from its implosion: "A chance for woman the outsider. Many disadvantages. A single advantage. It is not my history. So I have no history: There is none. History is a fiction of men. Why would I want to enter into history like Beatriz wanted to?" (*Testament*, 145).

In *Trobadora Beatriz*, the search for love takes place alongside the struggle for political and social power: the attempt to "enter history." These two strands are united dialectically in the figure of the Trobadora Beatriz, whose cultural and political involvement relies on finding an adequate object of her love. In *Amanda*, the quest for romantic fulfillment is subordinate to practical and political concerns. Although the resurrected siren Beatriz, having lost her tongue, cannot spread the word about the looming ecological and nuclear catastrophes, Amanda and her witches have a plan to take back the Brocken—to enter history—by any means necessary. Yet, *Amanda* tells us, even if social conditions were revolutionized, men and women would find themselves occupying very different utopias. Where the one strives to dominate, the other longs for relief from domination. In *Das heroische Testament*, at the end point of the trilogy, the decade, and the socialist experiment, the stakes are just as high, but expectations have plunged. If hope exists at all, it would be found in love's insular utopia, in a retreat from moribund ideology into the personal, the private, the individual: one's own rib.

As we will see, it was not just women who endeavored to "escape from history," abandoning the collective utopian project of the GDR to seek fulfillment within the private sphere. Chapter 5 will track the decline of the East German collective utopia and the ascendancy of "private utopias" like those imagined by Morgner: the private sphere, the underground, the "niche" society. The fact that Hero and

Leander, according to Morgner's notes, had an unspecified tragic fate in store reminds us that society is rarely kind to such private utopias—least of all societies as insistent on collectivity as the GDR. Morgner herself was well aware of the state's efforts to infiltrate private relationships: in 1977 she divorced her husband, the poet Paul Wiens, when she discovered that he had been informing on her to the State Security Agency (Westgate, 186).²⁵ The following chapter, an analysis of four Stasi narratives from before and after the *Wende*, will investigate the conditions—and even the possibility—of the private sphere in the shadow of state surveillance.

25. In *Strategies under Surveillance: Reading Irmtraud Morgner as a GDR Writer*, Geoffrey Westgate offers an intriguing interpretation of *Amanda* as a critique of the SED surveillance state; see esp. Westgate, 206–45.