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Socialist Patriarchy and the Limits of Reform: A Reading of Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz* as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura

Abstract

Irmtraud Morgner's *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz* is one of several important anti-patriarchal texts to come out of the GDR over the past ten years. It is a complex and ambitious attempt to elaborate the meaning of women's emancipation in a socialist society, an attempt which is structurally and thematically marked by a struggle between oppositional and orthodox approaches to questions of sexuality, knowledge and power. This particular reading of the text emphasizes the limitations which traditional Marxist analysis and representational practices impose upon a textual field which necessarily introduces conflict and difference into the repressive stability of GDR socialism and its conventional narrative representation. Having made women's radically different desires, experiences and relationships with one another a legitimate subject, the text opens up knowledges which threaten to violate traditional political, social and sexual orders, and conventional narrative consistencies. I have attempted to read the text's transgressions and radical oppositions against the pressure of its insistently conclusive Marxism and to suggest the need for a critical re-thinking of the relations between sexuality, representation and power.

Keywords

Irmtraud Morgner, *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz*, anti-patriarchal, GDR, DDR, women's emancipation, socialist society, sexuality, knowledge, power, conflict, traditional political, social, sexual order, Marxism

**SOCIALIST PATRIARCHY AND THE LIMITS OF
REFORM: A READING OF IRMTRAUD
MORGNER'S *LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF
TROUBADORA BEATRIZ AS CHRONICLED BY
HER MINSTREL LAURA***

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Throughout the relatively short history of the German Democratic Republic, officials there have exploited the now well-known Marxist maxim that progress in a society can be measured by the status of women. Indeed, the government's claims to have achieved political, legal and economic equality for women have figured significantly as legitimization strategies for the GDR. This official and paternalistic «equal rights» approach to emancipation has perpetuated the belief that advances can be made on the economic and legal levels, while leaving the supposedly derivative and in fact more threatening micro-structural bases of power and oppression intact. However, despite the official protests against the necessity of possibility of a «feminist» movement or literature in the GDR, a number of texts appeared in the seventies which opened an important critical discussion of patriarchal structures; texts which begin implicitly, if not explicitly to expose and challenge the limits of an essentially reformist approach to sexuality and emancipation among GDR ideologues and within Marxist theory generally. It is not surprising that such texts should have appeared in the years following the Eighth Party Congress of the SED in 1971.¹ The economic stability that the GDR had achieved by the early seventies and the generosity that this stability initially allowed have made a more critical literature possible. And it is certainly not insignificant that more critical analyses of political, social and psychosexual structures of domination began to appear concurrent-

ly with the re-emergence of the Women's Movement as a critical force in the West.

Writers like Christa Wolf, Gerti Tetzner, Brigitte Reimann, Irmtraud Morgner and Maxie Wander have begun to articulate the visible and damaging effects within the GDR of the historical oppression of women and the discursive repression of a «feminine» difference. In the process, they have succeeded in re-conceptualizing what was once defined and made structurally harmless as the «woman question.» Christa Wolf has received the most attention among Western readers for having gone beyond the false project of legitimizing GDR socialism with illustrations of women's emancipation; in fact, her texts have exposed a very problematic relationship between socialism in that form and the emancipation of women or men. Like other GDR writers, Christa Wolf has elaborated the micro-structural bases of domination in ways that challenge the self-evidence of various GDR institutions and the «truths» on which they rest. Certainly, such anti-patriarchal literature in the GDR signals the kind of «insurrection of subjugated knowledges» against a regime of apparently self-evident and absolute certainties which, according to Michel Foucault, characterizes critical epistemological developments in the West during the past ten years.² The points of convergence between feminist and post-structuralist thought make Foucault's characterizations of such developments useful in our attempts to elaborate the significance for us of this anti-patriarchal literature in the GDR. What continues to fascinate us about this GDR literature are not only, and indeed, perhaps not primarily the explicit descriptions, validations and critiques for conditions of women in the GDR; these texts have an immediate informative value, but we read and re-read them not so much for what they say about women, but for what they do discursively, for what they contribute to the theoretical, political and literary projects in which we as Western scholars and feminists are engaged.

Irmtraud Morgner's very long and complex montage-novel, *Life and Adventures of Troubadora Beatriz as Chronicled by her Minstrel Laura* (1974)³ can be read as a textual field of struggle between oppositional knowledge and the theoretical and unitary discourse of traditional Marxism. Western critics have read the text as a compromising affirmation of the status quo and the GDR's «evolution» toward sexual equality on the one hand, and as a radical critique of that society, its patriarchal structures, and

legitimizing discourse on the other. The text actually takes up the question of women's emancipation within a socialist society more directly and more polemically than any other literary text to come out of the GDR. However, in spite of the polemics against patriarchy, and indeed, perhaps because of them, the text actually constrains the emancipatory possibilities which it opens up. The ruptures introduced into the text and the GDR by other insistent «feminine» desires are foreclosed by the discursive limitations of orthodox Marxist rhetoric and by the supposed historical necessities that govern the development of GDR society. *Life and Adventures* is thematically and structurally marked by the tension between the necessities of the GDR's «really existing socialism» and the unnamed and unassimilable desires, which intervene and which would defy the conceptual and political grasp of conventional wisdom and social structures.

The tensions develop around the fantastic legend of Beatriz de Dia, the medieval troubadora who enters the GDR in the late sixties after having awakened in France from an 810-year sleep. Beatriz' bonds with mythical and «real» female characters represent the structural and thematic intervention of unconscious and «irrational» desires into the repressive stability of GDR socialism and traditional textual authority. The complex and sustaining relationships among the women expose the micro-structural bases of patriarchal oppression by raising questions of family structure, sexuality and patterns of emotional and political dependency, questions which situate the constitution of power at the level of psychosexual relations. Their questions and unorthodox relationships begin to threaten conventional Marxist conceptions of the meaning of emancipation. Indeed, the threat which Beatriz and female bonding pose to social stability and ideological certainties is emphasized throughout the text by the fears and rationalized denials with which various GDR characters respond to that challenge; for many of the male characters, Beatriz and her fantastic presence clearly represent a world without absolutes, without Fathers, without surrogate gods of any kind, a world which is not only threatening, but unimaginable. Beatriz brings the fantastic, the extravagant, the impossible and the erotic to bear on the apparently «natural» order, its discursive underpinnings and its literary representation; her exploits and textual interventions have the potential for exposing the political nature of conventional distinctions between the reasonable and unreasonable, between

natural and unnatural, between truth and fiction.

The subversively feminine, then, is not read in terms of a fictionalized or mythologized biological essence; rather, femininity is identified with historically repressed forms of knowing, desiring and relating, with knowledge and experiences that threaten and are consequently unthinkable within the bounded certainties of a hierarchical social and cultural order. The emancipation of women, in its most threatening moments, figures both thematically and structurally as the emancipation of desire and imagination from the bonds of pragmatism and rationality which would contain the multiplicity and particularity of desire within systematizing theory and conventional familial structures. Having made women's different desires, experiences and relationships with one another a legitimate subject of interest, the text necessarily introduces conflicts and struggles which threaten traditional political, social, and sexual orders, and textual coherence. However, this text restores thematic and structural order by burying these conflicts that it has opened up and cannot erase. Resistance to the unnamed and undomesticated desires which Beatriz brings to light is not only exerted thematically through the polemical gestures of conformist GDR characters, but structurally through the text's insistence on political and conceptual closure as well. While the text rhetorically asserts the possibility and necessity of women's emancipation in the GDR, it structurally negates that proposition by moving with linear logic toward the subsumption of Beatriz' «difference» under the teleological necessities of GDR Marxism. Ultimately, the difference Beatriz makes is appropriated and robbed of its subversiveness by a reformed socialist patriarchy. The movement of the text reduces Beatriz' role to that of reformer or rational enlightener, and the unconscious, unsystematic and unassimilated desires are made harmless or denied altogether. With the death of Beatriz and her disappearance from the text, the necessity and possibility of conflict are negated by a synthesis which restores harmony to GDR reality and to the text. This synthesis is represented paradigmatically by the supposedly self-evident and in fact textually unconvincing heterosexual marriage of Beatriz' GDR counterpart Laura to Benno Pakulat, the progressive son of a very orthodox Marxist. Ultimately, then, neither the GDR nor its narrative representation tolerate a «presence» which is outside their systematizing grasp. This is a text which exposes both the limits of its own explicit analysis of patriarchy and the patriarchal bases of political and

social stability in the GDR.

Certainly, the contradictory effects of the form(s) of this text produce such thematic and structural tensions. Morgner has incorporated and strategically juxtaposed a variety of forms, including short prose pieces, documentary sketches, and a wealth of legal and scientific materials which set up and contribute to the thematic ambiguity around distinctions between fiction and truth. The juxtapositions of myth, «fiction» and documentary involve an irony which seems to, and in fact, does at times challenge the accepted boundaries between the real and the unreal. However, the fictional and the unreal are ultimately subordinated to theoretical and historical «truths,» and myth works in the end to substantiate supposed historical necessities. It is crucial to both read and demonstrate these coexisting impulses.

The heterogeneous fragments take shape around the life, adventures, and death of Beatriz, whose mere presence would appear to disrupt the «rationality» of GDR realist conventions. The text's epistemological, thematic and stylistic tensions are developed around her relationship to her minstrel Laura Salman. In a preface to the text, Beatriz' minstrel Laura sells GDR writer Irmtraud Morgner the chronicles of Beatriz de Dia's life, and Morgner accepts a task which will apparently involve destroying the conventionally accepted distinctions between history and myth. This exchange between Laura and Morgner, an exchange which supposedly precedes the «fictional text,» not only challenges realist conventions but quite effectively blurs the distinction between experience and its representation. Moreover, the transaction establishes a network of female narrative voices without distinct identities so that distinctions between experiencing, documenting, and «fictionalizing» become problematic and subject to an historical and political reading.

The task of destroying patriarchal myths does not appear to take the form of asserting new truths to supplant traditional truths. Instead, Morgner's imaginative rewriting of patriarchal myths actually highlights rather than obscures its imaginative and political bases. Demeter and Persephone, for example, once the mythical victims of the power of the gods, and Melusine, a harmless mermaid, become defiant political agitators who not only exist outside of recorded history, but call the foundations of that historical record into question, and disrupt history's apparent linear necessity. These new «myths» certainly do not represent an attempt to

reconstruct a «real» but neglected women's history or to mythologize biological difference; the reader is engaged here at least sub-textually in an ironic exploration of the political implications and bases of chronologies and historical accuracies. In fact, the use of myth and legend in this text can be read in much the same way that Sylvia Bovenschen has read Western feminists' appropriation of the past in terms of «a sensitivity to the underground existence of forbidden images....In turning to an historical image, women do not address the historical phenomenon itself but rather its symbolic potential.»⁴

These radical impulses in the use of myth and history are obscured, however, by the traditional Marxist content of the refashioned legends. And it is instructive to review briefly the underlying form which these new legends take. Unable to adapt to the patriarchal and oppressive Middle Ages, Beatriz de Dia is charmed out of history by the members of Queen Saba's Round Table. It is not clear how Queen Saba obtained possession of the castle between «Kaerllion and Usk and the Future» after the death of Arthur in 542; what is clear is that the foundation of this Round Table depended upon the cooperation between Saba and the defeated goddesses Demeter and Persephone. During the sixth century, Persephone granted eternal life to a group of proud, politically astute women who were fighting for the restoration of matriarchy and agreed to agitate on Persephone's behalf. In the twelfth century, the «schöne Melusine» pledged her support to the group of forty-eight women and later led a secret opposition to a majority victory in the Round Table. It was in 1871, the year of the French Commune, that this opposition introduced the political struggle of the working class and with it the first male members to the Round Table. By 1918, there was parity in the organization and the struggle was no longer aimed at the restoration of matriarchy, but toward the victory of the working class and equality under socialism. As an agent of the legendary Round Table, Beatriz is given the reformist task of raising consciousness in the GDR, a society assumed to be legally, politically and economically «free» of patriarchal vestiges. On the level of explicit content, then, the renamings and interpretations are the undisguised reconstruction of a traditional Marxist analysis, which would equate progress in the struggle against patriarchy with progress in the struggle against capitalism. The primacy established in 1918 of socialism as the appropriate struggle for women keeps the orthodox view of women's

oppression and emancipation intact, even within imaginatively retold myths and legends. Beatriz' challenge to such reductive arguments of simultaneity between socialist and feminist struggles continues to operate only on a sub-textual level where the discursive incompatibilities between GDR Marxism and the feminist inquiry are exposed in spite of explicit rhetoric to the contrary.

Several interrelated fictional story lines are developed within the text to represent GDR «reality.» Morgner's own unpublished novel, *Rumba auf einen Herbst*, a novel written within the previous conventions of realism in the GDR, is found in fragments strategically located throughout the text, juxtaposed to pieces which historicize not only its content, but its form as well. Three *Bitterfelder Früchte*, relatively long prose sections which document the life and work of GDR workers, also offer «realistic» representations of the GDR in the more traditional sense.⁷ However, these sections actually tend to demystify traditional romantic notions of work and productivity in that society, illustrating not only changes in the nature of work but developments in the literature and cultural politics as well. The third *Bitterfelder* piece defies realist conventions by exploring the life and death of scientist Vera Hill, a woman who can reconcile her identities as scientist and mother only as long as she can fly (on her own power) to and from work. Vera Hill falls from the sky and dies tragically when community censure and her colleague's lack of faith in the possibility of flying become overwhelming. The very obvious allusion to the persecution of witches contributes to the textual representation of femininity and difference as profound threats to psychic and social stability, and to narrative consistency. The «fictionalization» of Vera Hill's death further exposes the systematic repression of those possibilities and meanings which defy the fictional coherence dictated by particular power relations; the constitution of truth and reality is revealed again to be a fundamentally political process.

In addition to the prose fiction, documentary sections assert evidence of legal, political and social conditions in the GDR. Again, the juxtaposition of the documents with accounts of everyday conflict situations contributes to the text's structural and thematic ambiguities. Perhaps the most significant and least ambiguous instance is the legalization of abortion, which figures both thematically and structurally as a turning point in the text. As narrator and narrated character, Laura Salman identifies that change as the condition of possibility for women's control over their lives.

Textually, the documentation of that legal reform marks the beginning of Beatriz' increasing domesticity and growing similarity to Laura, her apparent superfluity and eventual death and disappearance from the text. Clearly, this linear development erases conflict and subordinates women's desires and political interventions to legal and political changes effected from above. A rather orthodox analysis emerges out of a structural logic which privileges the macro-structural forces as the real forces of social change, clearly separating those forces from the local bases of power.

The montage structure would appear to open the text to multiple readings; however, it also works at reducing itself to a single and systematic analysis. The justifications for such a montage are very explicitly elaborated within the text in an interview which Beatriz' minstrel Laura grants the publishers at *Aufbau Verlag* in Beatriz' name:

Die orthodoxe Romanform verlangt Festhalten an einer Konzeption über mehrere Jahre. Das kann angesichts heftiger politischer Bewegungen in der Welt und einer ungeheuerlichen Informationsflut heute nur trägen oder sturen Naturen gelingen. Was ich anbiete, ist die Romanform der Zukunft. Die zum operativen Genre gehört....Abgesehen vom Temperament, entspricht kurze Prose dem gesellschaftlich, nicht biologisch bedingten Lebensrhythmus einer gewöhnlichen Frau, die ständig von haushaltbedingten Abhaltungen zerstreut wird.⁶

(The orthodox novel form demands adherence to one perspective over a period of many years, something which is possible only for lazy or stubborn minds, given the intense political activity in the world and the overwhelming flood of information. What I am offering you is the novel of the future, which belongs to the operative genre....

Quite aside from temperament, it appears that short prose corresponds to the socially, not biologically determined rhythm of the average woman's life, a life of constant interruptions which result from the demands of housework and childcare.)

At other points in the text, Beatriz articulates the dangers inherent in «great conceptions» which reduce reality and meaning to

the fictional coherence of global theories. «Feminine» writing and knowing are explicitly associated with the unconcluded and the erotic. Beatriz sends her minstrel the following message:

Romanschriftsteller bezeichnete Beatriz als Leute, die aus Feigheit ihre Gedanken in fremden Köpfen verstecken. Und überhaupt warnte Beatriz die Freundin vor einer großen Arbeit. Sie schrieb: «Das ist eben, woran unsere Besten leiden, gerade diejenigen, in denen das meiste Talent und das tüchtigste Streben vorhanden sind...Denn die Gegenwart will ihre Rechte; was sich täglich dem Dichter an Gedanken und Empfindungen aufdrängt, das will und soll ausgesprochen werden. Hat man aber ein größeres Werk im Kopfe, so kann nichts daneben aufkommen.»⁷

(Beatriz characterized novelists as people who, out of cowardice, hid their own thoughts in others' heads. And she warned her friend quite generally against great works. She wrote: «That is precisely the problem with our best writers, those with the greatest talent and worthiest aspirations...because the present moment demands its rights; the thoughts and sensations which force themselves on the writer every day demand and deserve expression. When one has a greater work in mind, nothing outside of it can arise.)

This textual montage intends to challenge traditional realist conventions and to deconstruct the transcendent and all-knowing narrator; certainly, the juxtaposition of genres and the disrespectful irony succeed at points in subverting textual and extra-textual limitations on meaning and possibility. There is also an apparent refusal to privilege one form of knowing over another, to distinguish the important from the unimportant, or the global from the small and close-at-hand. The combination of literary forms and representational practices certainly has the potential for exposing the process of writing as a political exercise of choice, exclusion and control. However, these impulses are regulated and constrained by the conceptual coherence of an orthodox Marxist analysis and a loyalty to the GDR status quo which limit and control textual meaning with an imposing finality. In fact, the textual heterogeneity and apparent skepticism with respect to truth are systematized by the logic and language of traditional Marxist discourse, by the

repeated and explicit affirmations of economic, social and political structures in the GDR. A fragmented text, which appears to democratize the relationship between reader and writer actually exercises a fundamentally undemocratic authorial function by situating official «truths» at the center of an apparently open text. This superficially experimental text compromises its avowed radicality by representing a pre-given reality in fragments which ultimately add up to a perfectly pre-constituted and harmonious whole.

The relationship between narrators and narrated reality illustrates the problem still further. This text lacks the intimacy and depth of a text such as Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1969) because it does not experiment with a «self» in process, but focuses instead on the individual's confrontations with an apparently separate and given social and economic structure. Whole coherent subjects confront one another and an already constituted social sphere; the process of social change remains exterior to the self, and personal or individual change is conceived in terms of a derivative and rational «enlightenment.» The classical bourgeois conceptual and political split between the individual and the social is perpetuated by a Marxism which resists a materialist analysis of subjectivity.

The montage actually culminates in the structurally disappointing harmlessness of a good-night-story about the legendary Beatriz de Dia, a story told by the progressive husband Benno to his wife (and Beatriz' minstrel) Laura. Point of view is significantly transferred here to the «feminized» male voice, a voice which diminishes Beatriz' extravagant fantasies and her bond with Laura by relegating them again to the safely separate realm of fable and myth. The silencing of women effected by this switch to a male narrator can be read as the condition of possibility for the marital harmony, for the order and narrative closure, for the careful distinctions between reality and fantasy restored at the text's close. This closure obscures, though it cannot completely erase, the ruptures introduced by extravagantly feminine fantasy into the text, fantasy and desire which persist in spite of the institutional appropriation and control which would gather them safely back into the status quo.

This structural appropriation of difference can be elaborated with respect to thematic development as well, in particular with respect to Beatriz' impact on various GDR characters. Her impact

on a figure like Uwe Parnitzke offers a particularly interesting illustration of «her» sub-textual meanings and her textual appropriation. From a thematic point of view, direct contact between Beatriz and Parnitzke is brief and tangential; however, the reader necessarily brings Beatriz' radical uncertainties and eroticism to bear on the rigidity and conformism which this journalist represents.

Beatriz first hears of the GDR from Parnitzke, whom she meets while still in the streets of Paris in 1968. Discounting the possibility of emancipation in the capitalist West, Beatriz follows him to the place which she begins with varying degrees of irony to call the «Promised Land.» Parnitzke's own lack of promise in her eyes introduces the skepticism with which Beatriz will continue to expose and counter rampant mystifications of the GDR and its «really existing socialism.» Parnitzke actually figures, in a sense, as a patriarchal principle which unifies the three most significant and threatening female characters in their oppositional practices. He is identified as the former husband not only of Beatriz' minstrel and counterpart Laura, but also of Valeska Kantus, a woman whose sex change experiment is recounted near the end of the text and is characterized as a gospel. In contrast to the women's openness and sensuality, Parnitzke remains a victim of patriarchal power relations and the position he has taken up within them. He represents the fears that underlie bureaucratic pragmatism, unquestioning conformism and unerotic and rigid loyalty to reason and authority. Parnitzke is a man who seeks a mother in the woman to whom he is married, and a strong father-figure to fill the space of an absent God. Nostalgic for Stalin, he longs for a world of discipline and order, for the psychic and social stability which seem to depend upon the repression of the outlaw femininity. His profound anxieties reveal again and again the extent to which challenges to patriarchy are associated with lack of control, lack of certainty and stability, and with a force more threatening than the rhetorically acknowledged threats from the capitalist West.

This anxiety is generalized to other male characters in the text, and developed very movingly in accounts of the acute fears of Oskar Pakulat, an older worker and the father of Laura's husband-to-be Benno. In a moment of crisis, Pakulat, who is distraught over his son's lack of respect for authority and tradition, identifies his son's «madness» with femininity and his problems with women. At one particularly acute moment, he cries: «We men have to stick

together.» A «femininity» which is not defined or circumscribed by rational and essentially male principles, which transgresses conventional boundaries, figures once again as the spoken and unspoken enemy to what is given as a «natural» order. The deeply-rooted fears produced and exploited by patriarchal power structures perpetuate the need for and tolerance of structures of domination.

The textual tension between a dogmatic insistence on absolutes and a pleasure in the unknown is extended to the realm of science and its claim to truth. Again, Parnitzke's indirect relationship to Beatriz figures significantly in the conflict developed between the systematic and the erotic. Parnitzke, who is assigned to cover a meeting of physicists, is confronted and confused by the scientist Wenzel Morolf and his passion for the unknown and unknowable. Both Morolf and the women scientists whose work is explored in the text assert the validity of the speculative sciences and characterize their work as an erotic struggle on the boundaries of the unnamed and the unknown against the tyranny of the pragmatic and applied sciences, which Parnitzke would privilege in the name of the Party. In fact, it is Morolf who makes the only explicit allusion in the text to Dante's Beatrice, and he makes the allusion in an attempt to elaborate his own relation to science and knowledge:

Der Kampf mit dem Unbekannten ist stets ein sinnliches Erlebnis...In der Göttlichen Komödie läßt er sich selber—paradoxerweise durch die verewigte Beatrice, die er als Tote in jünglinghaft-asketischer Überanstrengung ziemlich lange geliebt hat, bis der Gegenschlag kam—belehren: Nur durch die Sinne kann Verstand erfassen, was er hernach erst zur Vernunft erhebt.⁴

The struggle with the unknown is always a sensual experience...In *The Divine Comedy*, he is taught—paradoxically by the deceased Beatrice, whom he had loved for a rather long time with youthful, ascetic overexertion until the counterblow came—: only through the senses can the mind comprehend what it then exalts as reason.

This tension between the pragmatic and the «irrational» also characterizes Beatriz' relationship to her minstrel Laura. Contact between the two women is introduced thematically during the

period of Beatriz' work in a GDR circus. Laura's criticisms of Beatriz for trivializing the «real» medieval troubadora in a circus act initiate the contrast between Laura's pragmatic realism and loyalty to official political and cultural policies and Beatriz' «naive» extravagance. Laura represents what is supposedly the more historically conscious side of what will become one single character with the death of Beatriz at the end of the text.

Beatriz' minstrel is represented as the daughter of a train engineer, Johann Salman, whose contribution to the development of the GDR is recounted in one of the *Bitterfelder Früchte*; Laura's mother Olga is a frustrated housewife whose desire to be put to sleep until less patriarchal times is granted by the agents of the Round Table. Clearly, like Benno Pakulat, Laura represents a «new generation» of socialists who are unwilling to (and apparently need not) subordinate personal, subjective or individual questions to the exigencies of a supposedly collective public sphere. Her direct experience of oppressive attitudes and institutions within the GDR certainly legitimizes Beatriz' zealous critiques. However, Laura maintains a pragmatic historical optimism and loyalty to the system throughout. Her situation evolves and improves in direct proportion to and as a result of changes in conditions outside of her immediate activity, system developments such as greater social and economic stability which «allow» certain questions to be raised, and which «allow» for more «feminist» men, more equitable laws, greater access to untraditional jobs. In spite of the carefully constructed familial backgrounds, Laura's intrapsychic conflicts are left largely unexplored and the individual subject is elaborated in terms of roles and attitudes which are apparently both derived from and changed by factors outside human interactions and intervention.

Beatriz' death figures significantly in this reading of the text's reformist limits. The troubadora dies some time after returning from a trip to the West where she has gone in search of the unicorn and anaximander, the elixir which she hopes will change consciousness and conditions in the GDR by undoing sex roles and eroticizing relations of all kinds. This final trip to the West juxtaposes western capitalist conditions to the promise of the GDR, so that Beatriz' radical critiques and desires are mitigated by the insights she wins into historical and political necessities. Her trip takes her to Italy where she is confronted with the «illusion» of radical solutions. The unicorn she finds in the streets of Venice

becomes a harmless house pet, a supposedly integral part of everyday life in the GDR. Once again, the importance of struggle and active intervention is negated as the potentially radical implications of sexual emancipation are confined and domesticated within the reformed bourgeois happy home. After her return to the GDR, Beatriz' perspectives on change grow increasingly similar to those of her minstrel Laura, whose attitudes become somewhat more critical in turn. In fact, Beatriz alarms Laura with her sudden domesticity and confinement to the home; Laura actually foretells the troubadora's death when she articulates the rather obvious fact that her friend is making herself superfluous. After Beatriz' death, Laura is whisked off in her sleep to be initiated into the Round Table in Beatriz' place, then returned to her husband Benno with the task of working for «attitudinal» changes in the GDR.

The synthesis effected here between Beatriz' radical zeal and Laura's historical realism can be read in very different ways. On the level of the explicit, the text suggests that Beatriz' utopian, fantastic impulse has been integrated into GDR reality in the figure of Laura, who combines then the legendary and the fantastic with patient pragmatism and «realism.» Beatriz' idealism and her desires are mitigated but not erased by the complex conditions of change as they operate in the GDR; indeed, her extravagant desires have exposed and challenged the unquestioning conformism of GDR characters with a refusal to accept the status quo as sufficient or unalterable. Still, there are thematic and structural problems with this apparently happy ending. When Laura explains to Morgner in the preface that she could not write Beatriz' story herself because she would not know whether it should induce laughter or tears, she introduces an ambivalence with respect to Beatriz' death which remains throughout. Certainly, the text's thematic and structural closure would erase the possibility of a desire which transgresses or defies the appropriating grasp of conventional theoretical, political and narrative systems. The text removes the difference that Beatriz and her political, cultural and emotional solidarity with Laura have made by subsuming that difference within a conceptual synthesis represented by the heterosexual marriage of Laura to Benno. With the domestication and death of Beatriz, struggle and conflict disappear, unconscious desires are defined as safely conscious attitudes, and the female bonding which has provided the disruptive and critical potential in the text is unconvincingly suppressed in favor of a nervously asserted heterosexuality.

The text's final domesticity points not only to political necessities and limitations in the GDR context, but also to the discursive limitations of traditional Marxism, to its inability to explain the social construction of the sexed subject in other than overly economic or functionalist terms, and its refusals to conceptualize the body and sexuality as privileged bases of political power. I have attempted to identify the limitations which Morgner's adherence to the GDR status quo and to a rather orthodox Marxist analysis of patriarchy impose on a text which both opens up and then constrains struggles, conflicts and difference. In spite of its polemical and explicit affirmations of possibilities for emancipation in the GDR, the text exercises significant suppressions of meaning by compromising its own radical affirmations of uncertainty and its own refusals of absolutes. The struggle within and outside this text between an incipiently materialist analysis of the relations between sexuality, knowledge and power on the one hand, and an entrenched orthodoxy with respect to these relations on the other will continue to engage us here and in the GDR for a long time.

NOTES

1. The Eighth Party Congress of the SED (Socialist Unity Party), held in 1971, the year in which Walter Ulbricht stepped down from his post as party secretary, effectively contradicted Ulbricht's pronouncements of the late sixties that antagonistic economic contradictions had been overcome and socialism realized in the GDR. Whereas Ulbricht's policy had left little room for criticisms or discussions of still-existing problems and contradictions in the GDR, the Eighth Party Congress opened the way for more open discussion.
2. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 81.
3. *Leben und Abenteuer der Trobadora Beatriz nach Zeugnissen ihrer Spielfrau Laura* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1974). West German edition published by Luchterhand, Darmstadt und Neuwied, 1976.
4. Sylvia Bovenschen, «The Contemporary Witch, The Historical Witch, and the Witch Myth,» *New German Critique*, 15 (Fall 1978), 87.
5. Morgner's *Bitterfelder Früchte* are, of course, allusions to and examples of (though at times exaggerated and consequently ironic) the kind of literature called for in the late fifties and early sixties by workers and writers concerned about the

gap between the actual problems of socialist life in the GDR and the portrayal of socialism in socialist realist literature. Until the development of the so-called *Bitterfelder Weg*, the GDR had not really had a national literature that dealt with the situation of workers in that society, and writers were urged to enter the world of the workers, write about their lives and help workers begin to write themselves.

6. Morgner, p. 258.

7. Morgner, pp. 271-272.

8. Morgner, p. 641.