

Where do we go from here?

Angela Krauß is in search of the best-case scenario...

It speaks for the quality of literary texts by Angela Krauß, a long-time resident of Leipzig, that she is one of the few East Germans who were able to make a seamless transition to the reunified German literary world after the fall of the Wall. Krauß began publishing prose texts in the early 1980s in the German Democratic Republic, but it wasn't until she won the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 1988 for her short prose text *Der Dienst* that she gained the attention of a wider public. Since then, Krauß has published numerous works of fiction as well as a volume of poetry – nearly all with Frankfurt's Suhrkamp Verlag – with topics ranging from portrayals of life in the GDR and reflections on post-Wall identity, to commentaries on culture in the USA and Russia and the challenges of contemporary life. Published in 1990, *Der Dienst* ('In the Line of Duty') is a quasi-autobiographical story, told in a lyrical prose full of tightly composed images. It reveals how the suicide of the narrator's father, a high-ranking officer in the GDR border police, initiates the narrator's awareness of the societal deformations caused by GDR ideology. The novella provides an astute and sensitive perspective on what it meant to live and write in the German Democratic Republic. Krauß' essayistic writing is

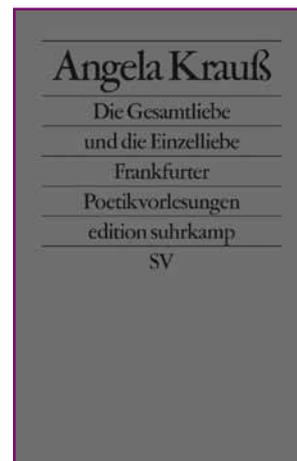


marked by a similarly sophisticated blend of sensitive observation and forthright analysis. In *Die Gesamtliebe und die Einzelliebe* (2004; 'Total Love and Singular Love'), the four lectures given in the prestigious series each year sponsored by the University of Frankfurt, she writes of matters which continue to interest all those who seek insights into what and why authors write – before, during and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

These two texts, like Krauß' body of work in general, eloquently depict the dislocations as well as the opportunities faced by citizens of the former GDR in reunified Germany, not as an historical overview, but from the

personal perspective of someone for whom the known and familiar world rapidly changed around her. Audiences' continuing fascination with everyday life in the GDR is evident from the lively responses to such films as *Goodbye Lenin* (2003), *The Lives of Others* (2006) and *Barbara* (2012), as well as Eugen Ruge's novel *In Times of Fading Light* (Faber & Faber and Graywolf Press, 2013). Yet beyond those more or less subtle forms of critique and markers of dislocation, Krauß' texts also testify to the resilience of the human spirit, as she and her narrators discover a well-spring of love and empathy as the foundation for ongoing and new relationships.

By Julie Klassen



Born in 1950 in Chemnitz, **Angela Krauß** initially trained as a graphic designer in Berlin. From 1976 to 1979 she studied at the Johannes R. Becher Institute (now The German Institute for Literature) in Leipzig. Krauß has received numerous literary prizes as well as invitations to hold posts as a writer-in-residence and as a guest lecturer at universities and colleges in Germany, Austria, Great Britain, and the United States. Most recently she received the 2010 Rainer Malkowski Prize from the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, and the 2011 Franz Nabl Prize, awarded biennially by the city of Graz, Austria, where she was the poet laureate in 1990. Speaking for the Rainer Malkowski Prize jury, Albert von Schirnding stated: 'Angela Krauß has created a body of work that does not fit into any of the commonly used rubrics of literary works: prose texts and poems of extraordinary poetic intensity and veracity, whose linguistic power transforms the difficult into the effortless, the pain into beauty.' The editors of prominent quarterly journal *Text und Kritik* are currently preparing a monograph on Angela Krauß for publication in 2014.

Die Überfliegerin

(1995; 'High-Flying Woman') Long indecisive about how to react to the post-Wall changes, the narrator is now determined to reconstruct her life, free from her ties to the GDR. In the search for new models, she embarks on journeys to the erstwhile super-powers, the USA and Russia, only to have affirmed that the personal relationships from her own past and her insights about the nature of love inform the foundation for moving forward.

Millarden neuer Sterne

(1999; 'A Billion New Stars') With her narrator's account of an extended stay in New York in the final weeks of the millennium, Krauß presents the idiosyncrasies of this vibrant metropolis from an outsider's viewpoint. She shows how the city

prompts participation in its life, with unexpected consequences for the narrator. In the course of her personal encounters, the narrator develops a friendship with Leo Glückselig (1914-2003), a Viennese Jew and graphic artist who had fled from Austria in 1938, participated in the US Army's liberation of Germany, and influenced postwar German-Jewish refugee culture in New York.

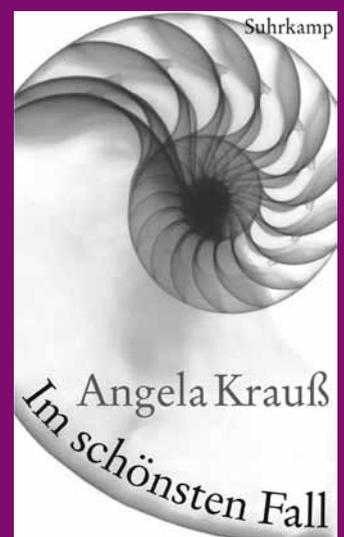
Wie weiter

(2006; 'Where do we go from here') The book moves on from the issue of personal self-realisation in post-Wall Germany to the question of how to prepare for and act upon the future challenges of a changing world. As the narrator reflects on what she has learned from the loved ones in her life, she comes to accept the advice of

her friend Leo, that undertaking just any kind of small deed will, at each step, set in motion new possibilities for meaningful action and affirm one's own resourcefulness.

Im schönsten Fall

(2011; 'Best-Case Scenario') The narrator of Krauß' most recent novel registers an accelerating sense of free fall in the face of uncontrollable factors in her life, ranging from the literal and figurative tremors caused by machines in her building that process and transmit electronic data, to climate change and the politics of the increasingly urgent world summits. Determined to regain a secure foothold, she takes it upon herself to find the underlying pattern of harmony that can hold the world together.



Julie Klassen has translated both *Der Dienst* and *Die Gesamtliebe und die Einzelliebe* and is Professor Emerita of German at Carleton College. Her interview with Angela Krauß, 'Whenever a Living Human Being Approaches Me, I Forget Everything I've Ever Learned' was published in *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 25 (2009).