

MEMORY ON THE MOVE: TRANSNATIONAL TRAVEL IN POST-1989 GERMAN  
LITERATURE

BY

LAUREN MICHELLE HANSEN

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy in German  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Anke Pinkert, Chair  
Associate Professor Yasemin Yildiz  
Professor Michael Rothberg  
Professor Harriet Murav  
Associate Professor George Gasyna

## Abstract

Contemporary German literature after 1989 has become increasingly transnational and transcultural, given its numerous portrayals of travel, particularly in exploring traumatic family pasts. The transitional years of 1989/90, known as the *Wende*, have arguably resulted in greater mobility and Germans' turn to the future as a unified country. However, authors of the second generation, or those born at the end of or just after WWII, are going back in historical time, as they revisit the war and post-war periods via modes of travel in their post-1989 literary works.

The sweeping changes across Germany and Europe after 1989, the public debates about how to remember WWII and the more recent divided German past, and the gradual passing away of the first generation who survived WWII explain the surfeit of memory literature and novels that examine family memory. Using Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, I argue in this dissertation that second-generation authors employ modes of travel in their post-1989 works in order to negotiate critical empathy to parents' traumatic pasts and revisit intergenerational conflicts of the Cold War period. Critical empathy here means emotional proximity and an attempt to understand parents' traumatic wartime experiences while maintaining critical distance in order to avoid over-identification or an overly emotionalized investigation of the family past. Critical empathy is negotiated through the authors' depictions of geographical proximity and distance to places pertinent to the family past. I trace how critical empathy unfolds across and beyond German borders in Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (1991), Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (1999), Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Anatolin* (2008), and Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011).

Given the over forty-year division between East and West Germany, two differing trajectories for dealing with atrocities of the Second World War had to be reconciled. The initial euphoria of reunification and its renewed engagements with the past ultimately delegitimized the GDR, folding it into a Western historical narrative of triumph in which capitalism defeated communism. In the meantime, however, many scholars have countered this hegemonic view with more nuance that takes into account the antifascist state's problems, yet exposes its complexity and texture as a legitimate cultural and political project. Moreover, the celebratory narrative and tone of reunification at large is countered with what scholars see as a profound loss, disappointment, and disorientation in works of art after the GDR disappeared. That is, rather than necessarily longing for its return, artists and writers have invited reflection on the effects of a vanished framework for interpreting history and the world. The authors explored in this dissertation each negotiate in their own ways and to varying degrees the role that the formerly divided Germany plays in their respective portrayals of family pasts that are constituted by multiple spatial displacements.

The larger stakes of this dissertation therefore lie in the new possibilities for GDR memory and postmemory that emerge in the process of negotiating critical empathy through travel in contemporary German literature. Itinerant engagements with the GDR past in these texts published around the turn of the twenty-first century enable attunements to present vulnerabilities that transcend Germany and German culture alone. Furthermore, protagonists in transit negotiate non-traumatic ties to traumatic family pasts. I therefore show how the open-ended, itinerant literary works investigated here allow reflection on the (GDR, war, or family) past beyond modes of trauma and loss to perhaps move contemporary German culture out of the post-1989 era and open it up to complex transnational and transcultural constellations of the twenty-first century.

## Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to my adviser and mentor Professor Anke Pinkert who from the beginning of my graduate school career believed in me, pushed me to perform at my intellectual best, and truly inspired me in her scholarly and pedagogical work and, more importantly, as a compassionate human being. She has taught me what it means to be not only a Germanist, but also a humanist. I also greatly appreciate the support from my dissertation committee members: Yasemin Yildiz, Michael Rothberg, Harriet Murav, and George Gasyna. Your mentorship and training has been crucial in helping me form the foundation of my project. Thank you to Professor Mara Wade for your encouragement and professional advice throughout my graduate school career. I am also indebted to my fellow graduate student colleagues and friends for their tremendous support over the years: Alexandra, Regine, Renata, Zach, Jeff, Kelli, Sara, Sarah, Johannes, Lujun, and Monet. Last but certainly not least, I would not have been able to persevere without my personal pillars of support throughout graduate school. I am forever grateful to my family, Nick, and Amanda for your unwaivering belief in me and in my goals.

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## Introduction

In contemporary German literature, protagonists and their (post)memories are frequently on the move. In Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (1991), the East German protagonist emigrates to Paris in a pre-1989 context to start anew. A few months later she nevertheless returns east to Weimar in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for her father's funeral. Sifting through her father's belongings she rediscovers her father's discovered wartime exile calendar and decides to write in it. Monika Maron's autobiographical protagonist in *Pawels Briefe* (1999) attempts to engage through photographs with memory of her Polish-Jewish grandfather who had perished in a concentration camp during WWII. She then travels to Poland in the mid-1990s with her mother in order to better imagine the brief years of her grandfather's life there. Hans-Ulrich Treichel's main character in his 2008 novel *Anatolin* feels compelled to connect his West German past to wartime memories. He travels to his mother's birthplace in Poland, the country from which his parents and lost brother had been expelled at the close of WWII. The protagonist in Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011) leaves his father in former East Germany to travel to Mexico where his grandmother had been in exile as a Communist during WWII. While in Mexico, he confronts his father's past as a Gulag prisoner and later GDR historian by looking through a folder of his father's documents from throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

All of these novels were published after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and Germany's official reunification in 1990. These are two major events in Germany history that, put together, constitute *die Wende* or the 'shift/turn.' Pakier and Stråth point out that 1989 marked "a new zero hour," (3)<sup>1</sup> a notion which suggests a tabula rasa and invokes new horizons.

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<sup>1</sup> Invoking parallels to immediate years following the Second World War. See part 3 of Pinkert, *Film and Memory* and Huyssen, "After the Wall" 52.

In the immediate post-Wende period, the proponents of unification in both East and West celebrated the fall of the wall, given, among other circumstances, greater access to western goods and relatively easier mobility. However, there is a noteworthy trend in literature that works parallel to and against these changes. Authors born at the end of WWII or after have written family novels since the *Wende* which center on travel back in historical time. For example, some such works represent a Germany still divided. In addition, protagonists engage traumatic wartime memories of exile or extermination they did not directly experience. The novels depict or engage memories related to the war and post-war periods. Interestingly, these memories are shown to have emerged not only in Nazi Germany or in one of the two divided Germanies, respectively, but also in France, Mexico, and in today's post-Soviet countries,<sup>2</sup> such as Poland and Ukraine. These memories relate to earlier experiences of spatial displacement and are also invoked through travel to and across these spaces in the present.

Because of the centrality of travel, both real and imagined, occurring in texts published around 2000, family memory spanning the twentieth century has therefore been increasingly and retrospectively rendered transnational and transcultural (Eigler, "Beyond" 80; Gerstenberger 99). Through the lenses of family memory and travel, this study investigates how authors negotiate proximity and distance, in both a geographical and affective sense, to war and postwar memories in their texts published after German reunification.

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<sup>2</sup> Post-Soviet space in this study refers to satellite or bloc countries that had been in the Soviet Union before its collapse in 1991. I generally defer to the term post-Soviet to characterize these countries in order to highlight the dissolved geopolitical order rather than, for example, the vanished ideological order. I follow the lead of Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor, and Vera Zvereva who justify using the term post-Soviet, in addition to post-socialist, in their co-edited volume. They choose post-Soviet or post-socialist as opposed to, for example, 'Eastern European,' 'post-totalitarian,' 'neoliberal capitalist,' or 'post-communist.' Post-Soviet "in its narrow sense" refers to "the experiences of the former USSR republics; however, in a broader sense we apply it as a set of social and cultural meanings which still may be found in post-socialist countries in connection with their history with the Soviet Union" ("Introduction" 12, note 2). See Rabikowska, Schlögel pp. 15 and 21 for more discussion about the use of post- in post-Soviet and about transitional landscapes (Übergangslandschaften), respectively.

Along with the increasingly transnational facets of literature after 1989/90, the family novel genre also grew in popularity among West and especially East German writers in Germany's post-unification *Erinnerungsliteratur* (memory literature).<sup>3</sup> The four texts by Honigmann, Maron, Treichel, and Ruge at the center of this study are therefore not only travel narratives back into historical time that take the post-unification present as a point of departure. They also represent returns to troubled intergenerational relationships of the post-war years, renegotiated on the road, rail, in the air, or on foot. In most cases, these returns are inspired by the disappearing parent generation born around 1920 and the missed opportunities, particularly in the post-war period of the 1960s-80s, for communicative memory<sup>4</sup> and intergenerational exchange.

Additionally, the second-generation<sup>5</sup> (semi)autobiographical protagonists in these novels attempt to gain proximity, geographically and affectively, to memories not experienced firsthand. Conventionally, the protagonist in the family novel is a “searching, suffering, interpreting, and learning individual” whose identity is “intertwined with” parts of the family history that he or she did not experience (Assmann, “Limits” 34). Given the unknown but palpably felt past, postmemory is therefore key here in this study's investigation of the negotiated relationship with the experiences of the parent generation. Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (“Generation” 103).<sup>6</sup> The concomitant post-1989 developments of

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<sup>3</sup> See Criser, “Renegotiating History” in which she explores the function of family in post-1989 (particularly East German) literature as coping mechanism and site of history negotiation.

<sup>4</sup> “those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications” (Jan Assmann 126).

<sup>5</sup> By second generation, I refer to those born at the end of or after WWII. Monika Maron was born in 1941, Barbara Honigmann in 1949, Eugen Ruge in 1954, and Hans-Ulrich Treichel in 1956.

<sup>6</sup> “The Generation” in quotes is used to distinguish the article from her book *The Generation of Postmemory*.



travel and family memory in literature do not gather on the periphery of unified Germany's cultural memory<sup>7</sup> as a sort of counter-movement, however. Instead they are central to shaping post-unification cultural memory. Assmann suggests that the close relations among individual, family history and national history are a new and significant structural marker in the family novel ("Limits" 34). That is, individuality and the varying degrees of collectivity make up a spectrum of mutually reinforcing levels that interact in memory literature.

Relying on Marianne Hirsch's postmemory framework, I argue that second-generation authors use travel as a way to revisit tenuous family relationships and negotiate non-traumatic ties to wartime (post)memories. Second-generation authors return through their texts to precarious intergenerational relationships to achieve critical empathy with the parent generation. Critical empathy<sup>8</sup> describes a negotiation between what I see here as a renewed emotional proximity yet also a critical distance to avoid over-identification or an overly emotionalized approach. In the novels at the center of this study, this process is shown to unfold across and beyond German borders (Erll, "Travelling" 6). I explore how travel draws the contemporary protagonists closer spatially and affectively to the past, while also maintaining the distance necessary for critical reflection.

The ultimate effect of such critical empathy at play in novels from the second-generation authors is to negotiate non-traumatic ties to traumatic family memories and acquire new visions for the future. The texts use the present as a critical site in which past and future influence one

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<sup>7</sup> According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory is characterized by its concretion of identity in determining what a group is (not), its reconstructability according to contemporary needs, its formation through language, ritual, pictorial representations, etc., its widespread institutional support, and finally its obligatory effect in creating a group's normative self-image (130-1).

<sup>8</sup> I am not referring to Vernon Lee's understanding of critical empathy as a combination of literary interpretation with the sensuous, affective reading experience (see Morgan), rather, I am using critical empathy as a term grounded in cultural and literary discourses about German family novels. Helmut Schmitz's version of critical empathy ("Historicism" 202), or simultaneously taking account of suffering and perpetration, is particularly suited to discussion of German suffering and is therefore used in the chapter of this study dedicated to Hans-Ulrich Treichel.

another bidirectionally. That is, protagonists engage the past and thereby gain new inlets to the future. A reverse dynamic is at play in these texts as well. An attunement to the future in contemporary literature enables discovery and negotiation of non-traumatic ties to the past. Amir Eshel calls this type of open-ended engagement with the past “futurity,” which he explains as an open-ended process of becoming by which questions of identity, responsibility, and empathy are engaged. Moreover, Eshel suggests, “[b]y revisiting some of the darkest moments of modernity,” the literary texts “make us aware of our own role in the writing of our lives” (Eshel, *Futurity* 5). The authors examined in this dissertation take stock of and at the same time try to orient themselves among traumatic and conflicted family memories of the twentieth century that are dispersed transcontinentally, if not globally. The past serves as a source, no matter how ambiguous, of identity from which to draw. The authors, in the process of negotiating that ambiguity in their writing, engage in private acts of remembrance that nevertheless become part of unified Germany’s cultural memory. The ongoing negotiation of and orientation among past, present, future, and in different national and cultural contexts that expand beyond Germany, means that authors are no longer necessarily haunted or overcome by traumatic family pasts. The tentative agency of subjects orienting themselves in the past and present through the mode of travel allow non-traumatic connections to the past to emerge.

### **Memory on the Move: Transnational and Transcultural Frameworks**

Literary returns or new engagements with family memory of the war and postwar periods have increasingly been unfolding through travel beyond Germany in novels published since 1989. This indicates, as Eigler notes, a shift from national to transnational approaches underway in literature in the last two decades in order to, among other things, negotiate notions of belonging within increasingly interconnected historical narratives (“Beyond” 80). I argue that

this also impacts the way authors negotiate connections to family pasts that are implicated within these larger, interconnected historical narratives. Katharina Gerstenberger also observes an increasing amount of plots “that link German locales with international sites both in the past and in the present” (99). Travel as a recurring theme, mode, and discourse in the exploration of family pasts seems to affirm Eigler’s intuition about a transnational turn underway in literature.

In the four novels at the center of this study protagonists who were born into and grew up in postwar Germany travel after 1989 to different national contexts that are of relevance to their respective family pasts. We thus find a “great internal heterogeneity of cultural remembering within the nation-state” owing to “fuzzy edges of national memory [...] that have emerged through travel, trade, war, and colonialism” (Erll, “Travelling” 8). In other words, forced and voluntary movements of peoples both in the past and present inform Germany’s cultural memory. WWII, in particular, and the various displacements it precipitated are reflected in the open-ended and contingent shaping of cultural memory via recent German literature.

The protagonists’ various routes of spatial displacement in the form of travel exemplify what Erll calls “travels’ of memory” (“Travelling” 11). Following Eigler and Gerstenberger, I do not abandon the national framework<sup>9</sup> here, but Erll makes a persuasive case for thinking beyond the national and toward the *transcultural* when it comes to memory.<sup>10</sup> The four novels in question engage both the transnational and transcultural to varying degrees in that they reveal the nation-state as no longer “isomorphic with national culture and a national cultural memory” (Erll, “Travelling” 6). The nation state is thus a less relevant constituent of the broader, more

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<sup>9</sup> See Radstone who also argues the significance of national specificity.

<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity, Rothberg usefully differentiates between transnational and transcultural: “...transcultural memory refers to the hybridization produced by the *layering* of historical legacies that occurs in the traversal of *cultural* borders, while transnational memory refers to the *scales* of remembrance that intersect in the crossing of *geo-political* borders” (“Multidirectional” 130).

fluid cultural memory that transcends national borders. Instead in these texts as well as in public discourses at large, “formations beyond the nation-state” are becoming increasingly relevant for “cultural remembering.” These formations render the nation a space across and beyond which “carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory” wander (Erll, “Travelling” 6). I foreground these imaginary transnational and transcultural routes in my exploration of memory work in post-1989 literature in order to show how authors negotiate affective proximity and distance to the past and are thus carving out more agency than commonly ascribed to postmemory work.

The national framework is not the only collective that breaks down or is reconfigured through travel. Citing the family framework as an example, Erll challenges Maurice Halbwach’s notion of collective memory as limited to homogeneous and “essentially non-transcultural” “social communities” (“Travelling” 10). Indeed, in the novels under investigation in this dissertation, the family framework becomes more dynamic and reveals its fissures in travel. Travel is the occasion for negotiating the binding and separating forces in the past of the smaller family unit that is embedded in larger historical shifts. As mentioned before, the individual, the family, and the nation are structural hallmarks of the family novel (Assmann, “Limits” 34). This genre is therefore the site at which these various constituents are being negotiated. The novels analyzed in this dissertation reflect the family or the nation as tentative sources of orientation that had become unhinged or ‘unhomed’ through forced displacements during the war (Rothberg, “Multidirectional” 129). Through traveling, however, second-generation protagonists revisit these displaced family pasts anew through contemporary transcultural itineraries in order to locate them and their meaning, albeit tentatively, in the present. For example, the family past is the main reason for Ruge’s protagonist to travel to Mexico, as his grandmother had spent her

antifascist exile there during the war. While there, the street performance of a Mexican song he had enjoyed with his grandmother during his childhood in the early GDR, connects the East German past and his own experience of it with a song about Mexican nationalism and with the contemporary instance of travel in the present.

I draw on the transnational and transcultural discourses in these family novels to examine how different itineraries of displacement figure into “mnemonic processes unfolding across and beyond cultures” (Erl, “Travelling” 6) and, in turn, how familial memory, as presented in German literature, renders the framework of family itself transnational and transcultural.

### **Why Family?**

German reunification ushered in not only a broader renegotiation of conflicting East-West historical narratives, but also a notable proliferation of literary renegotiations of family memory that unfold through multiple and varied itineraries after 1989.<sup>11</sup> Helmut Schmitz notes a “shift towards a communicative and family-centered memory” and thus also an “emotionalization” of history (“Introduction” 5).<sup>12</sup> This shift can be attributed to the disappearance of a way of life and of understanding history and the world (Buck-Morss 2), and to the disappearance of wartime witnesses (Schmitz, “Introduction” 5). Although scholars have voiced caution against using the family lens to revisit historical events, this study resists the conclusion that the family framework portrayed in post-1989 novels is myopic or privatizing. Rather than assuming that these novels “emotionalize” history without critical distance, I show

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<sup>11</sup> See Assmann “Limits” 34, Schaumann 228, and Fuchs and Cosgrove 2.

<sup>12</sup> Though he refers particularly to the representation of German victimhood in the context of WWII, one may arguably extend this to memory literature that deals also with family pasts entangled in German perpetration, Jewish victimization, and so on.

that they use the special positioning of the second generation in the postmemory framework in order to shuttle between emotional connection and critical distance regarding their parents' past.

The family is one of many social units that interlock and influence one another. Hirsch justifies the importance of the family sphere in postmemory despite its potential for too much individualization and therefore over-identification (Hirsch, *Generation* 39). She reasons that the dynamics of larger collectives are reflected in the familial collective and vice versa (*Generation* 35). On the one hand, the family is but one social framework through which to explore how history affects individuals and with which to orient oneself in the windfall of political and cultural changes. On the other hand, the family is itself unstable and unreliable, for especially in the context of war and postwar histories it is torn apart both spatially and discursively.<sup>13</sup>

In this study, the family as an analytical category is not presented by any means as a monolithic point of reference through which to confront the past. The family is a social, cultural, and ideological construct<sup>14</sup> subject to rifts created not only by spatial displacement but also discursive disagreements, caused here by larger cultural movements, such as that of the 68-er generation, that challenge a biological understanding of family relationships.<sup>15</sup> The novels from the second generation that have been published since 1989 are returning to and revising intergenerational conflicts from prior decades.

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<sup>13</sup> Angelika Bammer's essay "Mother Tongues" in her edited volume thus also informs my thinking of Hirsch's postmemory, as the notion of displacement is explored in a variety of ways, including its pertinence to the family "when [it] has been uprooted or otherwise [unhinged] from its cultural moorings," (92) therefore indicating the family as precarious construct.

<sup>14</sup> See Hirsch's *Family Frames*, in which she uses photography to show the family as an ideological construct. Also useful here is Rothberg's explanation in "Multidirectional" (132) that "...families are not organic entities but are hybrid, social-biological formations whose relations vary both within and across cultural contexts."

<sup>15</sup> Discursive intergenerational conflicts overwrite or trump biological notions of belonging, i.e., the family. Biological bonds are broken via intergenerational discourses and cultural movements; see Weigel. Family itself is rendered in these novels as a construction that can be questioned, undermined, placed in jeopardy, or emphasized at any time.

In light of the gradual disappearance of the parent generation, authors of the second generation are searching for ways to revisit their previously held notions of their respective family pasts. They thereby create, through writing, posthumous relationships with the parent generation. This shows a self-reflexive dimension in postmemory work that challenges more rigid notions of generational movements, associating, for example, the second generation only with the student movement of the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> What this study aims to show, in contrast, is that contemporary German literature attests to a development in the second generation vis-à-vis the disappearing first generation, in which the second generation adopts a more personal and reflective approach to exploring the family past (Assmann, *Das neue* 51). The confrontational tones of the 1960s, and to a certain extent the 1970s and 1980s, have thus been exchanged for a softer approach that yet still resists what Schmitz calls the “emotionalization” of history (“Introduction” 5) by maintaining critical distance.<sup>17</sup> As the novels at the center of this study show, the disappearance of the previous generation prompts the second generation to begin searching for a point of reconnection to the parent generation. This is done through travel to the places pertinent to forced spatial displacements of the (grand)parent generation during or after the war. Traveling to such places is thus a way to make up for lost opportunities for communicative memory and thoughtful intergenerational exchange at the end of the twentieth century when many from the parent generation have passed away.

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<sup>16</sup> Helmut Schmitz observes that “In contrast to the student movement of 1968, which drew a sharp line between themselves and their parents, the third generation is concerned with family genealogy and the exploration of the haunting legacies of the past” (“Introduction” 5). This may be an unfair assessment of the second generation. Schmitz seems to suggest here that the second-generation attitude has ossified in the 1960s without changing since, while the third generation has continued the task of exploring family pasts in a more detached, objective way. Detached observation is not always the case with the third generation, however. Sociologist Harald Welzer and his team’s study “Opa war kein Nazi” serves as a case in point to show that subjective views can be carried through to the third generation.

<sup>17</sup> More generally, Huyssen characterizes the 1960s in the United States and Europe as a “culture of confrontation” in art and “in the streets” (*After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986, 189).

The second generation's search<sup>18</sup> for new understandings of the family past prompts a physical search through travel. A search, insofar as it does not necessarily connote an endpoint reached, can be seen here as both a textual and spatial process of return. Hirsch's "*narrative of return*" illuminates the layered experiential contact brought about by the generation after's displacement to another context connected to the family past. She defines the narrative of return as one "in which a Holocaust survivor, accompanied by an adult child, returns to his or her former home in Eastern Europe, or in which children of survivors return to find their parents' former homes, to 'walk where they once walked'" (*Generation* 205). Given the rapidly disappearing first generation, the latter case of survivor's children embarking alone on such journeys is becoming more prevalent. Hirsch has come up with the notion of surrogation in which "those of us living in the present do not take the place of the dead but live among or alongside them" (*Generation* 214).

Hirsch's "narrative of return" is therefore quite spatial because of its manifestation in travel. I would like to suggest, however, that we use this term not only as a spatial trope but as a textual concept as well. I explore here the post-war generation's *narrative* of return in its written form, whether fictionally or autobiographically. The textual dimension of the narratives of return in German literature are shown through a return to earlier modes of interpretation via writing.

Hirsch's narrative of return is also obviously linked to family pasts touched by victimization, especially through the Holocaust.<sup>19</sup> Two different dimensions emerge in this study, however. For one, the generations after, but particularly the second generation, within Hirsch's

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<sup>18</sup> Georg Langenhorst, in his article from the mid-1990s on the notion of "Vatersuche," or search for the father, focuses solely on sons posthumously confronting fathers and mothers in their respective Väter- and Mütter-Büchern (25).

<sup>19</sup> Hirsch does, however, at various moments in "Generation" point out that postmemory applies to pasts of perpetration as well. See also McGlothlin.



postmemory framework are arguably victims of pasts whose effects are ambivalently indirect but still felt. This study invites rethinking of postmemory's focus on impasses and entanglements by showing that the generation after, through writing, reclaims its agency, maintains perspective in the present, and imagines visions for the future. All of these possibilities are enabled and inspired by encounters with the past through the mode of travel.

Another new dimension to the narrative of return embodied in the four texts studied here is that it may also include returns to pasts of perpetration from the second-generation perspective. Though Hirsch's narrative of return focuses on memories of victimhood, it is also applies to the way in which the second generation in some of these novels revisits, via writing, what were thought to be clear perpetrator positionalities brought forth by the 68er-generation. That is, within the context of this study, while the second generation imagines physical returns to pertinent spaces of the family past by using travel in its writing, it also narratively return to previously held notions of who the victims and perpetrators were. This is not to say that positionalities are suddenly reversed. In fact, the novels arguably question rigid notions of victimhood and perpetration. Through the process of writing, the authors unravel and critically examine older narratives of victimhood and perpetration vis-à-vis the first generation. The authors, through their works, come to nuanced understandings of the parents' experiences and positionalities which themselves were constituted by forced displacements due to war. While in the post-war years, the second generation had shaped public discourses regarding notions of victim and perpetrator, now, authors from that same generation rework these categories as more fluid and unstable like the first-generation experiences themselves. The travel aspect in their texts reveals this process' tentativeness.

Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Anatolin*, for example, probes the meanings of and boundaries between victim and perpetrator through the second-generation protagonist in what I call the poetics of the search. In the poetics of the search, the autobiographical protagonist searches for a family narrative from which to create his own autobiography. On a broader level, this poetics of the search is constituted by explicit references to Treichel's previous texts and their protagonists (Stephan in *Menschenflug* 2005 and the narrator in *Der Verlorene* 1998). More specifically, the poetics of the search in *Anatolin* appears through a self-reflexive engagement with family memory and earlier discursive tendencies in German society. For instance, there is not only a narrative of return in the spatial sense to a part of Poland that the Germans had once seized. There is also a narrative of return in the textual sense to what two particular words "Lastenausgleich" (compensation for burden) and "Warthegau" (district of Poland controlled by the Nazi regime) mean and meant to *Anatolin*'s autobiographical protagonist. He thinks back to what these words meant to him in childhood and young adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s as opposed to their meaning in middle adulthood now. The narrative reveals these words' connotations that change over time to reflect shifting stances towards the parent generation as victims, perpetrators, and, later, a complex mix of both. To be sure, the second generation does not completely do away with earlier attitudes towards the war generation, rather it revisits and in some ways revises them. In *Anatolin*, travel to Poland and Ukraine coincides with rethinking intergenerational relationships and how they are inflected with broader postwar discourses. Just as wartime memories gain dimension through their topographical renderings in the "surrogate" travel presented in these novels, the respective authors gain dimension in their particular views

of the parents' implication into history as something more multi-faceted than previously thought.<sup>20</sup>

When considering Hirsch's "narrative of return" or Sigrid Weigel's idea of a traumatic event to which all subsequent history refers (265), it may seem that family novels from the second generation are fixated on the past. There are forward-looking gestures as well, however. In spite of the dynamics in postmemory that imply intergenerational continuity within a family, Weigel's notion of generation helps to keep in mind that ruptures are inherent in postmemory and that these ambiguities pose epistemological and affective difficulties to the generations after. These very obstacles may nevertheless be what constitute a look to the future if we emphasize postmemory as an ongoing process liberated from the specific aim of ascertaining truth and knowledge (Gwyer 148, 151).<sup>21</sup> Past and present need not be at odds with one another. Though there is travel back in historical time in the novels explored in this study, the travel back in time, its resulting discoveries, and its obstacles are precisely what enable the searching protagonists to find tentative grounding in the present and future. Particularly in the chapter on Eugen Ruge's novel *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, it is apparent more than anywhere else that new impulses are discovered that move the contemporary German literary scene forward, and indeed, as I argue, out of the post-1989 period and beyond the classification as post-1989 literature.

No longer reading the novels in this study as fixating on the past,<sup>22</sup> I follow the approaches of Amir Eshel and Linda Hutcheon who view past and future as temporalities in

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<sup>20</sup> Treichel's example brings to mind what I see as a productive juxtaposition in the textual narrative of return between denotation and connotation. While at any given time a denotation is an established, perhaps unquestioned definition and charges a word with a particular meaning or register, in retrospect, what was once a denotation gives way to a more fluid, evolving connotation. In other words, denotations are retrospectively deconstructed when taking into account the discursive context that enveloped and supported the denotation at that time.

<sup>21</sup> This an emphasis that Hirsch intends in her idea of postmemory as well. See, for example, chapter 2 in *Generation* or McGlothlin 11.

<sup>22</sup> See Eshel, *Futurity* 176-182 for an overview of the debates and these scholars' positions. Huyssen in *Present Pasts* argues a fixation on the past as a source of comfort for a dizzying present and unpredictable future (Eshel,

dialogue with one another (Hutcheon 19)<sup>23</sup> or tied together (Eshel, *Futurity* 179). Eshel notes Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Eelco Runia's focus on the present that, in its intertwining with the past, is actually productive for thinking about avenues opening up to the future (*Futurity* 179-80). Drawing on this line of thinking, I highlight how past, present, and future intermingle with one another in bidirectional lines of influence in the family novels explored here. No one part overcomes the other, and their relations change within the mode of travel highlighted in my reading of the novels.

There are two coinciding trajectories of departures, arrivals, and returns present in the novels from Honigmann, Maron, Treichel, and Ruge: (grand)parents' forced displacements in circumstances of war in the twentieth century and second-generation voluntary travel or emigration at the turn of the twenty-first century. En route to, within, and across these seemingly distant places, "past and present coexist in layered fashion, and their interaction is [at times] dominated by objects, [letters and photographs] that provoke deep body memory, and the affects [the interaction] triggers" (Hirsch, *Generation* 218).<sup>24</sup> The four family novels from the second generation continuously negotiate critical empathy or the affective proximity and distance between two different temporalities and experiences of displacement through the mode of travel. The mode of travel works in this negotiation to confront protagonists with their own earlier postwar memories of interaction with the first generation. This, in turn, is the first step towards achieving, often posthumously, critical empathy to the first generation's wartime experiences of traumatic, forced displacement.

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*Futurity* 176), while Jameson, Eagleton, Badiou, Zizek, and other critics in the Neo-Marxist tradition suggest a "diminishing sense of the 'historical past'" (Eshel, *Futurity* 177).

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Eshel, *Futurity* 179.

<sup>24</sup> Hirsch, *Generation* 218. See also Sheller and Urry 216 for body/affect as a vehicle through which to experience mobility.

Given the disappearance of the first generation and the previous world order known as the Cold War, objects play a particularly crucial role in re-evaluating intergenerational relationships and also, on a larger scale, negotiating the interconnections among past, present, and future. The past of the divided Germany, for example, persists in cultural memory and in physical traces, yet the political and social order of the present accentuates the pastness of divided Germany. Objects are therefore the site for negotiating the extent to which a generation or era is truly gone. At the same time, though, the objects accrue new meanings when traveling protagonists engage them anew in various national and cultural contexts. Objects play a significant role in rendering German cultural and communicative memory transnational and transcultural.

### **Why Post-1989?: Study Methodology and Contributions**

In this dissertation, I conduct close readings of the protagonists' travel back in history to pertinent spaces of family memories related to the time during and/or after the war. Exploring these temporal and spatial aspects of proximity and distance informs my analysis of how contemporary authors negotiate an emotional proximity and critical distance to traumatic family pasts from within the postmemory framework. The close readings are inflected with theoretical insights from memory and literary studies, and the interpretations are also contextualized and historically grounded in post-war and post-unification German memory discourses.

The four texts in this study were all published after 1989. They portray and thereby revisit wartime and post-wartime spaces that are related, to varying degrees, to Germany's divided past. In fact, Honigmann, Maron, Treichel, and Ruge were all born into and grew up in the divided postwar Germany. All, except Treichel, are from the former East Germany. It is therefore plausible that the year 1989 marks a pivotal event not only in German history but also

in the lives and careers of these authors. The memory of the GDR or, more generally, memory of the divided Germany is at stake in each of their novels. The following gives an overview of the broader post-war discourses in both East and West Germany that influenced not only the public post-1989 memory discourses, but also the writers' transnational engagements with the past that are explored in this study.

The fall of the Berlin Wall signaled the end of an over forty-year historical and discursive division between East and West, in which both East and West Germany, if for different reasons, evaded frank confrontation with the Nazi past by casting blame on one another (Niven, *Facing* 5). The writers investigated in this study were born as early as 1941 (Monika Maron) and as late as 1956 (Hans-Ulrich Treichel). They were therefore at least young adults in the late 1960s when a new cultural and political shift in both Germanys, but especially in the West, took place. The Federal Republic of (West) Germany (FRG), especially in 1968, experienced an uprising commonly known as the '68-er generation in which young people, mainly students, began to question the role that members of the first generation played during the war. As the *Väterliteratur* genre of the 1960s and 1970s shows, such challenges on behalf of the second generation also took shape in family spheres, in which "eine quasi biologische Trennlinie gezogen [wurde],"<sup>25</sup> and the younger generation refused to "inherit" onus of the injustices committed by those before them (Koenen 300).

Opposition took place on universities in East Germany as well, though it began much earlier and continued in spurts over the next decades.<sup>26</sup> In the tentative years immediately following the war, student demands were aimed toward freedom of opinion, press, and political

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<sup>25</sup> "an essentially biological line of separation was drawn."

<sup>26</sup> Sigrid Meuschel, however, points out the relatively quiet dissent in the GDR in comparison to other countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia, for example, which saw multiple uprisings (9).

affiliation, to name a few, rather than toward first-generation wartime culpability (Ammer 145). Moreover, due to increasing censors and restrictions, especially with the official establishment of the GDR in 1949, such movements were forced to dissipate or go underground only to resurface briefly during the “thaw” of the mid-1950s (Ammer 145). In the 1970s and 1980s, oppositional organizations inspired by the BRD’s 68-er movement and the Communist reformers in Prague began to crop up (Poppe, Eckert, and Kowalczyk 20), demanding freedom of speech, press, ability to form non-Communist political parties, academic and pedagogic freedom, and student self-governance (Ammer 145).

Beginning in the 1980s, calls to acknowledge German suffering emerged,<sup>27</sup> but discussions were at that time often steeped in tensions and discursive patterns of ‘East and West.’<sup>28</sup> While widespread discussion of German suffering began taking shape in West Germany in the 1980s, the previously marginalized topic of Jews as the primary targeted group for extermination by the Nazis drew to the center of official memory discourse of East Germany, and dissidents called for a “frank confrontation” with the past (Herf 364). As the Berlin Wall fell, two German states with differing trajectories for dealing with the past were now charged with negotiating their respective identities and approaches to the war and its aftermath. However, negotiation implies two or more equal parties who assert interests and make concessions, essentially coming to a mutual compromise, but this did not so much turn out to be the case in the reunification process.

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<sup>27</sup> Here, I am especially thinking of the West German historiography’s impasse known as the Historians’ Debate, in which conservative historians questioned the uniqueness of the Holocaust and cited earlier gruesome precedents set by the Soviet Union (Herf 359) in an effort to relieve Germans of their burdensome past and achieve a degree of normalcy (Herf 335).

<sup>28</sup> I refer here specifically to Ronald Reagan’s controversial 1985 address at the Bitburg cemetery in which, by commemorating *Wehrmacht* soldiers, he united West Germans and Americans in the front against Communism. See Niven, *Facing* 106.

The asymmetrical political powers during and after unification led to a reduction, if not dismissal, of GDR politics and culture. Wolfgang Schäuble, former leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in 1989/90 and Minister of the Interior, made this post-unification imbalance clear in his address to East Germans amidst the negotiations of the unification treaty:

My dear citizens, what is taking place here is the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, and not the other way around. [...] We do not wish callously to ignore your wishes and interests. However, we are not seeing here the unification of two equal states.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of the now accepted political incorporation of East German states into the Federal Republic, scholars like Julia Hell have argued that because of the “absorption” of the GDR into FRG (Hell 5), the literary culture of the former has been reduced to a notion of totalitarianism that “does not take individual actions into account, [and] the gradation of conformity and resistance that were underway” (Hell 6). Invocations of “totalitarian” modes when referencing East Germany tend to segue into what Paul Cooke criticizes as the “problematical equation of the GDR with the Nazi dictatorship,” (Cooke 12) which assumes that the country espoused an authoritarian ideology rather than developing an antifascist, socialist vision that aimed for greater equality. In this vein, Benjamin Robinson likewise challenges scholarship’s tendency towards a “‘totalitarian’ understanding of the social fantasy” since it “forecloses the recognition that the socialist project was composed of many desires and rational interests,” (Robinson 17) though, to be sure, it did have its fallacies and blind spots.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Qtd. in Cooke 4.

<sup>30</sup> See Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*.



Though West Germans also had to adjust to the effects of reunification and an “accelerated globalization” (Fuchs, James-Chakraborty, Shortt 11), East Germans faced radically overturned “post-war assumptions about history, ideology, and the future” (Fuchs, James-Chakraborty, Shortt 11). The “epochal change of 1989/90” (Huysen “Diaspora and Nation” 147-148) explains the rather somber, if not apocalyptic, public discourses about the collapsed socialist state, its continued artistic representations, and their lacunae. Modes of loss, trauma, and disorientation seem to predominate postunification culture of the 1990s.<sup>31</sup> However, by engaging war and post-war memories anew, the second-generation authors studied here depart from traumatic relations to the past that critics have noticed in literary and film representations since unification.

Charity Scribner, for instance, invokes a somber tone indicated already in her appropriately titled *Requiem for Communism* which “examines a set of key texts, artworks, and films which convey the currents of mourning and melancholia that are stirring both sides of Europe today” (9). In a similar psychoanalytic vein, Alison Lewis (“Unity”) analyzes German unification in terms of trauma apparent in failed dialogue between intellectuals after 1989. The demise and subsequent diminishing of the complexity of GDR politics and culture also exacerbated the “profound disorientation and disappointment” (David Williams 105) that East German artists, intellectuals, and writers felt, even long after the fall of the Wall.<sup>32</sup>

Such feelings and structures of displacement in the wake of the larger geopolitical shifts and “memory contests” (Fuchs and Cosgrove 1) in reunified Germany from the 1990s to the present may explain the literary shift in focus toward more privatizing modes of the family.<sup>33</sup> In

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<sup>31</sup> See also Buck-Morss; Rutschky; Pinkert “Vacant History” 268.

<sup>32</sup> See also Hell 251.

<sup>33</sup> For more on the proliferation of family novels after 1989, see Assmann, “Limits” 34, Schaumann 228, and Fuchs and Cosgrove 2.

the post-1989 novels examined in this dissertation, I demonstrate that remembrance of the divided German past from the standpoint of second-generation authors in reunified Germany reflects recent tendencies in German memory discourses to reinterpret, if not re-write, the history of the GDR, the BRD, and, even earlier, the Third Reich (Beßlich, Grätz, and Hildebrand 7).

Broadly speaking, memory discourses about the GDR tend to fall between “Ostalgie”<sup>34</sup> or nostalgia for the East and, as mentioned before, the conflation of the GDR with the Third Reich (Pence and Betts 6).<sup>35</sup> “Ostalgie” has been accused of retrospectively “sanitizing GDR reality and selectively championing aspects of ‘everyday life’” (David Williams 105). The concept has also acquired critical depth, however. According to David Williams, some scholars assert that “Ostalgie” reflects “a desire to preserve minimal continuity with ... pre-Wende lives” in the disorienting and disappointing aftermath of the reunification process increasingly perceived as annexation (105).

Given the dizzying effects of an unequal unification process, Ostalgic tendencies, even reconstructive nostalgia, are plausible,<sup>36</sup> but in the texts studied here, the depictions of travel to the former GDR, Poland, or Ukraine do not represent a longing for re-emersion in a political order that no longer exists. The aspect of travel in the investigated novels unlocks or detaches the re-engaged family memories from the revisited and recollected spaces. In fact, each novel in its

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<sup>34</sup> For a critical discussion on Ostalgie, see, for example, Thompson, chapter 3 of David Williams, and Fuchs “Ostalgie.” Fuchs, James-Chakraborty, and Shortt point out a “Westalgie” as well: “Westalgia has emerged as a variety of historical nostalgia that communicates the historical discontent of those who have been left behind by the declining welfare state and a global economic crisis and who therefore fetishize a better past that seemed to promise a very different future” (10). Paul Cooke paradoxically locates “Westalgie” in the former East in which “artists can nostalgically rediscover what is for them a more ethical value system, which they feel was part of the *West* German culture before 1989, and which they then use to critique the late-capitalist, consumer-drive post-unification state” (14).

<sup>35</sup> See also Konrad Jarausch’s edited volume *Dictatorship as Experience*.

<sup>36</sup> Boym “Estrangement” (512) defines reconstructive nostalgia as one type of nostalgia that “stresses the nostos” or home, “emphasizing the return to that mythical place somewhere on the island of Utopia...where the ‘greater patria’ has to be rebuilt.”

post-1989 hindsight shows these memories and, at times, their symbolic memory objects move about with the protagonists, interacting and being shot through with other national and cultural contexts. For example, in a section of *Anatolin*, Treichel's autobiographical protagonist narrates his travels to the father's birthplace in today's Ukraine. While there, imagined memories of the father's idyllic childhood in the rural Ukrainian landscape juxtapose and mix with the narrator's own less-than-idyllic memories of childhood back in Ostwestfalen in West Germany of the 1950s. Honigmann's protagonist tries, in the 1980s, to imagine the parents' wartime exile in Paris against the backdrop of her own problematic relationship with her father in East Germany. Here, memory objects play a significant role. The protagonist uses the father's unanswered letters as another backdrop in Paris against which to contemplate her family past. She hides and tries to ignore the letters only to take them back out and lay them flat, in spite or perhaps because of their sparse tangential references to the Holocaust.

The texts' withholding of nostalgic tendencies does not mean, however, that they participate in what Martin Sabrow calls "dictatorship memory." This type of memory discourse about the GDR focuses on the "Macht- und Repressionsapparat des kommunistischen Regimes" (Sabrow 16).<sup>37</sup> The texts do not dismiss or discredit the role that the former GDR or other East European countries play in their portrayed engagements with family memory. In fact, their engagement with postmemories from wartime traumas depend on memory of the divided German past. The texts therefore respond to debates about competition and conflation between GDR and Third Reich memory after 1989 in Germany.

Aleida Assmann's reflections on the place that the Third Reich and the GDR take in contemporary German memory discourses relate to the ways in which the four texts here engage

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<sup>37</sup> "dictatorship-centered memory"; "power and repression apparatus of the regime." See also Kim 336.

memory of the GDR and/or the Third Reich and the Holocaust to differing degrees. The main thrust of Assmann's argument seems to caution against the broad dismissal of East Germany as a continuation of the Third Reich in light of its violations of human rights.<sup>38</sup> She observes that memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust has taken the form of *Vergangenheitsbewahrung* or preservation of the past, whereas GDR memory culture is based on the principle of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the sense of finally overcoming the past (Assmann, *Das neue* 115). Assmann argues that the victims of state terror should be incorporated, next to victims of the Holocaust, within a more transnational network of memory (*Das neue* 122). She suggests that remembrance of victims of Communism and Stalinism has not yet been recognized on a larger, pan-European scale because of intranational competition between Nazi and GDR memory in the German context (122). Assmann's logic seems to be that if these memories cease to be rivals in the German context, they can acquire equal acknowledgement within the "gesamteuropäische Erinnerung" or pan-European memory. Finally, if that happens, both memories can only strengthen Europe's current ethical and political platform for human rights.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "In Deutschland deutet man die zweite Diktatur vor dem Hintergrund der ersten, empfindet sie zugleich aber auch als einen problematischen Konkurrenten der ersten. Wenn wir über die DDR reden, sind oft ... gewisse Vorannahmen über die NS-Zeit mit im Spiel. Obwohl diese historischen Epochen in der Geschichte klar genug getrennt sind und ganz entscheidende Unterschiede aufweisen, rutschen sie im nationalen Gedächtnis immer wieder zusammen, wo das eine Ereignis als Schatten, Schema und vor allem: Konkurrent des anderen wahrgenommen wird" (In Germany one interprets the second dictatorship against the backdrop of the first but at the same time senses that it is a problematic competitor with the first. When we talk about the GDR, certain assumptions about the National Socialist period often play a role. Even though these historical epochs are clearly enough separated in history and indicate marked differences, they continue to slide closer together in the national memory where the one event is perceived as a shadow, a scheme, and, above all, competitor of the other, *Das neue* 112). Gal Kirn summarizes the differences to keep in mind when analyzing Nazi Germany and East Germany: "The differences between communism and fascism relate to various dimensions: different political forms (the organization of the working class or the nation), ideas (social justice and equality or the purity of ethnic and racial subjects), the relationship between Party and masses, and forms of terror" (334-5).

<sup>39</sup> "Eine Erinnerungskultur, die die stalinistische/kommunistische Opfererfahrung mit der Holocaust-Erinnerung verbindet, könnte das europäische Credo für Menschenrechte stärken und die Europäer vor Rückfällen in Gewaltverherrlichung und autokratische Strukturen schützen" (A memory culture that joins the Stalinist/Communist

While Assmann warns against conflation between the GDR and the Third Reich in memory discourses, one might conclude that her further ruminations such as those above hint toward precisely that. By categorically joining the Nazi dictatorship with the postwar dictatorship, whether explicitly or implicitly, the future of GDR memory in public discourses becomes trapped between two problematic ways to proceed. On the one hand, including memory of the GDR into the injunction to “master” the German past implies moving *forward* in the sense of forgetting and starting anew. On the other hand, combining memory of the GDR with memory of the Nazi past by highlighting their, albeit very different, human rights violation in the name of a precautionary *Vergangenheitsbewahrung* is equally problematic. In spite of good intentions to strengthen human rights advocacy, this approach equally misplaces memory of East Germany along with the Third Reich. It also fails to account for the complexity and nuance that several scholars and the authors in question here show.

The texts by Honigmann, Maron, Treichel, and Ruge provide a way out of this impasse in memory discourses. The texts, through travel, project back in time to the Cold War period. But it does not end there; remembering the Cold War period is not the overall objective of these texts. Instead, remembering the Cold War period is a means to project even further back to WWII and engage wartime postmemories. In this way, the texts show a different type of *Vergangenheitsbewahrung* that is not precautionary and not necessarily associated with pan-European memory of totalitarianism. And by imagining travel to the former East Germany, Poland, or Ukraine in texts after reunification, the authors in question are not just returning to family memory either. These texts have broader implications, as they reflect, negotiate, and comment on the various ways the GDR is remembered or not in larger memory discourses in

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victim experience with Holocaust memory could strengthen the European credo for human rights and protect the Europeans from regressing into glorification of violence and autocratic structures, *Das neue* 123).

unified Germany. Revisiting these contexts through contemporary instances of travel breathes new life into these memory discourses and brings them out of modes of trauma, loss, and nostalgia. By negotiating non-traumatic ties to family pasts through open-ended engagement, the travel protagonists, in turn, also negotiate a relationship to the divided German past that accounts for the GDR's pastness yet also repurposes it for the present and future challenges. These challenges themselves not only affect Germany but the European continent or even the globe. Here, I am thinking of terrorism, social inequality, and other events that trigger further contemporary displacements in various forms. These texts engage memory of past displacements precipitated, for example, through war, thus engendering modes of attending to displacements of various forms that persist and develop today and will do so in the future.

Future-oriented impulses in these texts can be traced in the way they negotiate the relationship between WWII/Third Reich and the GDR. Travel to places pertinent to the family past are paradoxically the places in which the texts implicitly work out the internal tensions of German cultural memory. Narratives of return to family memory in post-1989 literature attempt to overcome the *intranational* divisiveness and competition between memory of totalitarianisms that Assmann points out (*Das neue* 122). Taking the family framework as a small-scale but significant starting point, the texts revisit longstanding *intergenerational* divisiveness and, at times, rivalry of the Cold War period. This, in turn, works through *intranational* divisiveness between GDR and Third Reich memories. The texts reveal a relationship between the two without conflating them or pitting them against one another in a zero-sum manner. The implicitly negotiated relationship between the Third Reich and the GDR in these seminal family memory novels gives both periods their recognition as distinct, yet contingent and historically specific

platforms for memories that shape the contemporary German memory landscape in interrelated ways.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, the texts examined here also engage more in depth particularly with the GDR past in its own right, independently of its relationship to Nazi Germany. By returning to family memory in these texts, a complexity emerges that shows the former GDR as more than a dictatorship. In this way, the texts add an important feature to the idea of *Vergangenheitsbewahrung*: an opening link in the GDR-Nazi gridlock constituted by travel in family novels. The mobility lens links the GDR and the Nazi past yet invites ongoing negotiation of their relationship. Family memory is therefore not just myopic or highly emotionalized; rather, it opens up a new way of thinking about and remembering the former GDR, in terms of both its productive and detrimental aspects. The texts not only reflect a significant and nuanced memory of the GDR that many scholars have advocated. More importantly, as I argue, the texts also advance the debates beyond modes of paralysis by repurposing GDR memory for the present and future.

As I have outlined above, the writers and their protagonists explored in this study perform, if to varying degrees, Eshel's notion of futurity.<sup>41</sup> This dimension works the debates about GDR remembrance out of approaches or assumptions that problematically yoke it to memory of Nazi Germany. Such future-oriented impulses in these novels are constituted by the negotiation of critical empathy while traveling through spaces significant to the family past.

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<sup>40</sup> See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*. See also Hirsch, *Generation* (206) in which she proposes a “feminist, *connective* reading that moves between global and intimate concerns by attending precisely to the intimate details, the connective tissues and membranes, that animate each case even while enabling the discovery of shared motivations and shared tropes. . . . It is *connective* rather than *comparative* in that it eschews any implications that catastrophic histories are comparable, and it thus avoids the competition over suffering that comparative approaches can, at their worst, engender.”

<sup>41</sup> Eshel, *Futurity* uses the term futurity to describe the future-oriented impulses engendered in contemporary literature by paradoxically revisiting the darkest moments of modernity, for example, the Holocaust.

Neither caught up in “Ostalgie,” loss, or trauma, nor employing “dictatorship memory” to dismiss and finally move on from the GDR era, the works under investigation here demand articulation of a new role for a non-foreclosed memory of the GDR in contemporary German literature. This new, cautiously productive role should account for literature’s continued remembrance of and engagement with the GDR past rather than its ultimate *Bewältigung*,<sup>42</sup> while at the same highlighting its visions for the future. The future visions that this engagement inspires are by no means a continuation or revival of old utopian aspirations. Rather, the orientation to the future comes from a paradoxical desire to remember the past, repurpose it for the present, and thereby face the future. Connecting the past to the present is often the motivator for travel in these texts in the first place, but sometimes travel in the present fortuitously invokes the past. Travel encounters in the present, in turn, end up doing much more by connecting, and thereby opening, the sought-after family memory to memory narratives of different times and places and/or enabling new visions in the present. This new way of seeing lies in the discrepancies between past and present, for example, between places of past exile and places of current tourism. These dynamics place the protagonists at a critical juncture in the present for negotiating a complex interrelationship among past, present, and future. This is no cause for paralysis under an overbearing responsibility, however. Out of these complex temporal interrelationships, more possibilities arise for repurposing the past, which is itself constituted by manifold displacements, to inform understanding of an increasingly transnational and transcultural present.

The role of the former East Germany and post-Soviet countries in the family pasts explored here reanimate memory of the GDR as a conduit for earlier memory. By tracing the role

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<sup>42</sup> Overcoming the past.



of these contexts in negotiating proximity and distance to traumas of WWII and intergenerational conflicts of the post-war period, memory of these spaces go from being the object of memory to being the means by which these authors connect to earlier (post)memories. Reading the former GDR memory as fluid and contingent in the instance of travel parallels protagonist engagement with memory objects in the texts. Memory objects, often from the GDR period, play an important role in keeping family memory contingent, particularly as these objects travel with protagonists. Seeing an object for the first time or returning to it again, the protagonists of the four texts studied here engage with the objects and vice versa. The bidirectional influence between protagonist and object mirrors the same bidirectional influences among protagonists in the present traveling through spaces of the past. The objects and the spaces are not particular sites of discernment, description, or inquiry. Rather, they become media that relay and absorb new meanings when traveling or traveled through.

Memory of the GDR and post-Soviet countries is reanimated and repurposed through both travel and memory artifacts to achieve non-traumatic ties to the past as well as attunements to problems in the present. The future orientation in these texts is namely that German cultural memory is opening up towards memory narratives that have emerged in other contexts. For example, *Pawels Briefe* implicitly and perhaps problematically draws comparisons between German and Polish national narratives and their respective roles in remembering or forgetting Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Through travel, new intersectionalities and divergences come into view among different memory narratives of various times and places, in the Maron chapter, for example, between Germany and Poland. My analysis of the novels at the center of this study highlights the productive ways in which these authors engage family memory in a new way that brings not only the family past but also the GDR past out of a paralyzing state of loss and

disorientation. The authors do this by taking family memory beyond German borders and situating it within a transnational and transcultural framework that includes present and future temporalities as well. The texts show that the past can be reinvigorated for tending to vulnerabilities of the present and imagining possibilities for addressing those of the future. Precisely the texts' open-endedness and the mode of travel keep them tentatively primed to productively approach future shifts, for example, in memory discourses or politics.

### **Roadmap: Chapter Overview**

The following chapters examine the specific strategies by which post-1989 texts from second-generation authors engage postmemory work on the move. In each chapter I pay particular attention to the way in which travel and objects enable or prevent connections to the family past. In chapter 1, I explore the family legacy of wartime Jewish and Communist exile in Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (1991) for its continuing intergenerational effects in post-war East Germany. The second-generation protagonist emigrates to Paris and returns to the GDR to negotiate her Jewish identity that is inseparable from post-war political identities in this particular family past. Writing in the father's exile journal is the means for an ongoing negotiation of that identity and the intergenerational relationship.

In chapter 2, I examine Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (1999) to show how political affinities and national identities can become re-inscribed when the second generation protagonist has the liberty of collecting and selecting from various letters and photographs left behind by the Polish-Jewish grandfather who perished in the Holocaust. Moreover, the autobiographical protagonist resists the foreignness that seems to threaten previous conceptions of the family past when traveling to Poland where the grandparent generation originated. Though travel to Poland further mystifies the grandfather's life story, it also alleviates the intergenerational mother-

daughter conflict. East German and West German political divisions merge or “unify” when the protagonist and her mother are displaced to another national and cultural context. That is, previous ideological divisions within this family story loosen when displaced outside of unified Germany.

Chapter 3 focuses on Hans-Ulrich Treichel’s *Anatolin* (2008). Here, I tend to the memory of flight and expulsion and argue that Treichel engages this memory in a self-reflexive and critically empathetic way that makes up what I call Treichel’s “poetics of the search.” The poetics of the search ultimately serves as a way to describe the open-ended memory work in contemporary literature from second-generation authors. By poetics of the search I refer to the continuous, self-reflexive process of writing by which protagonists, who are often autobiographical, set out to find out more about the family past. This process is deployed across Treichel’s other family novels but especially in *Anatolin*. The protagonist in this text departs from evasive approaches of other protagonists in earlier texts by embarking on a journey back in time that earlier protagonists had previously avoided or construed as a failure. Treichel’s autobiographical protagonist in *Anatolin* consults hand-drawn maps from former inhabitants of his mother’s hometown as well as travel brochures en route to Poland, as if to bridge family memory with tourist industry, flight and expulsion with the instance of travel. While in Poland, the protagonist bestows a selected house with meaning in order to establish posthumous critical empathy with the parent generation while taking care to historically contextualize German post-war flight.

Finally, in chapter 4, in Eugen Ruge’s *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011) I focus on the forward-looking gestures that move contemporary German literature out of the post-1989 era, given its publication year of 2011. While all the other novels also aspire to find some vision

for the future by working family (post)memory out of traumatic modes, Ruge's novel indicates a noticeable inclination towards new horizons. Travel to Mexico in this novel allows the second-generation to tend to intergenerational conflicts and renders memory of East Germany transcultural.

Through their various post-1989 travel itineraries, these texts depict the work of postmemory on the move that unfolds "across and beyond" cultural borders of today's unified Germany (Erll, "Travelling" 6) in order to re-engage its divided past and connect to earlier historical times. Through travel, second-generation protagonists negotiate geographical proximity and distance in order to negotiate affective proximity and distance across the generational divide inherent to postmemory. Recent German literature has shown reanimation of earlier forced displacements wrought by war, thereby recapturing, renegotiating, and reworking aspects of post-1989 German memory discourses, such as the widespread delegitimizing of the former GDR and a tendency to present Germany's past in neat and overly simplified ways.

The continued representation in post-1989 novels of the former East Germany and post-Soviet countries plays three main roles. Revisiting this era enables second-generation authors, through their protagonists, to revisit tenuous family relationships. Additionally, by remembering and/or traveling through these spaces, authors negotiate proximity and distance to wartime experiences that occurred before their own time. Finally, the texts tap into but ultimately move beyond tropes of disorientation, paralysis, profound loss, when thinking about the GDR and the former Soviet Bloc. At the same time, they also move beyond simplistic notions of mere dictatorship. The novels breathe new life into GDR memory by viewing it through a mobility paradigm in which this memory inspires and is inspired by displacement to distant places. Memories on the move become unhinged from 20<sup>th</sup> century pasts of catastrophe and are

ultimately free to establish new, non-traumatic ties to the past. Travel in these novels renders the past as something not necessarily *needed* to mend a debilitating trauma as much as it is *relied* on and productively utilized by second-generation authors.

Contemporary German literature has something to contribute in the way of new horizons for memory discourses. In this way, the present impasse in memory discourses of if, what, and how to remember in the present opens into the future. Previous ideological gridlocks for interpreting history and the world have loosened, and authors are poised to negotiate new interpretative possibilities.

For Barbara Honigmann, Monika Maron, Hans-Ulrich Treichel, and Eugen Ruge, the past is paradoxically only a point of departure for its ongoing negotiation in writing. This ongoing negotiation is becoming increasingly and productively entangled with memory narratives of other times and places. The future of contemporary German literature itself thus seems to lie in the transnational and transcultural aspects that I attempt to draw out in these four texts. Memory literature in particular shows increasing interconnection and intersectionality among various memory narratives associated with spaces both inside and outside of Germany. These interconnections brought about through transnational travel are precisely what comprise the future of the past: the ability to reimagine new bonds in times of precarity.

## **Chapter One: Being in vs. *Writing into Exile*—Postmemory in Barbara Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (A Love Made out of Nothing) (1991)**

### **Introduction**

Throughout her works, Barbara Honigmann negotiates what she herself has called her double life (“Das Schiefe,” 35-6).<sup>43</sup> The multi-faceted author’s conciliation of national/political and religious/ethnic identities has made her oeuvre particularly transnational. Honigmann was born in 1949 and grew up in East Berlin as the daughter of Jewish Communist emigres who had returned to East Germany after WWII. She expatriated from East Germany in 1984 to live in Strasbourg, France where she began writing and still resides to this day. Her texts, to varying degrees, work through national/political as well as cultural/religious identities, which seem to have influenced the way scholars have treated her oeuvre as well.

Given Honigmann’s background, scholars have striven to articulate the relationships between the author and her fictional protagonists, between Jewish identity and national background. A recent collection of essays dedicated to Honigmann’s oeuvre, for example, focuses on overarching themes and topics, such as tensions between fact and fiction<sup>44</sup> or connections between western culture and Jewish tradition<sup>45</sup> in her texts. Additionally, scholarship has been preoccupied with how to classify her as a writer. As one of the most influential German-Jewish writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the start of her writing career in the mid-1980s is associated with “d[en] Anfänge[n] einer europäischen

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<sup>43</sup> “*Doppelleben*.” All other Honigmann citations hereafter refer to primary text *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. The “*Doppelleben*,” according to Gsoels-Lorensen, suspends Honigmann “between her allegiance to German language and literature as an author writing in German, on the one hand, and her concerted efforts to reclaim an active Jewish identity moored in religious practice, on the other” (369).

<sup>44</sup> See Balint.

<sup>45</sup> See Hasenclever.

Literatur jüdischer Autorinnen und Autoren der nachgeborenen Generation” (Nolden 150).<sup>46</sup> She has been characterized as a German writer,<sup>47</sup> a European Jewish writer,<sup>48</sup> and even a global Jewish writer<sup>49</sup> with each category showing both a widening frame of classification from national to global as well as different emphases on religious and national identities. Honigmann’s work is thus embedded in a larger, transnational European scope, and rightly so, as her own biography, family past, and those of her protagonists are made up of manifold displacements that unfold across Europe and beyond. This has placed her “in die Tradition der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur” (Bannasch 134).<sup>50</sup>

I argue that in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (1991) the second-generation mirroring of the parent generation’s wartime exile, while at first a means of escape, ultimately allows the second generation to negotiate distance and proximity to the parent generation and to acknowledge both political and religious identities at stake as constitutive parts of this family legacy of exile. The main character’s move away from the German context means further repression of or escape from the identity confusion in East Germany regarding the German-Jewish past. Yet, upon brief return to the GDR, the protagonist has a more proximate understanding of her own identity as one that is marked by her father’s experience of exile. Writing in the father’s exile/return journal allows the protagonist to negotiate separation and proximity from the parent generation and to create another space. This new space generated in the father’s exile journal is namely one that is framed by the intergenerational experience of exile/return and enables a written, posthumous relationship between first and second generations.

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<sup>46</sup> “the beginning of literary production of the Jewish writer Barbara Honigmann”; “the beginnings of European literature of Jewish writers of the generation born after” (translation and all those hereafter are my own, except for Barrett’s translations of the primary text under investigation).

<sup>47</sup> See Bannasch.

<sup>48</sup> See Nolden.

<sup>49</sup> See Eshel “Barbara.”

<sup>50</sup> “in the tradition of German-language exile literature.”

In recent decades, the category of exile has developed into a vast, heterogeneous field of “verschwommene Konnotationen” (Englmann 1)<sup>51</sup> which may be attributed to the different places and experiences of exile that large groups of people have lived through. Some see exile as a leap (Israel 1) while others define it as a fall (Evelein 101), implying, through subtle semantic difference, a question of agency for one who goes into exile. Exile has also been interpreted as a solitary, existentially threatening experience of alienation,<sup>52</sup> whereas other critics highlight intellectual productivity, cooperation, and new identities that are formed through the experience.<sup>53</sup>

Particularly within studies of German exile during WWII scholars make a further distinction between antifascist and Jewish exile, though, as Ernst Loewy and others have shown, these two categories are not mutually exclusive.<sup>54</sup> Within the realms of this project, the places and certainly the forms of exile represented differ. For example, Ruge’s novel presents a case of exile motivated by political opposition to Nazi Germany, while in Honigmann’s novel exile is due to both political orientation and outside classification of religious/ethnic identity. Reading exile in Honigmann’s *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* therefore requires reading religious/ethnic identities and national/political identities together because these two different, yet inseparable, aspects form a trans- and intragenerational crisis of identity in the text that begins in post-war East Berlin and unfolds across the West into Paris.

Given the transgenerational aspect at play in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*’ portrayal of exile, I rely on Elisabeth Bronfen’s definition of exile:

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<sup>51</sup> “blurry connotations.”

<sup>52</sup> See Kaplan, also Said.

<sup>53</sup> See Evelein, Konuk, Israel.

<sup>54</sup> Ernst Loewy and others highlighted a deficit in exile scholarship of the 1990s in paying more attention not only to Jewish, rather than antifascist, exile literature but also to the idea that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. See Loewy 22-23 and also the edited volume from Itta Shedletzky and Hans Otto Horch titled *Deutsch-jüdische Exil- und Emigrationsliteratur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993).



Der Exilbegriff bezieht sich gleichsam auf eine verlängerte Abwesenheit von der Heimat aufgrund unerträglicher Verhältnisse, seien es wirtschaftliche, kulturelle, politische oder religiöse. Exil umfaßt sowohl die erzwungene wie auch die freiwillige gewählte Trennung eines Menschen von dem ihm vertrauten natürlichen Ort, und d.h. von seiner Familie, seiner Vergangenheit, seinem Erbe, von seinem gesellschaftlichen Kontext und seiner kulturellen Sprache, womit wörtlich die Muttersprache bzw. im übertragenen Sinne die angeeigneten kulturellen Regeln und Bräuche gemeint sein können. (169)<sup>55</sup>

This definition is first and foremost well-suited for my analysis of *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* to account for the forced exile of the wartime generation and the voluntary exile of the second generation from the GDR. As for the novel's portrayal of exile as a positive or negative experience, my analysis highlights the text's ambivalence by highlighting both modes.

In fact, the ambivalence of painful vs. productive exile and of political vs. Jewish exile constitutes the source of identity confusion for the wartime generation as it is presented in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. Honigmann's text portrays a return from the exile experience after which political (antifascist East German) and ethnic/religious (Jewish) facets of identity begin to cause confusion about what place one has in East German society when one is both a self-proclaimed Communist and an other-proclaimed Jew. This existential confusion, as I aim to show, carries over to the second generation that is born to East German Jewish return émigrés.

To the extent that, as Johannes Evelein puts it, the exile experience, even upon return, never really comes to an end (Evelein 174), neither does it stop at the wartime generation that

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<sup>55</sup> "The term exile refers to a quasi extended absence from the home country due to unbearable relations, whether economic, cultural, political or religious. Exile encompasses forced as well as voluntarily chosen separation of a person from their familiar, natural place and, which also means from their family, past, heritage, from their societal context and from their cultural language, with which literally, especially in terms of transfer, the assimilated cultural rules and customs can be meant."

experiences it firsthand. The first generation's identity confusion upon return carries over to the next generation as well. That is, a transgenerational sense of a double life can thus be read in the East German and Jewish identities in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. The combination of political and ethnic/religious reasons for wartime exile and the continued political assimilation upon postwar return lead to a transgenerational identity crisis, but the next generation works through this transferred existential ambiguity by embarking on its own exile experience across and outside of a still divided Germany.

*Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is a multigenerational Jewish family novel that reflects on the implication of a family past into the Holocaust. It also invites thought on the effects of exile on the next generation's ability to articulate pre- or post-war German-Jewish narratives. Gerschom Scholem gives in his 1966 "Juden und Deutsche" a historical account that traces the Holocaust back to the beginnings of Jewish assimilation into German society. The Jews' willful self-sacrifice in the name of assimilation led to a largely asymmetrical relationship with Germans that "für mehr als hundert Jahre der Beziehungen zwischen [ihnen] so charakteristisch ist" (181),<sup>56</sup> thus problematizing the idea of a historically harmonious German-Jewish "symbiosis" (180). Historian Dan Diner describes the Jewish-German relationship as a "negative symbiosis," since, "after Auschwitz," for Jews and Germans alike, "das Ergebnis der Massenvernichtung zum Ausgangspunkt ihres Selbstverständnisses geworden [ist]; eine Art gegensätzlicher Gemeinsamkeit" (185).<sup>57</sup> Simply put, while Scholem focuses on historical relations leading up to the Holocaust, Diner concentrates on relations after. Together they form a diachronic story of before and after the Holocaust, albeit from a West German point of view.

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<sup>56</sup> "that is characteristic of the relationship between them for more than one hundred years."

<sup>57</sup> "the result of mass extermination has become the point of departure of their self-understanding, a sort of opposing commonality."

What Scholem tells us of the “relations before” and what Diner’s explains of the “relations after” arguably haunt what Marianne Hirsch calls the “generation[s] after.” That is, the way in which Jewish identity is claimed, practiced, repressed, or negotiated with national and political identities potentially creates tensions, even crises, in the following generations. A crisis of identity can lead to an escapist approach, in which voluntary exile from the German context altogether is a way of claiming agency while further repressing the problematic entanglement of national and religious identities.

Scholars, such as Yfaat Weiss, discourage the application of negative symbiosis to approach Honigmann’s texts because, according to her, the term forces Honigmann into broad categories, fails to capture the complexity of her work, and approaches it with a term rooted in West German discourses, which, then, does not do the author’s East German background justice (19). I focus, as Weiss does, on the family story but not at the expense of its relation to the Holocaust. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* sheds light on intergenerational dynamics of continuity and interruption in the East German context after the war and the Holocaust.

Symbiosis, as it is portrayed in the family story of *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, reflects continuities of national, cultural, and political assimilation from centuries leading up to WWII into the years following the war. Symbiosis is particularly relevant in reading *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*’ portrayal of an exile returnee to the Soviet-occupied zone, as “many East German Jewish Communists of Jewish descent carried on the fragile German-Jewish symbiosis as if there had been no Hitler or Stalin” (Fox *Stated* 91). In fact, Karin Hartewig uses the term “red assimilation” (613) to describe the abandonment of Jewish identity in favor of a Communist identity, though this frequently occurred, particularly among intellectuals, in the first years of the

twentieth century as well (Hilzinger 37).<sup>58</sup> Anna Seghers is a prominent example to which I will occasionally return. For now, it suffices to say that Seghers, born in 1900 as Netty Reiling, not only changed her name to one sounding less Jewish,<sup>59</sup> but was also one of many who “converted” to Communism (Seghers joined the party in 1928) in the hopes of abandoning Jewish identity:

Wie für andere linke Intellektuelle jüdischer Herkunft verband sich auch für Seghers mit diesem Schritt—bewusst oder unbewusst—die Hoffnung auf die Emanzipation vom Judentum, die Aufhebung der stigmatisierten Außenseiterexistenz durch die Teilhabe am Kampf für Gleichheit und Gerechtigkeit. (Hilzinger 47)<sup>60</sup>

Jewish experience in the GDR, according to Hartewig, had been incorporated into, though at the same time marginalized within, the larger antifascist myth (466). The continued German-Jewish symbiosis in the GDR or, if one will, the “red assimilation” that is portrayed in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* leads to existential problems for the second generation that absorbs and has to deal with longstanding repression of Jewish descent and precisely with the complication that Jewish descent presents in post-war GDR society.

Negative symbiosis is reflected in the text through disjuncture in the father-daughter relationship and moments of existential threat in a society that downplays the Holocaust and its affliction specifically upon Jews. Negative symbiosis as it is given to us in this novel therefore shows not so much a societal binding of Jews to non-Jews though the Holocaust as Diner

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<sup>58</sup> See also Haller-Neumann 37-38.

<sup>59</sup> “In der Literaturgeschichte gibt es zahlreiche Beispiele von deutschen Juden und Jüdinnen, die sich als Ausdruck ihrer Assimilation einen neuen Namen gaben...Sie [Anna Seghers] wollte identifiziert und wahrgenommen werden durch ihre Texte, nicht durch ihre jüdische Herkunft” (In literary history there are countless examples of German Jews who gave themselves a new name as an expression of their assimilation...She [Anna Seghers] wanted to be identified and perceived through her texts, not through her Jewish background, Hilzinger 29).

<sup>60</sup> “As with other intellectuals of the Left with a Jewish background, this step, including for Seghers, meant—whether consciously or unconsciously—the hope for emancipation from Jewry, the casting off of a stigmatized outsider existence through participation in the struggle for equality and justice.”

explains it. Honigmann's novel instead shows a negative symbiosis in which the ethnic (Jewish) reason for exile is downplayed, forgotten, or repressed upon return to the Soviet-occupied zone after the war, even though, for many, it had been inseparable from the political (Communist) reason. In the rebuilding of the antifascist state, Jewish identity as a key factor of assimilation, deportation, and extermination gets lost, creating a void in the foundation of the new GDR that is revealed and explored in the text by Honigmann as a second-generation author.

### **Overview of novel's plot and structure**

The novel happened to be published around the same time as two pivotal events: the death of Honigmann's father and the German reunification. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* was published just one year after the death of Honigmann's father. Unlike *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, *Pawels Briefe*, and *Anatolin*, the process of writing *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* coincides, as far as we know, with the death of the author's father as well as the end of the GDR. Loosely based on Honigmann's father Georg Honigmann, the novel perhaps serves as a tribute to him and a continuation of that relationship. The way in which Honigmann has her protagonist revisit and critically reflect upon her father and his past situates *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* within the literary motif of the "Vatersuche" traced by Georg Langenhorst through German novels of the 1970s to the 1990s.

Langenhorst's 1994 article describes the motif of metaphorical and psychological search for the father that he finds in several German novels. According to him, the "Vatersuche" "schreibt [den Autor, die Autorin] von ihren Vaterkomplexen [frei], schreibt gegen die Vatergeneration [an] [und versucht] eigene Identität in Auseinandersetzung mit den Vätern zu

klären” (Langenhorst 24).<sup>61</sup> To resist the “selbsterfahrene Sprachlosigkeit”<sup>62</sup> of the parent generation who had lived through the war, Langenhorst sees “Sprach-Prägung”<sup>63</sup> through writing as the only remedy. Literature is precisely “das vorrangige Medium dieser Vatersuche” (26).<sup>64</sup> He only applies this term to West German and Austrian novels and focuses mostly on the family past entangled in Nazi collaboration, but he invites further exploration by asking whether the most recent novel he explores, from 1992, could be the last novel of this tradition of the literary search for the father (34). This is certainly not the case. Not only do *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* and the other novels from Ruge, Maron, and Treichel, illustrate much more recent literary examples of “Vatersuche,” but they also, with the exception of Treichel’s *Anatolin*, show an East German variant of it. The search for the East German father, in contrast to the West German counterpart, in this study’s archive is subject to different political and social conditions and is constituted by retrospective literary attempts to make sense of the familial father within and/or to separate him from antifascist ideology. Moreover, this particular novel from Honigmann expounds upon Langenhorst’s brief mention of the perspective of Nazi *victims* in the “Vatersuche.”

*Eine Liebe aus Nichts* spans not only the death of Honigmann’s father, but also the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and Germany’s subsequent reunification in 1990. The novel is thus uniquely positioned in both pre- and post-unification times, as it was ostensibly written before November 1989 and published later in 1991. The novel conjures up what had, at that time, been a fresh memory of the recently vanished ideological narrative and geopolitical landscape. In this way, *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is arguably one of the first novels to commemorate the split Germany

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<sup>61</sup> “Writes [them] out of their father complex, writes against the father generation, and tries to figure out own identity while confronting the fathers.”

<sup>62</sup> “firsthand experience of silence.”

<sup>63</sup> “the imbuelement of language.”

<sup>64</sup> “the primary medium of the search for the father.”

in literary form. While the appearance of Honigmann's first collection of short stories *Roman von einem Kinde* (1985) marked, according to Nolden, the beginnings of second-generation European Jewish writing (150), the year 1989 ushered in, according to Eshel, "den Zerfall jener Idee, auf der die totalitären Ideologien des 20. Jahrhunderts beruhen: der Idee, dass 'die Geschichte' als eine selbständige und unabhängige Entität existiere" ("Barbara" 193).<sup>65</sup> This, according to Eshel, influenced Honigmann's work in the sense that she has striven "eine Sprache zu erfinden, die ihr Leben als Kind deutsch-jüdischer Eltern, deren Leben von den großen menschengemachten Katastrophen des zwanzigsten Jahrhundert geprägt war, abzubilden vermag" ("Barbara" 197).<sup>66</sup> *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, as Honigmann's first post-1989 novel, is arguably the fruit of this attempt, as it is one of the first post-unification literary forays into postmemory engagement with the Jewish-German past.

Just as the "Vatersuche" is, according to Langenhorst, both an individual and collective process (24),<sup>67</sup> *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is an ambivalently public and private reflection. The father's death and the GDR's demise precipitate Honigmann's literary search and revisiting of these pasts and how they entwine with one another.<sup>68</sup> As a placeholder for the recent past among the flood of changes occurring in Germany in 1991, the novel itself may arguably be characterized as a specimen of exile, created at the wane of one geopolitical period and exiled to the dawn of another.

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<sup>65</sup> "the collapse of the idea on which the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century rest: the idea that 'history' exists as an autonomous, independent entity."

<sup>66</sup> "to invent a language that is capable of portraying her life as a child of German-Jewish parents whose life was implicated into the broad manmade catastrophe of the twentieth century."

<sup>67</sup> "individueller Prozeß ... , also die Geschichte allein eines spezifischen Individuums, ... aber auch als kollektiver Prozeß ..., in dem ganze Familien, Gruppen, Generationen oder Völker eine Vaterfigur suchen"; individual process...as the history of a specific individual alone, ...but also as a collective process..., in which entire families, groups, generations, or populations search for a father figure, (24).

<sup>68</sup> Langenhorst observes of the novels he investigates that the "Vatersuche" can only occur after the father's death (24).

To briefly explain my use of the term “Jewish,” which may denote religious, ethnic, or cultural identities, or some combination of the three, Jewish journalist Thomas Eckert of the former GDR best sums up Honigmann’s approach in her early writings when he says in his 1986 interview that “For us [family and friends of family], Jewishness, or a Jewish awareness, is perhaps first and foremost an emotional relationship to the Nazi past” (Ostow, “Being Jewish” 79-80).<sup>69</sup> Eckhart, like Honigmann, is a German Jew who was born after WWII in East Berlin and emigrated to the West in the 1980s. The *relationship* to Jewish identity that Eckhart discusses is precisely what is at stake in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, for it is defined more by ambiguity than as a declared identity that gains its contours through rituals or customs that are transferred onto succeeding generations. Moreover, Eckhart’s use of plural first person here, “for us,” encompasses generations beyond his own that the Holocaust has affected to varying degrees. Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen echoes this idea of relation, bringing Honigmann and her work closer to postmemory by describing her autobiographically inflected narrators as “insistent[ly] search[ing] for ways to relate,” to the family past “not made available” and to “Judaism as a religious practice or Jewishness as a larger, secularized, identity position” (372).

*Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is narrated in the first person through a female protagonist whose Jewish Communist father remained in exile in Paris during WWII, met the protagonist’s Bulgarian-Jewish mother, and later moved further west with her to London to escape Nazi-occupied France. After the war, the parents returned to the Soviet-occupied zone to help build the antifascist state. The narrator recalls childhood in the post-war years in Weimar with the father even after the parents separate and her mother returns to her home country of Bulgaria.

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<sup>69</sup> This idea, however, finds precedent in debates in the 1930s among the Jewish intelligentsia with regards to their Jewish identity or, rather a Jewish “feeling,” under increasing political pressure and exclusion under National Socialism. See Schoor 293-7.



The novel's structure proceeds non-chronologically. It begins and ends with death at the father's funeral in Weimar, East Germany. The opening scene at the funeral raises several initial questions to which the rest of the narrative alludes but perhaps does not answer. For example, at the very beginning, the reader is confronted with a dissonance with regards to the father's Jewish identity, as we learn through the protagonist that the Jewish funeral proceedings are in discord with the father's largely secular lifestyle and political identity. The initial funeral scene not only prompts non-chronological narration from the funeral in Weimar, back to Paris, to East Berlin, and so on, but also reveals an initial disjuncture in the text regarding East German Jewish identity that is symptomatic of a crisis of patriarchy and intergenerational disconnect.

### **Crisis of Identity: The German-Jewish Communist in Post-War East Berlin**

In *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, East Berlin is a key transitory space at which various aspects of the novel converge to display a complex form of intergenerational postmemory. In other words, Berlin as a site of disorientation following WWII, along with the father's written entries into his journal upon return from exile, conveys this novel's particular narrative of return. I first explore the crises of identity and of patriarchy in the post-war context to set up the second-generation voluntary exile from the GDR prompted by the transgenerational crisis of identity.

Though choices and transformations of the post-war period appear ordinary and seem to form a common trope among the texts explored here, such choices were grounded in an extraordinary time. As Lilla Balint notes of memory in Honigmann's prose, "Ereignisse von weltgeschichtlicher Bedeutung rücken in die unmittelbare Nähe von Banalitäten, Sehnsüchten und Emotionen des Alltags" (35).<sup>70</sup> As in Ruge's and Maron's novels, *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* portrays the chronotope of post-war Berlin as an opportunity for agency:

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<sup>70</sup> "events significant to world history come close to banality, desires, and emotions of the everyday."

... hatte er [der Vater] den Entschluß gefaßt, nicht länger für Reuter und die Engländer zu arbeiten, sondern zu den Russen nach Ost-Berlin überzulaufen. Er war Kommunist geworden...er war doch nach Hause zurückgekehrt, nach Deutschland, wo er herkam, wenn auch nicht nach Hessen-Darmstadt sondern nach Ost-Berlin, zu den Russen, den Kommunisten. (34-35)<sup>71</sup>

The mere choice of which occupied zone to inhabit determined one's reinvention and method of moving forward from the war. While Ruge's and Honigmann's novels both contain the post-war narrative of return, their depicted incongruences vary along political and ethnic lines. For example, the grandmother in Ruge's novel returns to East Berlin with a feeling of dissonance based on class difference, while Honigmann and Maron depict the complexity of post-war identities in relation to the Holocaust. Moreover, although Honigmann's and Maron's post-war depictions share the aspect of Jewish identity, *Pawels Briefe* does not engage with it from the German-Jewish perspective, as neither Maron nor her autobiographical protagonist identify as Jewish. Moreover, in *Pawels Briefe* readers gain only a mediated glimpse of the narrator's mother in her post-war years, which are recalled and relayed through communicative memory, while in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* the father's written entries from the post-war years are themselves inserted to assume a documentary role within the narrative. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* thus touches more acutely upon the cracks in the veneer of the Jews' new post-war identities than *Pawels Briefe*.

It is important to note that Jewish identity does not seem to play a role in the father's deliberate decision to return to the Soviet-occupied zone of Germany, yet it will continue to play

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<sup>71</sup> "He [the father] had made the decision not to work for Reuters and the English any longer, but to desert to the Russians in East Berlin. He'd become a Communist...but my father had actually come home, to Germany, the country he'd come from—even if it wasn't to Hesse-Darmstadt but to East Berlin, to the Russians, to the Communists"; Barrett 24-25. Unless noted otherwise, all English originates from Barrett.

an intervening role in the post-war years. For the protagonist's father, political affiliation seems to be the most significant deciding factor over and above any possible national identification that may be at play; he did not return to his hometown that happens to lie in one of the western sectors, "sondern nach Ost-Berlin, zu den Russen, den Kommunisten" (35).<sup>72</sup> This reveals the father's secular lifestyle, from even before the war, in which he neither practices Jewish tradition nor identifies as a Jew. It also reflects the broader historical post-war tendency, in which "The main difference between those who chose to live in the West and those who chose to live in East Germany was that the decision for the East was a political decision" (Stern 58).

Nevertheless, similar to the Nazis' sweeping pre-war classification of assimilated and practicing Jews as one and the same, Jewish identity, again highlighted from the outside, continues to interrupt one's assimilated political identity as a Communist in East Germany.<sup>73</sup> The father's return to the Soviet-occupied zone based on political affiliation is not necessarily recognized by others in this post-war milieu, as the father faces a myriad of challenges in adjusting, thus revealing contradictory tendencies in the antifascist ideology. On the one hand, there seems to have been an aspect of universalization, which takes two forms: one is the relativization of Jews as a specific group targeted by the Nazis.<sup>74</sup> The other is the form of universalization related to erasure of ethnic, national, religious differences in the service of a unified struggle against fascism/capitalism (Fox *Stated* 3). On the other hand, there was particularism as well. For one, East German politics distinguished between those returning from exile in the west, in the Soviet Union, and those who did not leave at all but instead resisted the Nazis from within. This had direct consequences during the purges at the height of Stalinism in

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<sup>72</sup> "but to East Berlin, to the Russians, to the Communists" (24).

<sup>73</sup> This is not to equate the Third Reich and the GDR, rather to show the continuation of Jewish assimilation in East Germany after the war.

<sup>74</sup> See Herf chapter 4 for more on post-war East German discourses surrounding the Jewish question.

the early 1950s. As Fox notes, “Several purges in the 1950s also affected East German Jews and especially the Jewish Communities” (*Stated* 81). Mario Kessler, too, writes that Jews had been specifically singled out in the purges (152), though, to be sure, non-Jews who were deemed suspicious were also removed from their jobs, sometimes even from the state (Fox *Stated* 81). East German political discourses also distinguished between the Jews as passive victims of fascism and the active Communist fighters against fascism<sup>75</sup> which led to differential treatment between these two groups with regards to, for example, status in the governmental organ and retirement pay grade. Also, Jews were specifically singled out as threats to the anti-Zionist campaigns in East Germany (Ostow, “Becoming Strangers” 63). Therefore, while in theory, socialist realism would erase differences of class, ethnicity, nationality, and religion, on the ground there were several political actions and tendencies that worked to the contrary.

To return to the example of author Anna Seghers, she too escaped Nazi Germany to Mexico where she spent her exile years, later returning to the Soviet-occupied zone. Given the contradictory situation described above, Seghers presents an interesting case because she, among others Communist intellectuals of Jewish descent in the GDR, attests to the possibility of returning from exile as a German-Jewish Communist to become a prominent founding figure of the GDR.<sup>76</sup> Fox points out that while the purges against “rootless cosmopolitanism” affected many Jews and Jewish communities in the GDR of the 1950s, many prominent Jews, including Seghers, emerged unscathed from the purges (*Stated*, 81). It would therefore be simplistic to say that all Jews felt alienated in the Soviet-occupied zone and East Germany, however, the father

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<sup>75</sup> See Pinkert “Tender Males” for more on the implicit distinction between passive Jewish victims and active, masculine antifascist resistance fighters in DEFA film representations of the 1960s.

<sup>76</sup> Actor Gerry Wolf is also exemplary in this regard. See Herzberg, for example, in his use of Wolf’s story to propose *Mischidentitäten* in the GDR to counter the often simplified and inaccurate term “Juden in der DDR” but, more importantly, to show that Jewishness was not always banished outright from one’s identity.

figure in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* draws particular attention to complications that arise among inconsistencies in post-war East German society.

The tensions under political symbiosis in the post-war East German context become apparent in the father's journal entries. It seems that no matter what, and contrary to universalization, there was some anxiety a Jew would be called out as such, whether he ever identified as one or actually even was Jewish.<sup>77</sup> The following excerpt captures a post-war discursive gloss over specificity, opening up an ironic gray area of identity that the father writes himself into. This particular passage tells about a line to get into the community bathhouse:

...Ausländer werden vorgelassen. Einige murren, werden aber belehrt, was sie schließlich den anderen Nationen angetan hätten, jetzt müßten sie eben warten. Staatenloser, der ich bin, gelte ich als Ausländer und darf vor den Deutschen baden gehen. (99)<sup>78</sup>

Imagery of a line proceeding into a bathhouse evokes, yet again, wartime atrocities. More significantly, however, is that not only are people delineated into groups named in the third-person (die Deutschen, die Ausländer, die anderen Nationen) to show distance, but also the specificity of human beings who perished under Nazi hands are disembodied and generalized as nations that suffered. The disembodiment of "Ausländer" as representative of the *nations*, not people, that suffered under Hitler, creates a blurred area in which the protagonist of this journal entry declares himself a "Staatenloser" who is neither German nor Jewish, a citizen of nowhere. The use of "Staatenloser" here has an ironic double meaning. It plays on both the trope of the wandering, stateless Jew and reflects antifascist discursive gloss over the Jews as human beings

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<sup>77</sup> Paul Merker presents the perfect case for this in which he says "I am neither a Jew nor a Zionist, though, certainly, it would be no crime to be either" (1955, quoted from Fox, *Stated* 79).

<sup>78</sup> "...foreigners allowed in first. Some grumble, so they get told about what they've done to other countries, now they just have to wait. People without a country, like I am, are considered foreigners and are permitted to bathe ahead of the Germans" (70).

specifically targeted in these various afflicted *nations* invaded by the Nazis.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, by equating himself as a stateless person, he distances himself from “die Deutschen,” preferring instead the place of outsider. Or is this a matter of being labeled from the outside? Though not specifically labeled as a Jew, the father is nevertheless singled out as a foreigner in this passage, which indicates, not necessarily agency in choosing an identity, but rather continued exclusion from a society to which one presumed to have belonged. Though perhaps initially adhering to the erasure of nationality as a platform for identity in East Germany by calling himself a “Staatenloser,” he is paradoxically rendered, at least from the outside, as a foreigner which seems to operate here under the assumption of a national identity. The national framework that is still at play in the East German non-nationally based identity is used against the father in this scene to classify him as a foreigner. The father’s identity is thus obliterated. Upon returning to Germany, he no longer belongs, if he ever did belong.

According to Scholem, it is the case that the Jew never belonged no matter how hard he tried. The calendar entries thus reflect a realization of having never belonged. That is the basis for Scholem’s argument that anti-Semitism was not a nascent phenomenon of the Weimar period (196),<sup>80</sup> rather a longstanding tension between Germans and Jews in the preceding centuries. The immediate post-war context in East Berlin presents itself here as a unique situation in which Jewish assimilation into German society presumably persists but in the form of political assimilation (Fox, *Stated* 91). Under antifascist ideology, the socialist individual was presumed

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<sup>79</sup> With regards to universalization under antifascist ideology, see Gilman “Die kulturelle Opposition”: “Die universalistischen Behauptungen vom Marxismus-Leninismus machten das ‘Jüdisch’-Sein zu einer der wenigen ethnischen Identitäten, die für einen guten Kommunisten nicht akzeptabel waren” (the universal claims of Marxism-Leninism made being Jewish one of the few ethnic identities that was unacceptable for a good communist, 158).

<sup>80</sup> “Aber nichts törichter als die Meinung, der Nationalsozialismus sei sozusagen vom Himmel gefallen oder ausschließlich ein Produkt der Verhältnisse nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg” (Nothing is more foolish than the opinion that National Socialism appeared out of thin air or that it was solely a product of relations after the First World War).

to be whole and projected itself into the collective in order to bring about change in society, thus leaving little to no room for self-reflection, let alone recognition of internal conflict (Hartewig 512). *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* hints at the tensions within the German Jewish Communist who further sublimates Jewish identity in the name of political activism. Political affiliation, however, does not suffice as a platform on which the Jewish character can continue to disavow Jewish identity and forget the recent past in post-war East Berlin. In other words, dedication to the Communist cause does not transcend the problematic entanglement between political and ethnic identities that gave rise to exile and return in the first place. Jewish identity is particularly forgotten in the exile situation, remaining on the margins, if acknowledged at all, in East German society. Political identification is indeed a source of identity confusion in this narrative of return, only complicating post-war transitions, especially for German Jews who had narrowly escaped death.

The written entries do not appear until near the end of the novel but they nevertheless provide the backdrop of historical existential crisis against which the protagonist tries to shape her own identity. On the levels of genre, structure, and content the entries near the end of *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* provide first-person narration from the father, thereby departing from the otherwise secondhand narrative of the protagonist. The entries therefore invite interpretation of negotiated political and ethnic/religious identities, claimed and unclaimed, under the contradictory antifascist ideology of the GDR. The negotiations, some of which have been highlighted here, anticipate intergenerational disconnect.

The generation after places the parent generation in shifting discursive positions from that of Jewish hero, to Jewish victim, from Communist hero, to victim of Communism. The parents are first portrayed in a heroic light, personally credited in their successful defeat of Hitler (“Er

hat verloren und meine Eltern haben gesiegt,” 33).<sup>81</sup> It is unclear whether they are to be seen as successful fighters against Hitler’s fascism or as surviving victims of his racist ideology that sought to destroy all Jews. As Fox notes of the East German post-war context, “Within the equation of Jewish-Communist togetherness...differences existed,” namely that Jews were victims of fascism and Communists were fighters against fascism (*Stated* 81). The uncertainty in this passage about defeating Hitler nevertheless highlights political and ethnic identities as inseparable factors in relation to exile. The tone shortly thereafter implies the ethnic identity, as it shifts to their victimization and the burden of survivor’s guilt: “...sie mußten für den Rest ihres Lebens mit den Bildern und Berichten derer leben, die kein Glück gehabt hatten, und das muß eine schwere Last gewesen sein...” (34).<sup>82</sup> The following passage, however, shifts yet again but this time toward their political heroism as Communists building “ein neues Deutschland” and choosing “gar nicht mehr [von den Juden zu] sprechen” (34).<sup>83</sup> But even here, the position as political hero is subsequently undermined with that of victim: “eines Tages mußten sie sich sogar für das Land ihres Exils rechtfertigen,” (34).<sup>84</sup> The first generation’s alienation on the grounds of ethnicity and politics<sup>85</sup> is reflected in the second generation’s narrative, as is the confusion of identity in which Jewish Communists in the GDR found themselves, whether they identified as

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<sup>81</sup> “He lost and my parents won,” (24).

<sup>82</sup> “for the rest of their lives, they had to live with the pictures and reports about those who hadn’t been lucky and that must have been a heavy burden,” (24).

<sup>83</sup> “a new Germany”; “not to talk about the Jews at all anymore,” (24).

<sup>84</sup> “the day came when they even had to justify their choice of the country where they’d spent their exile,” (24).

<sup>85</sup> For more on the distinctions based on where those returning had spent exile and their political consequences in the post-war East German context, see chapter 3 “From Periphery to the Center: German Communists and the Jewish Question, Mexico City, 1942-1945” in Herf and chapter 3 “In the Melting Pot of Socialism: East German Jews” in Fox *Stated Memory*. Alienation in the GDR had not been limited to Jews, however, given that East Germans, in general, were cut off from the West, as Robin Ostow shows in *Jews in Contemporary East Germany* (142). Another form of isolation is apparent on the national level by the fact that East Germany was the only nation in the Soviet Union to have not had any diplomatic relations with Israel up until 1989 (Herf 199-200).



Jews or not. The shifting positionalities are symptomatic of an ambivalence in East German Jewish Communist identities.

Reframing the parents' positionalities over and over again, from Jewish hero and then Jewish victim to Communist hero and victim of Communism during and after the war, could be symptomatic of transgenerational confusion in that the narrator tries to identify the status and role of the presumed stable East German patriarchy.<sup>86</sup> One could also arguably see this as evidence of the second generation's powerful omniscience and self-reflexivity, however. Given the legacy of assimilation over the generations in this depicted family past, Jewish identity continues to get displaced after exile and after the Holocaust. That is, Jewish identity gets lost in the story of assimilation time and again. The narration through the second generation in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* nevertheless hints at Jewish identity and includes it in the mix as a motivator and factor while narrating the parents' routes of exile during the war, including what they dealt with upon return. Honigmann's protagonist assumes the position of omniscient storyteller. She knows the different angles with which to narrativize the parents' past but refuses to choose one. Therefore, rather than the father's own identity confusion leading to the daughter's identity confusion about him, these shifting positionalities could indicate the multiple lenses through which the second generation can view the parents' past, including the lenses of Jewish and political identities in the family legacy of exile.

Julia Hell argues that early in the GDR's political formation, "the Communist Party and its leading cultural functionaries" used "a *symbolic politics of paternity*, a cultural discourse revolving around the antifascist father" in order to establish the East German society's "core structures of authority" (25). The role of the *Jewish*, antifascist father, however, surprisingly

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<sup>86</sup> See Hell.

plays no role in Hell's explanation of the symbolic politics of paternity. She briefly describes this tension in post-war East German society, in which recent memories of the Holocaust and its mostly Jewish victims clashed with the GDR's non-distinction among the victims of fascism. There were some who argued for and some who opposed the special recognition of Jews as victims of fascism (Hell 89).<sup>87</sup> Hell's explanation of this debate about Jews in the GDR does not relate it back to the symbolic politics of paternity to give us a picture of the Jewish antifascist father.

According to Hell, Jews "could live in the GDR only by repressing not some essential identity but the memory of a traumatic experience" (Hell 89).<sup>88</sup> *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* shows, however, that the two may be linked and compounded to a double repression. Repression of Jewish identity is indeed an enduring characteristic of this family's past, given the narrator's explanation of her assimilated ancestors (the "Bankiers der Großherzöge von Hessen-Darmstadt," 68)<sup>89</sup> and the passages above that illustrate the parents' political convictions in returning to the Soviet-occupied zone. It comes as no surprise, then, that the father hardly mentions any memory or knowledge related to the Holocaust for the sake of assimilating to the post-war antifascist discourse.

The Holocaust plays an elusive role in the text. If we recall once more Anna Seghers's post-war significance as a key cultural figure in the GDR, even in her case one may question successful transition in the post-war context without dissonance in the aftermath of the

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<sup>87</sup> See also Herf chapter 4.

<sup>88</sup> This is perhaps too simplified. Tension from repression of Jewish identity was indeed not always the case. See, for example, Herzberg, particularly footnote 31 above. Pinkert "Tender Males" also mentions "counter narratives for the negotiation [not repression] of (male) Jewish and Communist identities within post-war antifascist discourse" (202). Contrary to Hell's assertion with regards to the repression of traumatic memory, however, there were some artists like Jurek Becker and Konrad Wolf in the post-war GDR context who alluded to the Holocaust, albeit under limitations. See, for example, Hartewig 524 or Gilman "Die kulturelle Opposition."

<sup>89</sup> "the bankers to the grand dukes of Hessen-Darmstadt" (47-8).

Holocaust. Hell has done just that, pointing out that “Seghers’s return to Germany was certainly not easy” (89). Difficulties may likely be attributed to Seghers’s loss of her own mother to the Holocaust and can be gleaned from her literary texts. Hell illuminates in Seghers’s works *Post ins gelobte Land* and *Ausflug der toten Mädchen* the “conflicts and tensions lived by a Communist author whose Jewishness was supposed to be merely incidental,” since, after all, “anti-Semitism and its deadly politics” were minimized and subordinate to “a national narrative of class struggle” (88). The Holocaust implicitly intervenes in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* as well to show that the conflicts and tensions reflected in texts of the first generation (Seghers) emerge in those of the second (Honigmann) as well.

The Holocaust’s ghost-like presence in Honigmann’s novel is apparent, for example, in the underlined word “Mord” (23) in one of the father’s letters to the protagonist and in the calendar entry above in which the father is placed in the priority line of foreigners in recognition of what Germany had done to other nations.<sup>90</sup> *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* depicts a resulting tension within the father who is supposed to represent paternal authority in the East German context but cannot reconcile his decidedly Communist identity with the Jewish identity that is either foisted upon him and/or that tries to break through and be acknowledged in the wake of the Holocaust. Continued assimilation after the war becomes even more problematic and straining not only because Jewish identity continues to be negotiated despite disavowal, but also because of the Holocaust or, rather, the nagging realization of having escaped that experience.

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<sup>90</sup> The mysterious Martha figure or idea is the cipher for the father’s unrealized childhood dream of creating and performing a play in which everything but the script is completed (35-7). Martha can therefore be interpreted as a hollow personification of the failure of Jewish expression that is symptomatic of the “entschlossene Verleugnung” or deliberate denial inherent to the German-Jewish symbiosis (Scholem 182). The father’s identification number for his return to Germany (97) also invokes the Holocaust.

As in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, the second-generation's self-reflexive narration of the Cold War family memory in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* revises and adds nuance to East German literary portrayals of the family collected under a stable Communist patriarch, namely by revealing the cracks in that patriarchal figure. The cracks in this figure in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, however, differ through the aspect of Jewish disavowal and persecution. Hell argues that decentering tendencies are at play in East German family novels between the transient Communist father and historical narrative, on the one hand, and the real Communist father in the East German family narrative, on the other (51). And though she does not strengthen this connection, a further, spatial symptom of decentering is her observation that "Given that the real center of power was located in Moscow, its symbolic locus could never be unambiguously filled in Germany. Stalin, the leader who embodied this authorizing center, was absent..." (28). As much as the novels she examines strain to convey coherence in spite of historical and geographical dissonance, none of the other works she investigates considers what I see as a further destabilization, namely the *Jewish-German Communist father*. This aspect constitutes the added twist that Honigmann's novel introduces. In this family narrative, part of the father's identity merges with this transient Communist father that Hell mentions, yet is also differentiated from the real Communist fathers of the GDR.<sup>91</sup>

The Jewish facet of identity imposed from the outside disrupts the already strained, decentered overlap of symbolic and real Communist fathers, historical and family narratives. In the calendar passages the father is misidentified as an Italian, unidentified as a remainder of the recent war ("Staatenloser" or "Ausländer"), and given an identification number as a returnee that

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<sup>91</sup> See also Pinkert "Tender Males" regarding the way in which Jewish male figures' negotiation of identity in post-war DEFA films "had to be structured within this shifting matrix of passivity and agency, feminine and masculine identification, where victimhood and 'woman' became increasingly intertwined" (196).

reminds of his status as surviving Jew. In any case, the various (mis)labeling only serves to differentiate and perhaps marginalize, in spite of the *idea* of an East German socialist melting pot united under a political cause (Fox, *Stated 2*).

The father's journal entries and the narrator's ambivalent descriptions of her parents' actions during the war are examples in the novel that reveal contradictions of antifascist ideology between universalization and particularization in the attempt of political assimilation. As Moshe Zuckermann notes, "Bezogen auf die Juden in der DDR gehe es um die Bestätigung der Hegelschen These, daß es keine Identität (bzw. das Abstreifen einer Identität) ohne deren Anerkennung durch den anderen gebe" (120).<sup>92</sup>

The journal entries that appear only near the end of the novel are a sort of key to the crisis of identity, meaning the inability to fully assimilate into the post-war antifascist society of the GDR. Until now, the focus has been on the father's post-war written entries. In the following, however, I turn to the crisis of patriarchy by focusing on interactions between father and daughter in various settings in East Germany, particularly the theater.

### **Crisis of Patriarchy: Ephemerality and Marginalization of the Father-Daughter Relationship in the Theater**

A crisis of patriarchy is indicated via the perspective of Honigmann's second-generation protagonist. The internal conflict, or crisis of identity, displayed in the calendar carries over into a postmemory relational disconnect (crisis of patriarchy). The crisis of patriarchy manifests itself in space insofar as the father's presence in the novel becomes increasingly ephemeral and the theater, a place of pretending and performance, becomes the only place of spatial proximity between father and daughter. The father appears intermittently in the novel structure via his

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<sup>92</sup> "In relation to the Jews in the GDR, it is about the confirmation of Hegel's thesis that there is no such thing as identity (or disavowal of identity) without acknowledgment through others."

writing, but this applies to content as well. Father and daughter only share a collection of fleeting moments:

So ist unsere Liebe, weil wir immer getrennt voneinander lebten und wegen der wechselseitigen Forderungen, die nie erfüllt wurden, nur wie eine Liebe von weither geblieben, so als sei es nur ein Einsammeln von Begegnungen und gemeinsamen Erlebnissen gewesen und nie ein Zusammensein. (22-23)<sup>93</sup>

Another telling passage reveals weak bonds of a precarious relationship:

In meiner ganzen Kindheit bin ich zwischen meinen Eltern hin und her gependelt, und es hat mir weh getan, zu kommen, zu gehen, wieder zu kommen und wieder zu gehen, und so hat es wohl zwischen uns nie etwas Vertrautes gegeben, weil sich immer von neuem, bei jedem Wiedersehen, die Schalen der Fremdheit darübergerlegt haben. (28)<sup>94</sup>

These two passages capture the tenuous relationship throughout the novel. The spatial description of back-and-forth motions using words like “afar” and “encounter” conveys disorientation and underscores the brevity of contact and the movements entailed in the relationship rather than the relationship itself. One recurring space in the novel, however, that allows the relationship to temporarily linger in a state of “Zusammensein” (24)<sup>95</sup> is the theater, but even then there is only spatial, not emotional, proximity.

In light of the legacy of assimilation, does the theater suggest performed identities in the GDR? Characteristic of Honigmann is her use of theater vocabulary, “um das Rollenspiel, die Maskerade und die Scheinwelt des Theaters zu entlarven, in dem die Charaktere ihre selbst

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<sup>93</sup> “And so, because we always lived apart from one another and because of those reciprocal demands that could never be fulfilled, our love remained a love at a distance, as if it were only a collection of encounters and common experiences and never a togetherness,” (17).

<sup>94</sup> “During my entire childhood, I commuted back and forth between my parents and it hurt me to come and go, to come back again and leave again, and so there was probably never anything like real familiarity between us, because, over and over again, each time we said goodbye a shell of estrangement settled over everything,” (20).

<sup>95</sup> “togetherness.”

gewählten und ihnen zum Teil aufgezwungenen Rollen spielen” (Fiero, *Zwischen* 5).<sup>96</sup> *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* presents the theater abstractly, whereby specifics of any particular play are insignificant. Theater is a place of performativity, illusion, and exclusion, where identities are performed in the liminal space of “Zwischenraum” (25).<sup>97</sup> This in-between space is designated neither for audience nor cast. It does, however, enable “Zusammensein” (24) or togetherness in which the protagonist can temporarily linger and remain suspended in time and space with her father. Theater is used metaphorically to describe the relationship between the protagonist and her father.

The protagonist and father occupy the undesignated part of the theater that both marginalizes and privileges them. The “Zwischenraum” is notably a space from which “andere Räume für uns sichtbar blieben” (26)<sup>98</sup> and thus where “die Illusion nicht so beherrschend [war]” (25).<sup>99</sup> The “Zwischenraum” thus invokes Brechtian theater<sup>100</sup> in which the illusion is not as strong; the spectator remains aware, just as the father had been a sort of spectator in post-war East German society and noted lost illusions in his calendar. This difference in “illusion” between first and second generation indicates that the first generation had an illusion that is lost and the second generation already expects an illusion, albeit in the theater, that is to be kept at bay via positioning in the margins. While the father had written himself into an existential gray area in the post-war context, in this scene he occupies another gray area with the protagonist.

The theater is an important symbolic space that represents the protagonist’s and father’s identities in the larger East German context as Jews. Not only do they frequent the theater

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<sup>96</sup> “in order to reveal the role play, the masquerade, and the surface appearance of the theater, in which the characters play their self-chosen and partially forced roles.”

<sup>97</sup> “in-between space” (translation my own).

<sup>98</sup> “other rooms of which were still visible to us” (18).

<sup>99</sup> “the illusion was not as overpowering there” (18).

<sup>100</sup> Bertolt Brecht, a German Communist playwright of the twentieth century who escaped the Holocaust via exile, emphasized theater without illusion and in which the audience is an active participant.

together, they also occupy its liminal spaces. In addition, the father seems to have a preoccupation with theater actresses, and the narrator reflects on her time as a playwright in East Berlin. The theater is arguably a crucial space of intergenerational transfer of existential ambiguity of Jewish identity. Fiero also ascribes a special function in the text to the theater scenes:

Überträgt man dies auf ihr Leben als Juden in der DDR, befinden sie sich ebenfalls in einer Zwischenstellung. Sie fühlen sich kulturell und linguistisch Deutschland zugehörig, aber leben mit dem undeutlichen Gefühl, von der Mehrheitskultur nicht richtig akzeptiert zu werden. (*Zwischen* 80)<sup>101</sup>

Jewish father and daughter stand in a liminal theater space from which they view the audience, the play itself, and backstage activities, but remain passive, perhaps paralyzed, Jewish spectators. The liminal space in the theater seems to be the only place in which father and daughter can have a “Zusammensein.”

Besides theater, the GDR is another space in which the father-daughter relationship unfolds and is the larger space outside the theater in which the characters’ omniscient yet marginalized position becomes apparent. On the one hand, Honigmann portrays the GDR as a cultural and social idyll. The GDR is shown as the fortuitous home to rich treasure trove of German cultural and intellectual history, with Goethe as the primary recurring example:

Aus dem Fenster sieht man...wo der Ginkgo Biloba steht, den auch Goethe importieren und pflanzen ließ und auf den er das so berühmte Gedicht schrieb...mein Vater und ich

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<sup>101</sup> “If one transfers this to their life as Jews in the GDR, they are also located in an interstice. They feel culturally and linguistically affiliated with Germany, but live with an ambiguous feeling of rejection from the majority culture.”



haben uns bei unseren Spaziergängen durch den Park oft gefragt, ob es wirklich ‘dieses Baums Blatt’ in dem berühmten Gedicht gewesen sein kann. (8-9)<sup>102</sup>

These walks together continue to emerge in the protagonist’s dreams in Paris as well. References to Goethe and the Romantic period invoke the *Kultur*<sup>103</sup> of the nineteenth century, forming a sort of idyllic chronotope whose cultural inheritance the protagonist and her father enjoy.

Distant, nineteenth-century German culture, the father’s preference to only speak of his forefathers, and the legend of their successful assimilation form a temporal and spatial imaginary that bonds father and daughter to each other and to German culture. This mirrors a dynamic seen in Maron’s novel in which the main protagonist imagines the seemingly harmonious period before the WWII disturbance.

On the other hand, the rich cultural legacy that undergirds the father-daughter relationship masks the disturbances of the Holocaust, the father’s exile, and his return. The text’s frequent reference to the nineteenth century not only displaces what comes later for Jews in the twentieth century but also, by focusing on this earlier image of Germany and its iconic figures, overlooks the Jewish sacrifices, according to Scholem, in the name of assimilation. Frequent temporal interventions of the narrative present, namely the Cold War period of geopolitical division, lend the darker dimension to this one-dimensional portrayal. What gets suppressed in the idyllic depiction of East Germany in the narrative and how it finds expression in the text is precisely what makes up this other dimension.

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<sup>102</sup> “Out the window one sees... where the Ginkgo Biloba stands which Goethe also had imported and planted and about which he had written his famous poem... my father and I often wondered on our walks whether it was really this tree’s leaf that could have been the one in the poem” (translation my own).

<sup>103</sup> “Developed in the eighteenth century in response to political fragmentation, *Kultur* conceives of the nation not as a fixed geo-political but as a border-transcending cultural unit” (Shafi 180). The *Kultur* was also, according to Boa, based on the idea of a common language and shared cultural values, thus building a united front against geopolitical fragmentation (“Some Versions of *Heimat*,” 35). The *Kultur* thus binds what is assumed to be a homogeneous German culture.

While the narrator's recollection of childhood memories upholds a thin veneer of German cultural attraction and assimilation, it also produces an inadvertent tension that simultaneously suppresses and implies Holocaust memory. This tension is articulated from the position of the generation after which has tacitly absorbed both the idyllic aspects of a seemingly homogeneous German cultural past and the tragic aspects that preceded birth. This tension is shown to intervene between father and daughter in the present. The Holocaust as a disrupting factor in the narrative is reflected in the description of the East Berlin landscape:

In meinem Zimmer hatte ich das Fenster offengelassen, beide Fensterflügel standen ganz weit auf, und vor dem Fenster erstreckte sich der Straßenbahnhof, die ersten Bahnen krochen gerade aus den Schuppen, dahinter lag der Zentralviehhof, von dem immer ein beißender, ekelerregender Gestank vom Tod der Tiere herüberwehte...Über alldem ging gerade die Sonne auf, ... und färbte das schwarze Grau der verschwindenden Nacht in ein morgendliches gelbes und rotes Grau, und ich stand da mit dem Blumenstrauß in der Hand, im Anblick dieser Landschaft, die wie ein unruhiges und bedrohliches Meer war, die Straßenbahnen und Schuppen und das angekarrte quiekende Schlachtvieh in seinen Gittern und die Schlotte und die ausgeschüttete Morgensonne darüber. (41-42)<sup>104</sup>

This passage presents striking contrasts in imagery that express what remains unsaid between father and daughter. The warming, brightening presence of the sun pours over and masks the street cars personified as crawling beings and the shelters that in turn conceal something that stinks and shrieks. Such a contrast conveys a palpable tension in the atmosphere that lies just

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<sup>104</sup> "I'd left the casement window open in my room and both sides were cranked out. The main terminal extended back from below my window, the first trolleys were just creeping out of the sheds; behind lay the central slaughterhouse, from which the acrid, nauseating stench of animals constantly drifted over...The sun was just rising over it all, turning the blackish gray of the waning night into the yellowish and reddish grays of the morning and I stood there with the bouquet in my hand, looking at the landscape that was like a troubled and threatening sea—the street cars and sheds and the animals trucked in for slaughter squealing behind bars and the chimneys, with the morning sun flooding over it all," (29).

beyond the familiarity of one's domestic space and hidden beneath a "threatening sea of urban structures." Something visually indiscernible yet sensed through smell and sound lingers beneath the surface of the East Berlin landscape, which evokes urgency. Moreover, the morning imagery symbolizes the dawn of something new in the text.

The textual urgency and suggestion of newness precede the text's narrative and spatial rupture. Ambivalent narratives and imagery can no longer be held in tension, the source of which is the parent generation's repressed memories. In this same scene, the protagonist decides that "das Weggehen könnte auch so etwas wie ein Verwandeln sein, bei dem man die alte Haut einfach abstreifen würde" (48).<sup>105</sup> The choice to emigrate to Paris seems fortuitous at first, as though only the novelty and complete foreignness matter. Underlying the agency in departure, however, is the continued tension between release from the family past, on the one hand, and a closer exploration of it, on the other.

Departure evokes imagery of amputation or extraction: "es war wie ein Abschneiden und Abreißen, das weh tat, wenn ich sagte, diese Geschichte soll jetzt zu Ende sein, die Fortsetzung kenne ich nicht" (50).<sup>106</sup> A continuation of a story that is to end, however, connotes a persistent postmemory bond that from this point on in the text develops through a westward itinerary to West Germany and, finally, to France.

### **Narrative Expansion Outward and Westward from the GDR into Paris**

The ambivalent and deficient engagement with WWII and exile memories in the GDR are forced to center stage in Paris where postmemorial contact through the body and writing

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<sup>105</sup> "leaving could even be something like a metamorphosis, during which you'd simply shed the old skin," (34). Again, thinking of Moshe Zuckermann's quote above, p. 56, foreshadows a similar futile renewal of identity.

<sup>106</sup> "it was like a painful wrenching or an amputation when I said that the story was over now and I didn't know what its sequel would be," (35).

takes place. Holocaust postmemory determines and is shaped by the protagonist's itinerary westward to specific cities of significance to the father's past, especially Paris. As Feller rightly points out, movement in Honigmann's oeuvre is indeed prevalent (97).<sup>107</sup> At the same time, he also asserts that there is an "eindeutige Ablehnung von bestimmten physischen Orten als Träger von Religiosität..." (105)<sup>108</sup> in Honigmann's text. Though Feller focuses on Jewish theological motifs here, the observation of movement, on the one hand, and resistance to spatial engagement, on the other, apply to a postmemory reading of *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* as well and present a peculiar relationship between movement and memory. In spite of displacement that ambivalently seeks to escape and explore the past, the parts of the traveling section that do reflect on the family past fail to map onto space. What role does space play, then, within the interplay of memory and movement proposed here, in which postmemory incites movement and movement incites postmemory?

Paris is the most important urban setting located outside of East or West Germany in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. Various spaces and temporalities converge there through interactions with a new Jewish-American acquaintance by the name of Jean-Marc and through postmemory engagement with the parent generation's exilic experience. The scenes in Paris reflect both cosmopolitan and national approaches to the question of Jewish identity, as the focus shifts from the narrow perspective of family past to its arrangement within the broader, multi-faceted post-war European Jewish population and back again. Germany and the family past interwoven with it continue to play a prominent, even conflicting, role even when the protagonist is away in Paris. While ephemerality characterizes the father-daughter relationship in Germany, the traveling

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<sup>107</sup> Other scholars who extract the particularity of the Jewish experience of exile and emigration are, for example, Itta Shedletsky, Ernst Loewy, and Ehrdhard Bahr in *Deutsch-jüdische Exil- und Emigrationsliteratur im 20. Jahrhundert*. Ed. Itta Shedletsky and Hans Otto Horch. Tübingen: Niemeyer 1993.

<sup>108</sup> "unmistakable rejection of specific physical places as conduits of religiosity."

sections show that postmemory in the place of the father's exile transforms ambiguous post-war family relations into something more poignantly felt.

The theater motif persists and evolves as the narrative traverses various settings in the west. The further west the protagonist travels, it seems, the more her Jewish identity is accentuated and in differing ways. Traveling through West Germany and dwelling in France, the protagonist does not know how to perform her Jewish identity, articulate the script of her particular family history to others on a European stage, let alone her role as a *German Jew* against the backdrop of the mid-twentieth century. While previously occupying the peripheral, passive space in East German theater, the protagonist is suddenly prodded to center stage among other European Jews.

Paris is the stage for contact between different actors of Jewish identity. Honigmann reflects in this part of the novel the multi-faceted, cosmopolitan population of European Jews and, as she does in her later book *Soharas Reise* (1998), "hält die Spannung und den Unterschied zwischen den einzelnen jüdischen Emigrationsgeschichten aufrecht" (Shahar 208).<sup>109</sup> As we soon see, however, national difference within this network becomes a factor of discord. The protagonist's new Jewish-American acquaintance, Jean-Marc, is the child of Holocaust survivors who escaped to New York. The protagonist and Jean-Marc therefore "sing in the same choir" of their parents' legends but they each sing "verschiedene Strophe ein und desselben Liedes" (55).<sup>110</sup> Though revealing different spatial trajectories, the Paris sections of the novel bring about intragenerational postmemory dialogue about related, but different, narratives within a cosmopolitan network of Jewish diaspora.

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<sup>109</sup> "maintains the tension and difference between the particular Jewish emigration stories."

<sup>110</sup> "different verses of one and the same song," (39).

At first, it seems the exchanges between these characters in Paris illustrates what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder call “cosmopolitan memory” in which “shared memories of the Holocaust ... provide the foundations for a new cosmopolitan memory, a memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries” (465). However, the cosmopolitan exchange of Holocaust stories also gives rise to a more nationally-inflected discussion that creates conflict. The role of nation becomes a factor of discord in the intragenerational conversations about the Holocaust, given the contradiction of which even the protagonist herself is aware, namely her parents’ choice to return after the war to Berlin, “wo alles begonnen hatte, an den Ort, von dem aus Hitler ihnen nachgesetzt hatte,” (33).<sup>111</sup> National belonging as a facet of identity drives a wedge into an otherwise allied relationship formed with Jean-Marc on grounds of denationalized cosmopolitan memory: “...[er] konnte nicht verstehen, was er mir immer wieder vorwarf—wie Juden es über sich bringen könnten, in Deutschland zu leben, nach allem, was ihnen dort geschehen war” (55-6).<sup>112</sup> In a similar experience that the father had described in a journal entry in postwar East Berlin, the protagonist is identified and criticized from the outside for her German national identity. The depiction of Jean-Marc’s Jewish identity, on the one hand, seems to be contained within particular geographical,<sup>113</sup> linguistic,<sup>114</sup> and ideological<sup>115</sup> parameters, a vehement simplicity of perspective similar to Maron’s protagonist in *Pawels Briefe* vis-à-vis Poland and Communism. The protagonist, on the other hand, in her inability to articulate her role in Jewish identity so steadfastly, appears in these conversations as less ideologically constrained, being able to see, as in the theater, various angles to the issue of history and national belonging, a

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<sup>111</sup> “where it had all begun, to the place where Hitler had started to chase them,” (24).

<sup>112</sup> “he couldn’t understand, that he criticized me for, over and over again: how Jews could bring themselves to live in Germany after all that had happened to them there,” (39).

<sup>113</sup> “Er würde in dieses Land niemals einen Fuß setzen,” 56. “He would never set foot in that country,” (39).

<sup>114</sup> “Schon in seiner Schulzeit hatte er alles getan, um nicht Deutsch zu lernen,” 56. “Even in his school days, he’d done everything to avoid studying German,” (39).

<sup>115</sup> “Ja, sagte er, ein Bann, das ist es, was ich meine,” 56. “‘Yes,’ he said, ‘a ban.’ That’s what he meant,” (40).

contradiction particular to Germany that Jean-Marc cannot grasp and categorically rejects. Their conflict reflects Diner's statement that though the negative symbiosis will mainly overlay the relationship between Germans and Jews, it will also affect the relationship among Jews themselves (185).

The interactions between the protagonist and Jean-Marc in Paris cast Germany as an undifferentiated totality forever burdened with its Nazi past, thus expanding Diner's negative symbiosis to an international perspective and bringing nuance to Scholem's comprehensive Jewish label.<sup>116</sup> The conversations with Jean-Marc are the only instances where the word "Deutschland" appears in the narrative, unequivocally portraying it as the Third Reich and gentile Germans as associated to some degree with the Nazi past. This is similar to how, as Fiero notes of the relationship between Jewish-German protagonist and non-Jewish German Alfried, "die Erzählerin Alfried nicht als Individuum wahrnimmt, sondern als Repräsentanten einer ganzen Gruppe," (*Zwischen* 67).<sup>117</sup> Nationally demarcated memories and the simplistic portrayal of countries condemned to a particular temporality are again reminiscent of the nationally and politically inflected memories in Maron's *Pawels Briefe*. Gsoels-Lorensen, in her attention to communication and the process of identity formation in Honigmann's oeuvre notes the

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<sup>116</sup> Scholem suggests at two different points in his article that the Jews are their own kind of totality as victims. Though the victim-perpetrator line is rightly and firmly drawn here, despite this victim totality, Jews as a group still require some nuance: "Ich halte es für richtig, und ... wichtig, daß auch Juden, gerade als Juden zu den Deutschen sprechen, im vollen Bewußtsein des Geschehenen und ohne Grenzverwischung" (I think it is right and important that Jews also, and precisely as Jews speak to the Germans, in full awareness of what happened and without blurring boundaries, 177); "... wir können gar nicht nachdrücklich genug von den Juden als Juden sprechen, wenn wir von ihrem Schicksal unter den Deutschen reden. Die Atmosphäre zwischen den Juden und den Deutschen kann nur bereinigt werden, wenn wir diesen Verhältnissen mit der rückhaltlosen Kritik auf den Grund zu gehen suchen, die hier unabdingbar ist. Und das ist schwierig. ... für die Juden, weil solche Klärung eine kritische Distanz zu wichtigen Phänomenen ihrer eigenen Geschichte verlangt" (We cannot speak enough of the Jews as Jews when we talk about their fate under the Germans. The atmosphere between Jews and Germans can only be cleaned if we search for the roots of these relations, with the wholehearted criticism that is indispensable here. And that is difficult... for the Jews because such clarification needs a critical distance to significant phenomena of their own history, 179).

<sup>117</sup> "the narrator does not perceive Alfried as an individual but as representative of an entire group."

failed and failing conversations...exchanges beset by an *ir*-responsiveness in language due to which the I and the you exhibit a tendency to remain in, rather than voyage out from, their respective affective, epistemological, cultural, historical and social territories; in which the translation from ‘conversation’ to ‘life’ and back reveals itself as nearly, if not altogether, impossible. (372)

Though Gsoels-Lorenson speaks here of the intergenerational fissures in communication, her observations resonate with *intragenerational* communication in postmemory as well, in which a common Jewish ethnicity breaks down across national borders.

The scenes with Jean-Marc and the extent of cosmopolitan Jewry and memory evoke vast discourses regarding exile, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial theory that reach beyond the scope of this chapter but are important to at least touch upon in addressing the issue of the protagonist’s hybridity. Todd Herzog, for example, argues the protagonist’s failed and impossible hybrid identity in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. Taken at face value, one may easily subscribe to Todd Herzog’s argument that Honigmann’s novel shows “keine positive jüdische Hybridität, keine Heimat in der Fremde, keine Kontinuität aus Fragmenten”<sup>118</sup> and that her protagonist tries but fails to combine German and Jewish identities (211). Given both the father’s and daughter’s senses of non-belonging throughout the text, this indeed rings true, but there are several textual and theoretical assumptions to reconsider.

On the level of textual analysis, Herzog’s focuses on the function of the United States, specifically Ellis Island, and the relationship with Jean-Marc: “In Barbara Honigmanns Roman ‘Eine Liebe aus Nichts’ *verliebt sich* die Erzählerin in einen amerikanischen Juden und redet

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<sup>118</sup> “no positive Jewish hybridity, no home in foreignness, no continuity out of fragments.”



*mehrmals* von ihrem *Traum*, auf Ellis Island zu wohnen” (204, emphasis added).<sup>119</sup> Emigrating to the United States does not seem to be the protagonist’s main goal, however, rather it is an idea Jean-Marc foists upon her: “Er wollte mich überreden, mit ihm nach New York zu kommen, er wisse ja, daß ich das wolle, und obwohl es stimmte, konnte ich nicht soweit gehen” (56-7).<sup>120</sup> The protagonist’s lukewarm enthusiasm for the idea also reflects the nature of their relationship as acquaintances or, at most, friends if we compare it to, for example, the sexually and romantically involved relationship between the protagonist and Alfried. Moreover, the protagonist decides she cannot move so far away, suggesting an emotional or perhaps existential investment in France and/or Germany as German Jew. Or is it about more than the national/geographical context?

Herzog’s argument contains questionable theoretical assumptions about hybridity. It seems as though he forecloses hybridity as a possibility and implies that harmonious hybridity is its ultimate, yet unattainable goal. Complete integration of two seemingly irreconcilable identities is not what is at stake in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*. Herzog’s ideas suggest that one must choose between *either* Honigmann’s national/political facets *or* her religious/ethnic. To have both, in other words, to be hybrid, “findet sich in einer unmöglichen Position,” (211).<sup>121</sup> It means to be located “auf einem unbewohnbaren Platz, auf einer ‘verdammten Insel’, die weder die alte noch die neue Heimat ist, und die sowieso nicht mehr existiert... Die kosmopolitische Position beweist sich immer wieder als eine unmögliche Position” (211).<sup>122</sup> This explanation, however, only further complicates what Herzog means by the impossibility of the hybrid. It seems as

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<sup>119</sup> “In Barbara Honigmann’s ‘Eine Liebe aus Nichts,’ the narrator *falls in love with* an American Jew and *repeatedly* talks about her *dream* of living on Ellis Island” (emphasis added).

<sup>120</sup> “He tried to convince me to go to New York with him, said he knew that’s what I wanted but, though I knew he was right, I couldn’t go that far,” (40).

<sup>121</sup> “finds itself in an impossible position.”

<sup>122</sup> “in an uninhabitable place, on a cursed island that is neither the old nor new home and does not exist anyway...the cosmopolitan position always proves to be an impossible position.”

though he suggests that Honigmann's protagonist remains in a non-space, exists nowhere, or is at least in an impossible or unbearable position. What does this look like, and how can it work?

On the other hand, I am not necessarily aligning myself with arguments about the cosmopolitan hybridity he critiques. To be sure, I do not suggest that Honigmann's protagonist seeks, let alone finds, a harmonious union between Germanness and Jewishness, but perhaps Herzog's formulation is too rigid. Instead of tracing these on the level of content, the *method* of reading two facets of identity together under the lens of spatial displacement can be a viable way out of this dichotomy and present more interpretive possibilities. In other words, I read national/political and religious/ethnic identities together but this neither means condemning the subject to existential crisis nor celebrating a harmonious hybridity. Diner's negative symbiosis reminds us that two inextricable yet conflicting facets of identity can be brought together or are indeed forced together. In this way, I question Herzog's injunction to choose when reading Honigmann's works, and propose to replace it with concentration on both German and Jewish aspects in their proximity, difference, and all possible gradations in between.

That German and Jewish identities in this novel do not fit so neatly together warrants neither condemnation nor reconciliation. The intrigue of *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* lies precisely in the ongoing tension between the German and the Jewish within the main character, evolving across spatial contexts, where one comes to the foreground while the other retreats, evoking their respective sentiments and insecurities. This constant back and forth, foreground and background makes up a tension that is constitutive of Honigmann's oeuvre, and as I see it, there is no need to cage it within the impossibility of being, on the one hand, and a complete harmony, on the other.

In Herzog's concentration on the exchanges with Jean-Marc in Paris, he overlooks the relationship with the father, which, to my mind, is far more significant for the protagonist's

identity negotiations and evokes a further distinction within the field of exile as an agonizing, isolated experience<sup>123</sup> or one of growth and engagement.<sup>124</sup> Within *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, we see both experiences of exile portrayed across two generations and two historical epochs: wartime and post-war. The wartime generation's experience of exile as a result of both religious and political persecution reveals itself as a despairing experience in that this generation in the text struggles to grapple with one's positioning in post-war East German society. As Englmann argues, 1945 is not a "zero hour" (9). That is, literature written by exiles as a manifestation of or engagement with the exile experience does not cease to be exile literature upon return to the home country (Englmann 9). This speaks to the continuities of exile that can be observed across generations, however, in contrast to the father's forced, existentially threatening exile, the protagonist's experience is not only voluntary but also productive.

The protagonist feels, at times, alienated in conversations with Jean-Marc in Paris where complications of a German-Jewish identity are most prominently in accentuated, but the memory work in the narrative takes an otherwise introspective turn and transcends the space of exile. Feller notes of Honigmann's oeuvre in general that the transient form of *Makom* (place) is favored over the geographical *Makom* (105). He extrapolates this to a transient, spiritual *Galut* (exile) favored in her novels as opposed to *Galut* in actual places (107).<sup>125</sup> Taking the same tack, I argue that these theological terms help to disentangle the negotiations of Jewish and German identity by exiling them into a transcendent, ever-changing space of writing. I read these concepts, however, through the prism of postmemory in the travel sections of *Eine Liebe aus*

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<sup>123</sup> See Said. See also Kaplan, especially chapter 1 "Questions of Moving: Modernist Exile/Postmodern Tourism."

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, Konuk or Israel.

<sup>125</sup> "Das *Galut* ist mithin kein spezifisch-geographischer Ort, sondern ein geistiges Exil, das vielleicht durch das Lernen überwunden werden kann," (The *Galut* is not a specific geographical place, rather a spiritual exile that can possibly be overcome through learning).

*Nichts*. Towards the end of the novel, for example, reflection on the family past in Paris occurs more frequently and overlooks material and space, to privilege, instead, an embodied, and eventually, also a written connection.

Contact with the first generation is reflected in the traces of mirrored movements and embodiments between father and daughter in Weimar and Paris, respectively. Lethargy, immobility, and pain set the tone towards the end of the novel once the protagonist learns that the father is on his deathbed in Weimar. Not only do we learn that he is bed-ridden, but also that he is so weak that he “nicht mal einen Kugelschreiber halten könne, um einen Brief zu schreiben,” (86).<sup>126</sup> The patriarchal crisis culminates in the father’s incapacity to write, thus condemning him to a silence similarly observed of the once prolific East German historian father in Ruge’s novel.

Immobility, marginalization, and crises of expression culminate in an experience of togetherness, albeit at a spatial distance, between first and second generations. As she lets “den Tag verrinnen, bewegungslos” and watches the anonymous feet that walk past her window, the feeling of paralysis sets in along with a literal and figurative silence (86).<sup>127</sup> The protagonist is stuck within the margins of Parisian society, reflected spatially in the text via her isolation in the underground apartment where she is out of view.

This despondent experience of exile that is both isolated yet connected through memory and thought of the father opens opportunities for growth and togetherness. Writing and the body are two textual aspects that work through the protagonist’s agonizing solitude in exile. The protagonist unfolds and lays all the father’s letters on top of one another, “so daß ich sie wie ein Buch durchblättern und lesen konnte wie einen Roman,” (87-88).<sup>128</sup> Remarkably, these are all

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<sup>126</sup> “couldn’t even hold a ballpoint pen to write a letter,” (61).

<sup>127</sup> “frittered the day away, hardly moving,” (61).

<sup>128</sup> “so I could page through them and read them as if they were a novel,” (62).

messages addressed to her with no mention of a response, reflecting Gsoels-Lorensen's observation that "Honigmann's texts thematiz[e] modalities of 'speaking,' 'telling,' and 'listening' that do not neatly fall into the rhetorical or narrative patterns of 'conversation,' 'communication,' or 'story'" (371). Given the apparently unidirectional communication from father to daughter, it seems that much had been communicated, except for the story the protagonist wanted to hear from her father. The crisis of patriarchy is constituted by the "story" or novel that his letters tell, but more significantly by the story they do not tell. Petra Fiero points out that the heap of letters written to Alfried but never sent are symbolic of the troubled German-Jewish symbiosis Scholem describes ("Life at the Margins," 97), but an intergenerational miscommunication is apparent from the father's unanswered letters to the protagonist as well.

The "corpus" of his letters unfolded and laid on top of one another models a bodily imitation and experiential layering between father and daughter. The protagonist lies on her bed and experiences a bodily moment of togetherness with her father:

Wenn ich abends im Bett lag, konnte ich nicht anders, als mich auch so starr und unbeweglich auf den Rücken zu legen, wie mein Vater gelegen haben muß, seit er sich nicht mehr bewegen konnte, und so blieb ich und rührte mich nicht, bis es mich schmerzte. Ich zwang mich, in dieser Lage zu bleiben, ohne Veränderung, ganz unbewegt, als müßte ich warten, daß jemand käme mich umzudrehen, bis ich vor Schmerz und Erstarrung aufjaulte und glaubte, eine Spur von seinem Leiden gefunden zu haben, indem ich mich selber quälte, und endlich auch weinte und wenigstens im Weinen erlöst war. Denn schon mein ganzes Leben hatte ich Angst gehabt, daß ich, wenn mein Vater einmal sterben würde, am Tage seines Todes keine Tränen hätte nicht weinen könnte. War ich irgendwann eingeschlafen, trat mein Vater in meinen Traum, da lebte er

wieder und sprach mit mir und sagte etwas sehr Wichtiges, etwas, was er immer nur in den Träumen sagte. (89)<sup>129</sup>

The daughter's mimicry in the position of death is a way of answering the seemingly unanswered letters, but through the body. Lying still in an underground apartment invokes a buried casket, in which the protagonist corporeally and affectively overlaps the father's experience of suffering.

Just as with any other bodily proximity between father and daughter throughout the novel, this overlap also comes to an end and sets the narrative into motion once more.

Temporalities, memories, and narratives of return converge at novel's end when the itinerary comes full circle back to Weimar. The text engages with space from varying distances and on different scales from countries as totalities, to regional itineraries throughout Europe, to individual cities. The wide open spaces into which most of the novel unfolds returns once again to Weimar. On the level of plot as well, the narration returns to the funeral scene that had initially opened the story.

*Eine Liebe aus Nichts* privileges writing and body over objects as conduits of memory, but the exile calendar is one exception. Though a material object, the calendar is imbued with a more eternal and evolving quality. Herzog's claim about the function of Ellis Island as a "fiktiver Ort, an dem die zahlreiche widerspruchsvollen Identitäten, die sie [die Protagonist] anderswo nicht zusammenbringen kann, in Einklang gebracht werden können" (205)<sup>130</sup> is useful to here to

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<sup>129</sup> "When I lay in bed at night, I couldn't help lying on my back as rigidly and motionlessly as my father must have done when he wasn't able to turn over any longer and I stayed that way and didn't move until it hurt. I forced myself to stay in that position without changing, absolutely motionless, as if I had to wait for someone to come and turn me, until I finally moaned out loud from the pain and stiffness, and thought I'd been able to sense a little of his suffering by torturing myself, and I finally cried, too, and at least was relieved by crying. Because for my whole life I'd been afraid I wouldn't have any tears and wouldn't be able to cry on the day my father died. When I finally did fall asleep, my father would appear in my dreams—there he was, alive again, talking to me and telling me something very important, something he only ever told me in his dreams," (63).

<sup>130</sup> "a fictional place in which multiple contradictory identities that she [the protagonist] cannot bring together anywhere else can be brought into harmony with one another."

the extent that a synthesis of German and Jewish identities across generational lines is viable in the non-space or antichronotope of the English calendar. Here, Honigmann's protagonist writes her own entries, literally inscribing her own experiences of return to East Germany next to her father's, which results in a blending of temporalities. The English calendar itself is from the year 1944, but the entries are written in 1946, thus blending war and post-war temporalities and, on a larger scale, blending the close of the Second World War with that of the Cold War.

To the extent that the father and daughter could barely sustain a "Zusammensein," the side-by-side entries in the journal bring them together in written form through experience of exile, rendering the next generation's exile as fruitful. Postmemory overlap starts with the performance of death in Paris and with writing simultaneously at the actual scene of death in Weimar and in the scene of exile in the English calendar. After death's ultimate silencing of the first generation, postmemory continues in the act of writing and answering to the first-generation experience of exile/return within the written space of exile. The postmemory relationship under constant movement in the novel is *written* into exile into a non-space to the extent that this bond no longer stretches out over vast geographical territory through animated bodies, but instead on the pages of the English calendar. The act of writing in the abstract, liminal space of a calendar compensates for what ephemeral childhood interactions and elusive dreams cannot provide.

Feller posits that Honigmann's narrators engage with the parallel ideas of writing as separation and exile as being Jewish to emphasize a connection between "Schöpfung aus dem Nichts und der Frage nach dem Sinn des Hebräischen," (108).<sup>131</sup> Writing would thus mean here a separation to the extent that in this particular novel it is a way of saying goodbye to a deceased loved one and beginning the process of separation in mourning. But, to add to Feller's

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<sup>131</sup> "creation out of nothing and the question of the meaning of Hebrew."

theologically inflected explanation for writing and its relationship to Judaism, I propose that writing in the English calendar, the space of exilic writing, connects more than it separates. In fact, *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is about generational connections above all else.

An intergenerational dialogue begins and is forever recorded in the notebook before the protagonist's departure once again to Paris. By writing into the calendar, she responds to the countless letters and the private journal entries. Although the paper is presumably a space, the blended temporalities, sites, and experiences invoked here, for example, 1944 English exile and 1946 return to East Berlin, lead to an interpretation of the writings as transcending time and space and moving perhaps into an antichronotope, occupying, as in the theater, a space not designated.

Bannasch sees the entries in the calendar as a way of making visible the different types of narration between father and daughter (146, footnote 17),<sup>132</sup> but I would argue further that the entries have an additional layering effect, for in spite of different writing styles and experiences, layering is evident in the content as well. For example, the protagonist's own entries about returning to Germany from Paris convey alienation like the father experience in post-war East Berlin:

Jeder alte Mann, den ich auf der Straße sehe, erschreckt mich, ich sehe ihn an und denke, warum lebt der und kennt mich nicht und geht da herum und sieht mich nicht, als ob ich ihn gar nichts angehe, warum kann er nicht mein Vater sein. (104)<sup>133</sup>

While the father is hard pressed to find Jews in East Berlin after the war, leading to a crisis of identity, the eternal separation and precluded opportunity for spatial togetherness becomes

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<sup>132</sup> “die unterschiedlichen Erzählweisen von Vater und Tochter sichtbar zu machen.”

<sup>133</sup> “Every old man I see on the street frightens me. I look at him and think, ‘Why is he alive but doesn’t know me and why is he walking by without looking at me, as if I don’t mean a thing to him, why can’t he be my father?’” (74).



apparent in a sort of crisis of identity reflected in the protagonist who searches for the Jewish father in vain. As Fiero notes, their experiences of alienation overlap, but in contrast to the father, it reinforces her decision to leave East Germany once and for all (*Zwischen* 78).

One may argue that the portrayal of the second generation's exile, in contrast, cannot be called exile at all, given that the protagonist in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* chooses to leave the GDR for Paris. Edward Said, for example, describes exile as "the age-old practice of banishment" in which "the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" (181). Given the protagonist's choice to leave the GDR, one may propose instead a term such as "emigration" which, according to Said, is "anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility" (181). This does not do the second-generation experience in Honigmann's novel justice, however, because the wartime past certainly plays a role. An alternative could be "expatriation," which Said defines as "voluntarily liv[ing] in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. ... Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions," (181). However, there is more historical depth and intergenerational connections within the novel such that the second generation is acutely aware of the first generation's presence there decades prior during the war.

If we take into account Bronfen's notion of exile, instead of Said's, as something of force or of choice, the protagonist's second generation experience of Paris in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* may therefore also be considered a form of exile. Furthermore, it is one that incorporates both the painful and the productive, to the extent that the previous generation's wartime exile in the same place is rendered through the occasional solitary, alienating scenes the protagonist endures while in Paris. Yet in France, the protagonist engages with the surroundings, produces art, interacts

with others, and most importantly, out of her own experience of exile, feels a productive loss that allows her to write the experience of return to the home country in her father's exile journal.

The journal writings symbolize both first- and second-generation returns that are inscribed into the journal as an artifact of exile. The second generation, as seen here, may perform and imagine suffering into being, but, especially in the act of writing, this feeling is not one's own which evokes the artificial meaning of the word "forge" as "mak[ing] or imitat[ing] falsely."<sup>134</sup> In writing, the first generation signature is forged, a counterfeit, so to speak, from the second generation. However, if the following generations do not write in the name of their predecessors, pages remain blank and stories remain untold, even if they are stories about not knowing. We must therefore also consider two further meanings of forge: "to form or bring into being" and "to move forward slowly and steadily."<sup>135</sup>

Honigmann's protagonist strikes a balance here between passivity and activity vis-à-vis the written artifacts of previous generations. The very act of writing, of forging a signature, by the generation after in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* on the one hand, exercises agency in forging a bond to the past. This agency takes on a somewhat rebellious tone when we consider that "...Honigmann's 'generational texts' ... reveal themselves precisely as meditations on the subject of denied access, more precisely, of denied asking, denied speaking, denied listening and denied relation," (Gsoels-Lorensen 378-9). Distance and silence between father and daughter "does not mean a withdrawal into passivity on the narrator's part; the exact opposite is the case" (Gsoels-Lorensen 378-9). On the other hand, as Bannasch notes, the novel depicts the father's entries in an unmediated way without narrative framing (146),<sup>136</sup> thus maintaining integrity of

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<sup>134</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary online: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/forge>.

<sup>135</sup> Merriam-Webster.

<sup>136</sup> "Der Roman gibt diese Aufzeichnungen des Vaters nicht resümierend sondern im Wortlaut und ohne erzählersiche Rahmung wieder."

the first-generation voice and that which cannot be known. Fiero captures the ambivalence between being reverent to but not overwhelmed by the past when she notes that “sie steigt in gewisser Weise in seine Fußstapfen, lebt zwar ihr eigenes Leben, kann aber seine Geschichte, die in ihr weiterlebt, nicht leugnen” (*Zwischen* 66).<sup>137</sup> The protagonist’s written entries introduce a new spatial proximity through writing in the calendar. At the same time, the entries maintain generational, temporal, and experiential distance.

The narrative gets absorbed into the English notebook, evidenced by the shift from narration to the narrator’s own entries into the calendar. It becomes unclear where the entries stop, if at all, making it possible that the novel ends in the calendar. The reader is left disoriented at the end: are we reading a narration or a private journal entry? The novel leaves this question open. In the final scene the protagonist narrates or writes about the train ride back to Paris, and the novel ends, quite fittingly, in the suspension of a train in motion.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*Eine Liebe aus Nichts* demands that political and ethnic identities be read together as interlocking factors through the lens of exile as a form of spatial displacement. The history of assimilation of Jews into German society that Scholem outlines and the negative symbiosis that Diner uses for post-Holocaust relations between Jews and Germans, when put into conversation with *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, reveal continuities and disjunctures in post-war East Germany that manifest themselves in the text as trans- and intragenerational identity crises. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* shows a continued political symbiosis after the war and in East Germany, namely the so-called “red assimilation,” even though assimilation via politics as well as through secular national identity took place in the decades leading up to the war. In addition, *Eine Liebe aus*

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<sup>137</sup> “she follows to a certain extent in his footsteps, lives her own life but cannot deny his past that lives on in her.”

*Nichts* reveals the contradictions of assimilative political identities as well as of antifascist ideology with regards to the erasure of, yet emphasis, on Jewish identity. Parsing out the father's moments of identity crisis introduces the nuance of Jewish identity into Julia Hell's symbolic politics of paternity in GDR family novels. These moments of existential vulnerability are symptomatic of a repressed ethnic/religious identity that played a significant role in going into exile. That is, for Jewish Communists who returned to the Soviet zone, the Holocaust and Jewish identity are cast aside as peripheral, if not forgotten, factors that preceded exile, return, and the subsequent building of the GDR. The next generation nevertheless exposes Jewish identity as a factor of continuity despite disavowal and the Holocaust as a factor of disruption inseparable from the political cause and founding myth of East Germany.

However, as Frank Stern proposes, "the problems of German-Jewish identity and culture have to be seen in a wider historical perspective than just the frame of the postwar period" (71). To focus simply on the continuation of Jewish assimilation from pre- into postwar periods through the father and his journal entries would mean to ignore the valuable insights that *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* brings to the notion of postmemory. Viewed through the postmemory framework, the internal contradictions contained within the father transfer to and find expression through the second generation who, it seems, is charged with working the family past out of these conflicts, especially when encouraged to talk about her Jewish identity in Paris. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* portrays the second generation's experience outside of Germany as one of exile that displays intergenerational continuities, thus blending the painful and the productive, isolation with contact. The exile calendar ultimately becomes an alternative third space to continue the father-daughter relationship and thereby achieve a lasting "Zusammensein" through writing. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is itself a product of exile. Though Honigmann chose to leave the GDR in

1984, she clearly is dealing with an enduring connection to Germany, specifically East Germany, and reimagined childhood memories with her father. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is a written, intergenerational space of GDR memory that recuperates that which had been lost through various conversions and disavowals over the centuries: Jewish identity. Acknowledging Jewish identity in the family legacy as a main factor in the parent generation's involuntary exile and as a facet of one's own identity, Honigmann's protagonist reestablishes a closer, albeit posthumous, relationship to her father. *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* reflects the inseparability of Honigmann's German and Jewish identities that are shaped by both her voluntary exile from today's unified Germany and her occasional returns whether real or imaginative.

## Chapter Two: Political and Familial Tensions across German-Polish Borders in Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (Paul's Letters) (1999)

“Warum erst jetzt?” (Maron 7)<sup>138</sup> Monika Maron's autobiographical narrator asks herself in *Pawels Briefe* (1999) when she fortuitously discovers a box that had been buried beneath decades of silence and forgetting. The box contains photographs and letters from the perished Jewish grandfather from the first half of the twentieth century that come to light near the century's end. Monika Maron's three-generation, semi-autobiographical family story not only thematizes ongoing political tensions within the family sphere long after Germany's reunification, but also occasions reflections on the autobiographical narrator's own past and how it fits into the family past of shifting political regimes, affiliations, and locales.

Larger negotiations of the two German pasts trigger contemplation of the family past. Maron's narrator indicates the opportunistic timing of turning to the family past in the post-unification period by stating that “Erinnerungen haben ihre Zeit,” (7)<sup>139</sup> and that sometimes “Jahre, sogar Jahrzehnte vergehen, während deren uns immer wieder einfällt, daß wir uns eines Tages um diese eine Sache kümmern und uns an etwas oder an jemanden genau erinnern wollen. So, glaube ich, ist es mir mit der Geschichte meiner Großeltern ergangen” (8).<sup>140</sup> The German reunification lingers in the background of the text, though the text also explicitly thematizes it throughout as a parallel discussion to family memory. Indeed after initial celebration of the fall of the Wall in 1989, Germans had renegotiate these two competing histories.

These competing histories of the two German states from 1949 to 1989 are key constitutive features of Maron's biography. As with Barbara Honigmann, Maron's own

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<sup>138</sup> “Why only now?” all translations are my own

<sup>139</sup> “memories have their time.”

<sup>140</sup> “years, even decades pass during which it occurs to us time and again that one day we will see to this one thing and will want to precisely remember something or someone. That is, I believe, how it went with me and the history of my grandparents.”

background is also constituted by a kind of “Doppelleben” or double life, albeit one that is different from Honigmann’s. Elke Gilson probes the “Doppelheit” or dual perhaps also dueling (*Wie Literatur Hilft* 142), positionalities in Maron’s protagonists between, for example, logic and emotion or mind and body (147). However, Gilson focuses on Maron’s earlier fictional protagonists in her works before *Pawels Briefe*, such as *Flugasche*, for their aspects of self-contradictory impulses of a subject living in the GDR. How does Maron move away from duality and negotiate instead the *multiplicity* of intergenerational positionality shifts and contradictions in the post-Wende present?

Amidst the whirlwind of change sweeping Germany, the years to follow saw a boom in popularity of “autobiographischen Text[e] und Generationenroman[e]” (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 12).<sup>141</sup> That is, both public and private negotiations of memory took place, and they were by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* reflects this mutual exchange between historical context and family memory, drawing on both for comparison, support, and objection with regards to the recollections of both the narrator’s mother past and that of the narrator herself. As Eigler notes, critics associate Maron with unrelenting polemics against the “Autoritätsgläubigkeit” of East Germans (*Gedächtnis* 176).<sup>142</sup> This may be part of the reason why she and her book *Pawels Briefe* particularly came under attack in light of the controversy in 1995, in which Maron was revealed as a collaborator with the East German state security known as the “Stasi” (Lee 67).

On the one hand, *Pawels Briefe*, explicitly classified by Maron as a family story and not a novel (Boll 89), received much praise (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 178 n. 57). On the other hand, precisely its biographical and autobiographical aspects further stirred up the controversy

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<sup>141</sup> “autobiographical texts and generational novels.”

<sup>142</sup> “belief in authority.”

surrounding Maron's association with the Stasi, as the text raised questions about Maron's motivation(s) (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 178 n. 56). Others highlighted Maron's problematic co-opting of the grandfather's story of victimhood in order to construe herself as victim of Communism (Taberner, "Ob" 51).<sup>143</sup> Lee contends that "Autobiografie fungiert also als ausgezeichnete Weise einer Identitätspräsentation durch Geschichte. Was bisher keiner Rechtfertigung bedurfte, als vollkommen natürlich und selbstverständlich erschien, wird plötzlich begründungsbedürftig" (67).<sup>144</sup> With *Pawels Briefe* Maron attempts an autobiography that is at times ambivalent in its self-reflexivity. Andrew Plowman, for example, investigates more closely the link between autobiography and Maron's shuttling stance between apology and justification in the text's implicit and explicit references to contemporary discourses surrounding revelations of her Stasi collaboration.

The autobiographical project in the text is also at times tightly woven with, and other times distanced from biographies of previous generations, which themselves contain multiple conversions, disavowals, and border crossings. Given the portrayal of shifting identities in the family past, Maron's autobiographical narrator tries to position herself within these and her own changing identities and attitudes that span Germany's divided as well as its reunified eras.

I argue that in *Pawels Briefe*, the second-generation's return to the family past through this (auto)biographical piece negotiates proximity and distance through narrativity, photography, and travel. Maron's ultimate aim of this negotiation is to locate her autobiographical subject within the family past of shifting alliances and considering one's own fluctuating positionalities over the decades. Reflections on the events before her own birth precipitates reflection on one's

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<sup>143</sup> See also Caduff and Detje.

<sup>144</sup> "Autobiography functions as a perfect way to present one's identity through history. What had, until a certain point, not necessitated a justification and had appeared as completely taken for granted suddenly needs to be justified."



own biography and a reconsideration of previous conceptions about the GDR and the parent generation.

Mechanisms of proximity and distance in the text prevent the autobiographical narrator from over-identifying with her grandfather as a Jewish Holocaust victim. Use of memory artifacts, such as photography, and the depiction of travel to Poland in *Pawels Briefe* allows the second-generation to negotiate between what Susan Suleiman calls the 1.5 generation<sup>145</sup> and second generation—that is, between varying degrees of proximity and distance to the parent and grandparent generations. This negotiation says a lot more about the way in which the text constructs the protagonist's own motivations when dealing with her own biography, namely the role of the GDR period, rather than about the ties to the parent and grandparent generations. In the aftermath of the reunification period and the renegotiations taking place in the public sphere at large, Maron's family story is an example of what literature can do or allows us to see that history and politics cannot. The process of writing the family story revisits and addresses ideological divisiveness, showing an ever-evolving engagement with the past. An author can take stock of changing attitudes and positionalities over time. Fictionalized negotiations of familial relationships and the extent of their implication in politics persist into the post-unification period to render the GDR past and its role in one's life story as more complex.

To give a brief overview of the novel, the first-person autobiographical narrator, Monika, not only recalls her own memories in the late 1990s but also invokes those preceding her birth. The narrator's Jewish grandfather Pawel and the grandmother Josefa, after having disavowed their respective religions, convert as Baptists and emigrate from their Polish town to start a new life in Berlin in the early twentieth century. At the brink of WWII, however, they are deported

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<sup>145</sup> “too young to have an adult understanding of what was happening, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews” (277).

back to Poland due to Pawel's Jewishness, despite his previous religious conversion, while their children remain in Berlin. Pawel is later sent to the Belchatow ghetto in Poland where he dies. Their daughter Hella, the narrator's mother, survives the war and experiences afterward what she calls a rebirth (Maron 114). She moves to the Soviet sector of Berlin, officially becomes a member of the Communist party, and dedicates herself to building the antifascist East Germany. She marries a Communist functionary who becomes the stepfather Monika despises. The autobiographical narrator herself reflects on her own personal shift in political alliance. Having grown up with Communism, the narrator reflects on her own rebirth in middle adulthood in which she sought to disavow the GDR's antifascist ideology and move west.

After official geopolitical reunification, the residual "wall in the head" (Frederick Taylor "25 Jahre")<sup>146</sup> arguably prevented frank engagement with the past. Yet, *Pawels Briefe*, though not letting go of criticism completely, at least shows a willingness to engage the ideological blockade while imagining and gathering information about the family past:

Gerade ihr [Marons] Vorhaben, die assoziativ miteinander verknüpften Geschichten von Familienmitgliedern, Nachbarn und Bekannten einfach nur *verstehen* zu wollen, verhindert jede Spur von Rechthaberei und damit auch den Eindruck, wir hätten es hier mit einer objektiven Schilderung der Vergangenheit zu tun. (Gilson, "Ein kurzer" 73)<sup>147</sup>

Indeed, although Maron insists on calling *Pawels Briefe* a family story and not a novel (Boll 89), thus emphasizing authenticity, her text clearly points out the subjectivity of memory and of postmemory work as something constructed. The text itself is a written construction and a partial family photo album, crafted and arranged at the liberty of the writer. The collection of different

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<sup>146</sup> All references to Taylor hereafter, namely in chapter four, refer to Diana Taylor.

<sup>147</sup> "Precisely her [Maron's] intention to simply want to *understand* the associative, interconnected stories from family members, neighbors, and acquaintances prevents every trace of self-righteousness and, with it, the impression that we have an objective depiction of the past."

perspectives and the artifacts that betray them show that religious, national, political positionalities, and seemingly entrenched alliances are far more complex and fluid. At the same time, however, the process of narrating and constructing the family story awakens old intergenerational ideological conflicts that also must be built into this family story. Some stories, viewpoints, and particular locales are included in the exploration of the family past but in a way that conveys the narrator's distance towards them. For example, the trip to Poland in *Pawels Briefe* is narrated with ironic undertones that convey skepticism towards Poland and Poles, even Polish relatives. The fact that these ideological fissures are incorporated into the assemblage of this family story shows, more than anything else in *Pawels Briefe*, that the autobiographical protagonist is reexamining pieces of her own life that had been previously dismissed or denied. Realizing the blurred positionalities within the family past throughout the twentieth century reveals the narrator's own shifting attitudes towards the GDR over the decades.

### **1.5 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation: Negotiating Proximity and Distance**

Stumbling upon the box of artifacts from before and during the war reawakens dormant curiosity towards the grandparents, the war, and, consequently, the protagonist's own connection to the war period that overlaps with the first few years of her life. The narrator, like Maron, was born in 1941 and is thus part of the 1.5 generation, a term to define the generation of children who survived the Holocaust but were too young at the time to remember but old enough to have been there (Suleiman 277). Thus, the question, "Wo ist der Krieg in mir geblieben?" (117)<sup>148</sup> underscores the overlap between the war period and early childhood. War impressions remain latent within until the protagonist encounters the box filled with photographs from the first half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>148</sup> "Where does the war reside within me?"

Given that the protagonist experienced the war in infancy, before having developed the cognitive ability to remember, it is easy to think of her still as part of what Hirsch calls “the generation after.” However, the narrator seems to cling to what qualifies her as part of the 1.5 generation that had *been there* as the war raged, and, on a personal level, this temporal overlap connects her to her grandfather. The narrator thus falls between the 1.5 and 2nd-generation, however, her project’s inspiration stems from the temporal overlap that qualifies her as part of the 1.5 generation.

The first few years of the protagonist’s life overlap with the last years of the grandfather Pawel’s and are used as an important point of departure for the protagonist to build a relationship with him (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 149). The significance of the small period of overlap is poignantly felt in the wartime letters in which the grandfather mentions the protagonist by name. The protagonist’s initial inspiration of having been there and seeing her name in Pawel’s handwriting, however, prompts engagement with memories from before her birth and therefore puts her in the second generation position of not knowing and not having experienced what she investigates.

The narrator reflects on the grandfather’s death and how it overshadows his *life*, precisely the part of the story that is already distant to the narrator, given that his life in Germany was before her birth. Since Pawel was born a Jew, died as a Jew, but *lived* as a Baptist in Germany (Maron 53), the narrator tries to fill in and reconstruct the life between birth into Jewish identity in Poland and death by that same identity in Poland. Reflecting on the agency of identity in this family past, for example, the conversion to Baptism from Judaism is juxtaposed with and thus underscores unchosen, deadly identities. *Pawels Briefe* highlights the politics in which some are involuntarily given a particular identity as a means for not just exclusion but also extermination. A similar dynamic is seen in Honigmann’s novel, in which the father’s chosen identity in the

post-war GDR as a Communist is at times undermined by his imposed labeling from the outside as a Jew, revealing contradictions in the antifascist ideology that supposedly erases, indeed tries to expunge, religious and national identities in favor of one political and ideological identity.

*Pawels Briefe*, however, deals with the family story of a Jew who died during the war because of the identity he failed to shed. The protagonist, by reconstructing the life of Pawel, balances out, perhaps even tries to overshadow, his death with life.

Yet, the grandfather's life was during a time before the protagonist's birth, thus making her rely heavily on artifacts and also the mother's stories. The discovered box of documents prompts not only a renewed interest in the grandfather's life, but it also reignites longstanding political tensions between the protagonist and her mother, Hella. In this way, the analepsis<sup>149</sup> that follows the novel's initial encounter between mother and daughter is reminiscent of the backwards unfolding of events following the opening scene between father and son in *In Zeiten des abehmenden Lichts*.

The narrative depicts residual ideological conflict between mother and daughter that is rooted in earlier arguments about the injustices of East German society and capitalist West Germany. Delving into the past reopens what Anne Fuchs calls "memory contests" which "edit and advance competing narratives of identity with reference to an historical event perceived as a massive disturbance of a group's self-image" ("From" 179). Maron portrays war and post-war memory as tightly interwoven with political eras and allegiances of German history, namely the East-West politics of Cold War Germany and their respective ways of engaging (or not) with WWII memory. The mother, having experienced the war firsthand, and the main protagonist, too young to remember it, approach the past from two different generational and political

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<sup>149</sup> "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment..." (Genette 40).

perspectives.<sup>150</sup> Against the temporal backdrop of the *Wende*, wartime memories are revisited in the 1990s and indeed set “memory contests” into motion. Postmemory engagement with artifacts is shown in *Pawels Briefe* to be the catalyst for political tensions between generations who are entrenched in their own ways of remembering or forgetting. In a way, intergenerational conflict could thus be seen as a form of forgetting that distracts from the issue at hand, namely the family member(s) lost during the war.

The unreliability of memory and its susceptibility to repression after major historical events is thematized in the narrator’s recollection of political disagreements with her mother. For example, the protagonist holds resentment towards her mother particularly because of her ardent support of antifascist ideology after the war that did not openly or specifically acknowledge Jews as a victimized group in Nazi Germany. The protagonist attributes Hella’s memory lapses to the desire to forget the war period altogether:

Vor diesem Vergessen stehe ich ratlos, so ratlos wie Hella selbst. Das Jahr 1945 sei für sie eine Wiedergeburt gewesen...Eine Wiedergeburt ohne Eltern, ein Neuanfang ohne die Vergangenheit? Mußten nicht nur die Täter, sondern auch die Opfer ihre Trauer verdrängen, um weiterzuleben?...Und später, als das Leben längst weitergegangen war, als die Zeitungen “Neues Leben”, ... und “Neues Deutschland” hießen, als die Gegenwart der Zukunft weichen mußte und die Vergangenheit endgültig überwunden wurde, wurde da auch die eigene Vergangenheit unwichtig? (113-114)<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> See Dietrich for her discussion on the generational differences in the GDR, for example, the founding generation as opposed to those who were later born into the GDR and tended to be the ones who became disenchanting.

<sup>151</sup> “I am just as perplexed over Hella’s forgetting as Hella herself. The year 1945 was supposedly a rebirth for her...a rebirth without her parents, a new beginning without the past? Did not only the perpetrators but also the victims repress their grief in order to move on? ...And later, when life had already long moved on, when the newspapers were called “New Life,” and “New Germany,” when the present had to make way for the future and the past had finally been overcome, did one’s own past become irrelevant?”

Noting here particularly the reference to the Communist newspaper in East Germany, *Neues Deutschland*, the protagonist also attributes Hella's forgetfulness to the prevailing antifascist ideology in the Soviet sector after the war, part of which had been an optimistic "nach vorne Leben" (to live onward/forward [for the future] 114) in order to build a new Germany. That is, Maron seems to engage here in what Fuchs sees as the "demonisation of forgetting" ("From" 177) in contemporary German memory debates. The narrator insinuates a connection between the antifascist myth and forgetting in which the mother perhaps chose ideology over communicative memory regarding the grandparents' fate during WWII.

Fuchs highlights, however, the problematic juxtaposition of moralized forgetting with sacralized remembering ("From" 179) and thereby proposes memory contests as a more productive "open-ended process through which the postwar generations negotiate alternative versions of identity" (179). Fuchs explores *Pawels Briefe* as an example and notes that "although Maron assumes a critical position towards her mother's ideological allegiance to communism, she rejects the aforementioned cultural demonisation of forgetfulness" ("From" 181). In *Pawels Briefe* there seems to be a tendency towards the problematic dichotomy of sacralized remembering and moralized forgetting with regards to memory politics of the GDR all the way down to biographical interpretation. However, potential for intergenerational conflict is bracketed in the text as an attitude that the narrator once had but has since let go of, or at least, reconsidered: "Es fällt mir schwer, die Idylle, die mir aus Hella's Erzählungen entsteht, nicht zu attackieren" (50).<sup>152</sup> The self-awareness is at times complemented by a sort of letting down of guards typically used by the second generation against the first. For example, the protagonist and Hella have differing views as to why Hella's non-Jewish German boyfriend left her in 1933, but

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<sup>152</sup> "It is difficult for me not to attack the idyll that arises out of Hella's stories."

the protagonist ultimately concludes that “Die Interpretationshoheit für ihre Biographie gehört Hella. Und vielleicht ist es ja ein Defekt meiner Generation, eine Einübung unseres Denkens, wenn wir nicht verdachtslos hinnehmen können, daß im Jahr 1933 eine Halbjüdin von ihrem Freund verlassen wurde” (79).<sup>153</sup>

Political ideology is a further factor of earlier memory contests waged and recalled in the text. For example, when the protagonist is tempted to point out contradictions in the mother’s account of her political affiliation with Communists against Social Democrats in the first decades of the twentieth century, she decides to let it be, since “nichts gesagt werden kann, was nicht schon gesagt wurde...ich nehme es einfach hin” (65).<sup>154</sup> In line with Fuchs’ suggestion, the text contains numerous instances in which present reflection turns potential for argument into an opportunity to reflect on one’s own changing and differing interpretations of the past.

Part of the task at hand is to not only to reflect on past interpretations about the war but also to rethink them and create new ones in the process of writing the family story. Gilson explains memory as “eine nachträgliche Konstruktion, eine Neu-Inszenierung der Vergangenheit, die immer von aktuellen Ereignissen und Einsichten beeinflusst ist” (“Ein kurzer” 73).<sup>155</sup> She also points out the futility in ascertaining correctness of memory as it pertains to the reality of what happened: “Dadurch wird sie [Erinnerung] vielleicht nicht unwahrer als das, was *wirklich* gewesen ist, aber sie bleibt eben doch erfunden” (Gilson, “Ein kurzer” 73).<sup>156</sup> In the process of finding out more about the family past before the protagonist’s birth, the text often presents interview-like scenarios between the protagonist and her mother that seem to be both

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<sup>153</sup> “The power of interpretation of her biography belongs to Hella. And maybe it is a defect of my generation, an acquired way of thinking, when we cannot simply accept without suspicion that in the year 1933 a half-Jewish woman was left by her boyfriend.”

<sup>154</sup> “nothing can be said that has not already been said before...I simply accept it.”

<sup>155</sup> “a belated construction, a new creation of the past that is always influenced by current events and insights.”

<sup>156</sup> “Because of that, it [memory] becomes no less true than what *actually* happened but it is still invented.”



critical, yet also show willingness towards an open-dialogue in the post-unification period. If we briefly compare these scenes with the scenario in *Stille Zeile Sechs* in which the protagonist is charged with writing a biography of a Communist functionary, we see, in the Cold War setting of that text, that the one-way communication and the suppression of the narrator's criticism builds up to imagined cathartic episodes of violence towards the functionary who symbolizes state power.

The protagonist remains skeptical of what and how Hella remembers (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 172), but, as Katharina Boll points out, *Pawels Briefe* has a markedly different tone compared to Maron's earlier novels, such as *Stille Zeile Sechs*:

...[es] ist nicht mehr wie noch in 'Stille Zeile Sechs' von 'Kampf' und 'besiegen' die Rede. Das Verstehen der Geschichte der Großeltern, 'über das Maß der eigenen Legitimation hinaus' ist der Versuch einer Rekonstruktion nicht allein des individuellen Gedächtnisses, sondern eines vergessenen Familiengedächtnisses oder anders ausgedrückt: eines kommunikativen Gedächtnisses über drei Generationen im Kontext von drei politischen Systemen" (78).

Elements of dissent and frustration are present in *Pawels Briefe* as well but mainly as recalled situations between mother and daughter. The flashbacks to earlier disputes from the immediate post-unification period reflect inflamed memory contests between those who celebrated in triumph and others who defended themselves out of disappointment. Memory contests as they are recalled by the narrator in the immediate post-unification years are thus not so much open-ended exchanges of views, as Fuchs contends, rather they comprise an enduring competition between two generations that the younger insists on winning. For example, Maron's narrator recalls gloating in her mother's presence as "Sieger der Geschichte" immediately following the

fall of the Wall (130).<sup>157</sup> Maron therefore reflects through this text on the devaluation of the GDR in the wake of its demise, dedicating a few pages in this family story to earlier intergenerational political tensions.

Maron thus approaches the past in this text in a more open way that allows other voices to emerge in the text. Boll highlights this plurality of voices that bars a “homogene Geschichte” and places “die Stimmen der weiteren Familienmitglieder gleichrangig neben die Stimme der Autorin” (98).<sup>158</sup> The variety of viewpoints has quite a few effects in the text to show the contingency of memory. For one, the polyphony collapses the former hierarchy in which those who remember rank morally above those who forget, thereby de-emphasizing the second generation’s previous self-righteousness. A further effect of inserting direct quotes from other actors in this family past is that it establishes connections between the narrator and previous generations. Building the other perspectives, particularly those from the mother, into the family story constitutes the process of incorporating the forty-year Cold War period as part of Maron’s own biography. A similar polyphonic dynamic is seen in Ruge’s novel as well, in which the East German past is revisited in the early twenty-first century, not out of Ostalgie motivation but as a legitimate and complex part of one’s own past and life experience. Multiple perspectives from different points in time are also present in Ruge’s text to render memories more complex and multi-dimensional.

*Pawels Briefe* presents a collection of voices or heteroglossia<sup>159</sup> that is nevertheless framed from the narrator’s perspective. The narrator is the main arbiter who filters, paraphrases,

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<sup>157</sup> “the victor of history.”

<sup>158</sup> “homogeneous story”; “the voices of other family members next to that of the author.”

<sup>159</sup> Bakhtin’s chapter “Discourse in the Novel” defines heteroglossia as different types of speech that may enter the novel, such as “authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters,” each of which “permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)” (263).

or frames these voices with subsequent reflection. The family story as a construction is also constituted by selective inclusion and interpretation of artifacts, namely photographs. The weak connection of the 1.5 generation to WWII renders memory objects paramount in compensating for memory's fragility and staying on task with reconstructing the grandfather's life. However, the way in which the narrator approaches aspects of Pawel's life and the various photographs actually reveals more about the narrator's confrontation with parts of her own past than about Pawel's interests and political affiliations.

### **Narrative and Photographic Focalization**

Maron's investigation of the family past traces a pattern of belonging and disavowal across generations in this family narrative, and these shifting affiliations result in contradictory identities. Sylvia Klötzer notes that *Pawels Briefe* "richtet sich auf Kontinuitäten, auf Voraussetzungen für Kontinuitäten sowie auf Gründe für deren Blockaden" (45).<sup>160</sup> That is, discovering lines of continuity as well as *discontinuity* in postmemory rests on the second generation's speculation and selectivity. The simultaneous agency and ambiguity that come from being born after motivate the creation of the grandfather's life collage in *Pawels Briefe*. Creating such a collage forces the protagonist to place herself within the family lineage of shifting national, political, and religious affiliations. I argue that the subjective approach to photography in the text is used to negotiate changing positionalities in the family past, including the narrator's own shifting alliances with the grandfather and mother. Narrative and photographic focalizations<sup>161</sup> reconstruct Pawel's life and allow the autobiographical protagonist to revisit the

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<sup>160</sup> "pursues continuities, preconditions for continuities, as well as reasons to block them."

<sup>161</sup> Genette, like Bakhtin, also theorizes the presence of one or multiple voices or, perhaps also, modes of perception: "Internal focalization whether that be fixed (passing through one character), variable (passing through different characters), or multiple (as in epistolary novels, where the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several letter-writing characters)" (189).

mother-daughter relationship. These negotiations are shown to be interpolated into and motivated by the narrator's changing stances toward the GDR over the decades.

Boll, as mentioned before, draws out the polyphonic aspect of *Pawels Briefe* and counts the photographs and letters, the "Erinnerungsträger,"<sup>162</sup> as autonomous voices in the narrative (92). However, her analysis lets the centrality of the narrator almost completely disappear in a crowd of voices. Though a variety of sometimes contradictory perspectives prevents a monolithic explanation of the family story (Boll 96-7), it is clearly arranged from a particular generational perspective. The "arrangement" is visible in the narrative and visual focalizations present through *Pawels Briefe*. Focalization thus means the thought process in which the subject, both explicitly and implicitly, determines inclusion or exclusion of information or photographs pertaining to the constructed family story that constitutes *Pawels Briefe*.

### **Narrative Collage**

"Wie soll ich mir meinen Großvater als Mitglied der Kommunistischen Partei vorstellen?" (59)<sup>163</sup> the narrator asks herself as she grapples with the grandfather being a Communist, especially given his identification as a Baptist. The indirect speech from conversations with Hella and the narrator's reference to documents are two of many aspects that give the narrator pause for reflection, therefore showing a plurality of voices or sources but, at the same time, giving the narrator the main role as mediator. For example, Hella's statements are given not only indirectly but also subjunctively as possibility: "Hella sagt, ihr Vater hätte zwischen seinem kommunistischen und seinem religiösen Bekenntnis keinen Widerspruch empfunden. Beide Ziele seien ihm identisch gewesen" (59).<sup>164</sup> Immediately following, however,

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<sup>162</sup> "carriers of memory."

<sup>163</sup> "How am I supposed to imagine my grandfather as a member of the Communist party?"

<sup>164</sup> "Hella says her father did not see a contradiction between his communist and religious identification, to him, both goals had been identical."

the protagonist references an official document of the grandfather's voluntary withdrawal from the local Baptist community in 1929 (59). Juxtaposing the document with the mother's insistence that Pawel remained religious, the narrator speculates that "mein Großvater nicht seine Überzeugung gewechselt hat, sondern nur die Gemeinschaft, mit der er für sie eintreten wollte" (60).<sup>165</sup> Though the narrator still cannot reconcile these two aspects of the grandfather's identity, she leaves the contradiction open-ended in order to ponder her own ties with Communism.

Maron's protagonist critically reflects on this block that seems to have prevented understanding or connection to the grandfather: "...er wurde Kommunist, und ich kann ihn mir in einer kommunistischen Parteisammlung einfach nicht vorstellen. Oder will ich nicht?" (60-61).<sup>166</sup> The moment in which the protagonist finds out Pawel was a Communist is curiously absent from the family story. That is, there was no conversation or discovered document that prompted this section of *Pawels Briefe* that brusquely broaches the topic with a seemingly simple question: "wie soll ich mir meine Großvater als Mitglied der Kommunistischen Partei vorstellen?" (59). The reflection that follows up on the possibility of *not wanting* to imagine this aspect of Pawel reveals it as a taken-for-granted, dismissed, or perhaps repressed part of the family past that is now self-reflexively engaged. In any case, the narrator here not only realizes the blockade as a personal one but also presses further within her own biography in order to explain why she may not *want* to imagine Pawel as a Communist.

The realization that Pawel had been a Communist is a narrative gap that the narrator retrospectively tries to fill in by connecting Communism to her own biography: "Ich weiß nicht, wann ich erfahren habe, daß er Mitglied der Partei war. Entweder habe ich diese Mitteilung

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<sup>165</sup> "my grandfather did not change his beliefs, rather the community, with which he wanted to advocate them."

<sup>166</sup> "he became a communist, and I simply cannot imagine him in a communist party congregation. Or do I not want to?"

damals ignoriert, oder sie enthielt, als sie mir zukam, eine andere Bedeutung für mich als heute” (61).<sup>167</sup> The malleability of interpretation is especially highlighted in this section of the family story, showing reflection that both distances, yet draws nearer to the childhood influence within the Communist milieu:

Ich kann mich auch nicht erinnern, wann und wie das Wort Kommunismus in meinen kindlichen Sprachschatz geraten ist. Wahrscheinlich aber gleich nach dem Krieg... Ich war vier Jahre alt. Das Wort Kommunismus wird für mich wohl bedeutet haben: Mama, Marta, Trockenkartoffeln, keine Fliegerangriffe, Lucie und “Später, wenn alles gut geworden sein wird.” Oder was? (61)<sup>168</sup>

The mere use of the word “*geraten*” signals an involuntary linguistic intrusion into an otherwise pristine “*Sprachschatz*” and betrays the narrator’s present anti-Communist sentiment. While the narrator wonders later on, “wo ist der Krieg in mir geblieben?” (117),<sup>169</sup> the above passage shows a peeling back of layers in adulthood to search for, and thereby acknowledge, a former Communist milieu and its influence beneath decades of political tension and renunciation of Communism in the GDR.

Preoccupation with Pawel’s life from the position of the “generation after” upholds generational distance, however, in explaining the two-fold contradiction of the grandfather’s Baptist-Communist ties and of the narrator’s own anti-Communist stance, the position of the 1.5 generation late in the war and at the establishment of the GDR serves as an ambiguous point of

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<sup>167</sup> “I do not know when I first learned that he was a member of the party. Either I ignored this information at the time or it had a different meaning for me then than it does today.”

<sup>168</sup> “I also cannot remember when and how the word, “communism,” crept into my childhood vocabulary.<sup>168</sup> Probably right after the war...I was four years old. The word, “communism,” would have meant to me at that time: Mama, Marta, dried up potatoes, no airstrikes, Lucie and ‘Later when everything will have turned out well.’ Or what?”

<sup>169</sup> “Where does the war reside within me?”

autobiographical departure to which the narrator retrospectively traces her own changing attitudes over time.

Lucid recollection of changing political stance during middle adulthood follows the vague memories of early childhood:

Ich war dreiundvierzig Jahre alt, als ich zum ersten Mal nach New York reiste, wo ich innerhalb von vier Wochen begriff, daß meine politischen Ideale, an denen ich irgendwie und ratlos festgehalten hatte, ein Mischmasch waren aus kindlicher Paradiessucht, christlicher Moral und individuellem Freiheitsdrang. Damals, glaube ich, gab ich die Sache mit dem Kommunismus endgültig auf. (62)<sup>170</sup>

Reading the passage recalling childhood next to the one recalling later on in adulthood shows that memory is contingent on present context. In this case, continued anti-communist political leanings in the post-communist present affect one's ability to remember and way of remembering precisely the Communist influence in one's own past.

Selectivity is a means to serve present ends, namely, a need for continuity. Generational distance remains unbridgeable, but the threat of political incongruence is overcome and filtered through the process of selection and justification steeped in the narrator's changing autobiographical memories. In the time of narration, the 1990s, what most interests the narrator about Pawel is "was ihn von anderen Menschen, die [sie] kannte, unterschied," (63),<sup>171</sup> especially given the communist social milieu during both his and her lifetime. She clings to this

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<sup>170</sup> "I was forty-three years old when I traveled for the first time to New York where I understood within four weeks' time that my political ideals to which I had somehow helplessly clung were a hodgepodge of childlike dependency on paradise, of Christian moral and of individual impulse to freedom. Back then [in New York], I believe, I finally gave up on communism."

<sup>171</sup> "what distinguished him from other people [she] knew."

imagined difference to forge an alliance with the grandfather and overwrite his political affiliation. She thus constructs a paradoxical commonality through difference:

Wir, mein Großvater und ich, weil ich nach ihm und nur nach ihm kam, waren eben ein bißchen anders, ein bißchen unpraktisch, dafür verträumt und zu spontanen Einfällen neigend, nervös, ein bißchen verrückt. (63)<sup>172</sup>

She clings to the similarity through difference to outweigh the other undesirable political difference that cannot be incorporated into her imaginative alliance because “Daß er Kommunist war wie Hella, Marta, ihre Freunde und vor allem Hellas neuer Mann, nahm ihm etwas von seinem Anderssein” (63).<sup>173</sup> She focuses instead on the imagined common ground of being different that “[sie] tröstete und [ihr] recht gab, wenn [sie] mit der Erwachsenenwelt im Streit lag” (63).<sup>174</sup> The idea of the grandfather serves as a point of identity orientation when, given the pivotal changes in national memory and Maron’s autobiographical memory, such identity is questioned.<sup>175</sup> After ruminating on the Communist similarity in both the grandfather’s and the narrator’s biographies, Maron’s narrator downplays the unassimilable political aspect of both her own and Pawel’s pasts that nevertheless bonds them. Rather than allowing Communist “state-owned memory” to persist into the post-communist present and own the memory of the grandfather as one of its supporting figures, the narrator, in the above passages, seeks to “privatize” memory of his life and reclaim agency in its reconstruction. She privatizes the memory of his life by reconstructing it as one lived differently and in defiance, perhaps of the

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<sup>172</sup> “We, my grandfather and I, because I came after him and only after him, were just a bit different, a bit impractical, but also dreamy and inclined to have spontaneous ideas, nervous, a bit crazy.”

<sup>173</sup> “that he was a communist like Hella, Marta, their friends, and, above all else, Hella’s new husband, diminished his uniqueness.”

<sup>174</sup> “comforted her and stood by her side when she was in conflict with the adult world.”

<sup>175</sup> Scholars have criticized Maron for identifying with the victimized Jewish grandfather in *Pawels Briefe* in order to rehabilitate her own image that suffered in post-unification literary circles due to her collaboration with the Stasi. For example, Joanna Stimmel notes that Maron’s attempt at “establishing an alternative genealogy for the new Germany converges with the writer’s revision of her own biography” (168). See also Eigler, *Gedächtnis*.



prevailing pre- and post-war Communist milieu. By reflecting on the various and sometimes conflicting identities in the grandfather's life, the narrator recalls the changes in her own life with regards to Communism in particular, thereby constructing continuity among intergenerational disavowals in this family story. A bond is constructed here through the negation of the bond's very foundation.

The conflicting facets of Pawel's identity prompt a narrative shift from outward dialogue with the mother to more introspective engagement about the dismissed or repressed parts of one's own biography. Friederike Eigler notes "auf metakritischer Ebene ihre Tendenz, ein Bild von Pawel gemäß den eigenen Vorstellungen zu entwerfen" (*Gedächtnis* 149).<sup>176</sup> Although various, at times contradictory, sources are included in this family story, it is rendered a mnemonic collage that draws on these sources but further speculates and imbues the family story with imaginative investment.

Notably, in the process of creating a narrative collage of Pawel, the narrator attempts to discern early childhood memories and then jumps forward a few decades to political crossroads in adulthood while in New York. The parent generation and, coincidentally, the GDR years are largely overlooked in order to forge continuity with the grandparent generation. Narrative focalization, on the one hand, depends on the word: Hella's voice in oral recollection and documentation of Pawel's withdrawal from the Baptist church. Photographic focalization, on the other, functions on the visual plane but it, too, serves to fill temporal and generational gaps. It is arguably a way to read refusal of temporal and generational proximity to the parent generation and to detach from the maternal GDR narrative inextricably tied to upbringing. Conflicting, ambiguous memories and viewpoints in the mother-daughter relationship lend themselves to a

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<sup>176</sup> "on the meta-critical level [the narrator's] tendency to put forth an image of Pawel that is in accordance with her own imaginings."

sort of narrative smooth-over. The extent to which the protagonist can manipulate and rearrange the photographs of the mother-daughter relationship remains to be explored.

### **Photographic Focalization**

Through photographic focalization, Maron's autobiographical narrator enacts a detachment from the maternal communist influence over her childhood, thereby revising her own past as one deriving from a paternal, non-communist narrative. However, given the inclusion of these childhood photos, the GDR era is in some way commemorated or acknowledged as a formative part of childhood even if abandoned later on in adulthood. Photographic focalization means the selection, arrangement, and visual focusing of photographs throughout the novel and particular stories of disavowal and connection that these aspects reveal in *Pawels Briefe*.<sup>177</sup> Linda Haverty Rugg astutely points out that "photographs disrupt the singularity of the autobiographical pact by pointing to a plurality of selves" yet they also "insist on something material, the *embodied* subject, the unification...of author, name, and body" (13). Given that *Pawels Briefe* is autobiographical, I argue that Maron's inclusion of photography captures both continuity and disjuncture not only within the family story but also in her own life story.

The subjective approach to photography in the text is used to negotiate changing positionalities in the family past, including the protagonist's own shifting alliances with the mother and grandfather. The selection of postmemories of Pawel through hearsay, letters, and imagination shapes interpretation of his photographs. In addressing the protagonist's GDR past, however, the photographs also participate in remembrance of, yet also distancing from the influence of Communism in childhood embodied by the mother figure. Further on in the novel, following a somewhat chronological presentation of pictures, the reader begins to see the

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<sup>177</sup> See Criser's "Disruptions" for her insights on the use of photography in contemporary German family novels in order to reconstruct the family archive and thereby also cultural memory of the GDR.

protagonist/narrator in childhood photographs. Readers only see the protagonist as a child, however, and in all photographs she is accompanied by her mother to suggest, what once was or perhaps still could be, a strong mother-daughter bond.

Are knots and bonds as easily (un)made through the photographic medium as they are through the imaginative narrative? What does the use of photographs in the novel reveal about the various positionings of second generation in postmemory, 1.5 generation in (post)memory, and first generation in autobiographical memory? Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames* draws attention to the ideology and constructedness behind the creation and subsequent arrangement and viewing of photography. In relation, photography is a medium through which to assess one's past and the familial relations that dictated one's childhood but eventually relinquished control, or took on new forms of it, in one's transition into adulthood. "Adulthood," Hirsch contends, "...demands a break from the powerful relationships of childhood, particularly from maternal attachment" (*Family Frames* 198-199). The photography in *Pawels Briefe*, viewed through Hirsch's ideas of ideology in family photography, illuminates the tenuous bonds it aims to disguise. I draw on Hirsch's idea of transition to highlight maternal detachment through photography in *Pawels Briefe*.

The relationship between narrative and photography in *Pawels Briefe* has not been lost on scholars. For example, Boll sees the photographs and their insets as enabling a sort of joint viewing between narrator and reader, as though readers are afforded the same flexibility and autonomy as the narrator: "Da der Leser die Bilder zum näheren Studieren nicht in die Hand nehmen kann, ermöglicht die Zoom-Perspektive die Vergrößerung einzelner Details" (97).<sup>178</sup> This overlooks the narrator's role as collector and as a sort of gatekeeper to the family photo

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<sup>178</sup> "Since the reader cannot take the photos in their hand to study them more closely, the zoom perspective enables the enlargement of individual details."

album that accompanies her family story, however. Eigler notes that “Maron erschreibt sich mit *Pawels Briefe* nicht nur eine Familiengeschichte, sie entwirft mit den eingefügten Fotos auch ihr eigenes Familienalbum...” (*Gedächtnis* 162).<sup>179</sup> Tending to the last aspect, and again invoking the collage metaphor, the narrator as collector includes only some photographs while leaving out others. I would further add that the narrator zooms in on what is of interest to her. This enables, as Boll notes, but also in a way, eclipses the reader’s view as well: “[die Ausschnitte verweisen] zurück auf unseren eigenen, immer selektiven, Wahrnehmungsprozess...” (Eigler, *Gedächtnis* 162).<sup>180</sup> We as readers are therefore forced to zoom in on what the narrator deems significant.

Eigler also argues that the photo album interweaves both critical reflection and affective connection (*Gedächtnis* 163), however, I maintain that the degree of critical reflection or affective connection depends on the photographed person. The photographs of the protagonist and her mother as opposed to those of the grandfather reveal different motivations that impact the extent of reflection/distance, on the one hand, and imagination/proximity, on the other. The way the narrative frames the photographs of mother and daughter, that is, in the narrator’s reflection upon the photographs, she creates distance and reveals cracks in the mother-daughter relationship that cannot be seen in the photographs. Conversely, yet more subtly through arrangement, a photograph of Pawel and its inset appear towards the end among childhood photographs to sustain attention on postmemory of Pawel’s life and thereby also on a paternal narrative that bridges grandchild and grandparent generations.

The increasingly autobiographical narrative and photographs work with rather than against each other to provide referential traction upon which the narrator can make confident

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<sup>179</sup> “Maron creates with *Pawels Briefe* not only a family story, she also constructs with the inserted photos her own family album...”

<sup>180</sup> “the clippings refer back to our own, always selective perceptive process.”

assertions about the past and her positioning within it by virtue of having been there. In *Family Frames*, Hirsch describes in one of her case studies “the picture not taken” which “bypasses the technical properties of photography and reappropriates the process of ‘touching-up’” (201). Seeing photographs of the protagonist only up until a certain age and only with her mother underlines the time lapse between depicted past and depicting present, between emotional, or at least spatial, closeness to the mother in childhood and critical distance from the mother in adulthood. The “picture not taken” manifests itself through the narration that surpasses the time of the photographs. In this narration, liberty is taken to subjectively interpret the past from a contemporary standpoint. Once again, as with the treatment of the grandfather’s political attachments, the narrator as collector acknowledges the GDR/maternal influence in her formative years up until a certain point. Photos from adolescence or adulthood remain absent. The later years and their exclusion from the photo album coincides with the narrator’s own growing discontent with East German society. The GDR period is therefore a part of the protagonist’s life that is remembered through childhood photographs and the narrative that frames them. At the same time, however, this chapter of life in the GDR also functions in the text as a boundary or disconnect in the autobiographical narrator’s subjectivity. The photographic index of childhood is literally *overwritten* in the sense of later reinterpretation. This belated reinterpretation in adulthood develops the “picture not taken” by touching it up with narrative that circumnavigates technicalities of photography.

Attempts at separation abound in the photograph on page 164 of *Pawels Briefe* and the way it is described. The picture portrays mother and daughter amidst East Germany’s ideological upswing against or perhaps in substitution of the backdrop of WWII’s death and destruction, as the protagonist and her mother are depicted walking hand-in-hand among a crowd of communist

activists in what seems to be the late 1940s. The “*Trümmerhaufen*,” or piles of rubble (164), looming in the background signify the displacement of the war past in order to foreground the antifascist present and hopes for the future. The march before the backdrop of ruins highlights Maron’s implication into the founding ideological narrative of the East German state which, at that time, strengthened the bond between the politically active mother and the impressionable daughter as evidenced by their bodies close together and their hands locked as they walk.

The narrator recalls that the feeling of certainty at the time, “daß Genossen bessere und klügere Menschen sind als andere, war Teil meines kindlichen Denkens...” (164).<sup>181</sup> She then inflects this memory with critical perception as an adult in the present, as she recalls eventual rejection of the childhood influence “das mir später, als ich es längst besser wußte, zuweilen die Reflexe verwirrte und aus den Denkwegen geräumt werden mußte wie lästiges Gestrüpp” (164).<sup>182</sup> By mention of reflexes, Maron invokes a bodily metaphor of connection between habits of mind and body. Just as the word “communism” had crept into childhood vocabulary like a foreign body, its pervasive social milieu seems to have infiltrated and hard wired the ways of thinking and acting that the narrator seeks to banish. Describing Communism this way first internalizes it as a bodily component in order to then externalize and distance it.

After reflecting on herself as a naïve believer in Communist ideology, the narrator further separates herself in adulthood from these formative childhood experiences as if they belong to a previous generation and only the photographs stand as evidence of her participation in them:

Ich erinnere mich wenig an meine Kindheit und habe trotzdem eine genaue Vorstellung von ihr. Wie die meisten Menschen habe ich mich in meinem Leben hin und wieder

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<sup>181</sup> “that comrades were better and smarter people than all others, was a part of my childhood thinking.”

<sup>182</sup> “that later, when I had long known better, occasionally confused my reflexes and had to be cleared from my thought paths like annoying undergrowth.”

gefragt, warum ich wohl geworden sein könnte, wie ich bin, und habe mir zu verschiedenen Zeiten verschiedene Antworten gegeben. (165-166)<sup>183</sup>

Maron accentuates here the 1.5 or possibly the second generation position by distancing the childhood years as though they belong to another generation entirely. Instead of something remembered, these memories are instead largely imagined based on the referent of a photograph that provide a “genaue Vorstellung” (precise mental image). The narrator contemplates on a metacritical level whether “ich mich wirklich erinnere oder ob ich mich an eine in meinem Alter und Verständnis angepaßte Neuinszenierung meiner Erinnerung erinnere” (167).<sup>184</sup> This highlights the malleability and layered nature of both autobiographical and postmemory.<sup>185</sup> A similar unfamiliarity shrouds the photographs of the protagonist herself as they do Pawel’s photographs. She bases her interpretations on one-dimensional photographs that are both overlaid with layers of passing time and changing attitudes, if not also generational distance. Though it is surely difficult to recall memories of childhood, this passage underscores the time lapse and its resulting changes in perception and recall.

The question “warum ich wohl geworden sein könnte, wie ich bin” (166)<sup>186</sup> creates further distance from this childhood photograph and is reminiscent of Christa Wolf’s recurring question in *Kindheitsmuster* “wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?”<sup>187</sup> in her autobiographical narrator’s attempt to recall childhood. If we continue with this similarity, Wolf

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<sup>183</sup> “I remember little of my childhood and nevertheless have an exact image of it. Like most people, I have asked throughout my life why I could turn out the way I am and have given different answers at different times.”

<sup>184</sup> “I really remember or whether I remember only the new productions of those memories that have been shaped by age and understanding.”

<sup>185</sup> I differentiate autobiographical memory as events in one’s life that one recalls or that one knows had happened but cannot recall, and postmemory being memories in someone else’s life, reflected upon later on by the generation after. A similarity between the two lies in the knowledge of an event taking place in one’s own life or someone else’s without being able to remember it. In both cases, imagination compensates for the disconnect.

<sup>186</sup> “why could I possibly have become how I am?”

<sup>187</sup> “how have we become how we are today?”

resists the first-person in the entire novel as if to embed her story within a collective generational cohort, while Maron's protagonist appeals to a markedly individual stance, using "*ich*" rather than the collective "*wir*." In Maron's novel, the main protagonist and narrator are narrated and narrating "I", respectively, that seem to resist ties to a collective that nonetheless shaped most of her life in the GDR, once again, insisting on the "*Anderssein*" (being different) that distinguishes her and Pawel from their respective milieu.

Katharina Boll highlights scholarship's growing interest in the works of Maron and others with regards to the "*Ich-Verlust*"<sup>188</sup> or missing sense of "I" in the GDR (14). This may be because, as Hyunseon Lee explains, those in the GDR had not been not trained "zum Ich-Sagen."<sup>189</sup> (69). Lee further argues that the "Schwierigkeit, Ich zu sagen,"<sup>190</sup> experienced by earlier writers like Christa Wolf has carried over to today's former GDR citizens in spite of the "'Strom der Rede,' und trotz der Welle der freiwilligen Geständnisse in der Wendezeit" (69-70).<sup>191</sup> However, in their works from the GDR period, Wolf and others, such as Christoph Hein, do indeed thematize the difficulty of saying "I."<sup>192</sup> As Huyssen notes, the East German artistic and political landscapes were "complex patterns of censorship and self-censorship, resistance and critique" out of which "protected niches and spaces for a new kind of subcultural discourse outside the system of censorship" could be carved ("After the Wall" 42). Moreover, basing her analysis on the post-Wende justifications that writers like Maron produced in response to attacks on their pre-Wende writing, Lee also seems to be participating in the unfair moralizing

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<sup>188</sup> See Klötzer.

<sup>189</sup> "to say 'I.'"

<sup>190</sup> "the difficulty of saying 'I.'"

<sup>191</sup> "'stream of speech,' and in spite of the wave of voluntary confessions during the Wende period."

<sup>192</sup> See, for example, Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1979) and *Kassandra* (1983) or Hein's *Drachenblut* (1984). See chapter 5 in Hell for her discussion of "subjective authenticity" in Wolf's writing.



accusations leveled primarily at Wolf.<sup>193</sup> Shift in perspective is certainly the case of Maron's earlier, pre-Wende novels *Flugasche* and *Die Überläuferin*, in which first-person perspective moves to third-person. But to say that Maron had difficulty saying "I" in her works may be an overstatement. Maron's sole use of first-person in *Pawels Briefe* could be interpreted in a couple of different ways.

For instance, if one accepts Lee's argument that East German authors found it difficult to use "I" in their works even after unification, *Pawels Briefe* shows a perhaps defiant insistence on the use of the first-person. Birgit Konze points out that "Um 'Ich' sagen zu können, muss ein Mensch sich seiner Individualität, seiner Persönlichkeit bewusst werden, muss eine Identität als Mensch haben, nicht als Teil eines Kollektivs" (185).<sup>194</sup> Thus the use of "Ich" could be read as a mark of individuality and retrospective defiance of the GDR past which would fit well with Maron's particularly critical attitude towards the GDR, especially after 1989. Using "I" in *Pawels Briefe* could also be framed as being candid and taking onus for one's own actions and their contradictions. My inclination is to go with the latter interpretation. Maron, in my view, confronts in *Pawels Briefe* her own past and questions former viewpoints and attitudes in the radically different circumstances of post-unification present.

Both Wolf's and Maron's approaches to the question of how one comes to be who one is evoke distance or disjuncture between then and now and connote stark contrasts and shifts in identity throughout life: "Durch den Reflexions- bzw. Erinnerungsprozess entsteht eine Interpretation vergangener Erfahrung, die normalerweise darauf zielt, die Entwicklung des Ich zu

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<sup>193</sup> See Huyssen's "After the Wall" for a nuanced discussion of the failure of left intellectuals in both East and West Germany after the *Wende*. Regarding the debates about Christa Wolf, for example, Huyssen states that in 1990, "the failure of intellectuals became now the failure of Christa Wolf...suddenly the famous East German author served as a cipher for everything that was held to be wrong with postwar German culture" (49).

<sup>194</sup> "In order to be able to say 'I,' one must be aware of his individuality and personality, must have an identity as an individual, not as part of the collective."

erklären” (Lee 64).<sup>195</sup> In Maron’s case, this question highlights distance through incomprehension of how one could come to espouse particular values later in adulthood that are radically different from those instilled in upbringing.

The photograph on page 188 of Monika and Hella in 1953 and its narrative framing retroactively portray the disguised contextual cracks underlying familial relations that actually arise only later through the perspective of adulthood. Hella and Monika are again pressed closely together in the photograph, though this time Monika is older. They both look at something outside the photograph toward which Hella directs their gaze with her index finger. Narrative framing infuses this idyllic mother-daughter scene with information about the less ideal political and social context, traces of which the photograph disguises:

...obwohl allein Hellas Naturell und ihre Lust am Leben sie vor politischer Verbissenheit und moralischer Intoleranz bewahrt haben, blieb ihr Empfinden, so scheint es jedenfalls mir, unzugänglich für das Leid und Unrecht dieser Jahrzehnte. In ihren Aufzeichnungen erwähnt Hella weder das Jahr 1953 noch das Jahr 1956, kein Wort über den Mauerbau 1961. Und 1968, ‘das verfluchte Jahr 1968,’ wie Hella schreibt, ist nicht das Jahr des Einmarschs in Prag, sondern das Jahr ihrer Sorgen um Karl, der nach dem Ausscheiden aus seinem Ämtern in Depressionen gefallen war. (191-192)<sup>196</sup>

The narrator accentuates what the seemingly intimate mother-daughter photographs mask, namely the contextual injustices and political events that occur during or after the photograph was taken. At first glance, the photograph is not particularly peculiar and does not necessarily

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<sup>195</sup> “Through the reflection and, by extension, the memory process, an interpretation of previous experience arises which usually aims to explain the development of the individual.”

<sup>196</sup> “...even though Hella’s disposition and her sheer love for life protected her from political grimness and moral intolerance, her sensitivity, so it seems to me, remained closed off to the suffering and injustice of these decades. In her notes Hella mentions neither the year 1953 nor the year 1956, no word of the building of the wall in 1961. And 1968, ‘the cursed year of 1968,’ according to Hella, is not the year of the Prague invasion, rather the year of her worries about Karl, who after being let go from his bureau had fallen into depression.”

raise any questions other than what the two could be looking at, but the narrator retrospectively points out issues, including war memories, that had remained unaddressed in this relationship. The relationship at the time is visually depicted as a seemingly harmonious, yet the “vision” this relationship once had is retrospectively described from the point of view of GDR child who has turned into the critical adult viewer in the meantime.

In this photograph Hella directs Monika to look in a certain direction, perhaps to the future or to an object of distraction, which hints at both a previous bond and an interpretive obstacle to us as viewers. Looking together in the same direction connotes a bond, but one mediated by a third party, the object of both their gazes. Given that in subsequent years, according to the narrator’s recollection, the relationship becomes more tenuous, one may argue that the third constituent that held them together in their vision, literally and figuratively, was the Communist ideology devoted to the future.

Furthermore, and with regards to this shared object of gaze outside of the frame, the photograph has implications for the relationship between narrator and viewer/reader. The viewer/reader is limited to the depiction of Monika and Hella while they, in turn, do not return the look to the camera and thus to subsequent viewers. The unreciprocated gaze directed outside the frame and our not knowing what they are looking at doubly excludes the viewer and withholds deeper contextual information that the narrator provides in hindsight. In spite of the broader historical context reflected upon, including the events that followed the photograph and how they impacted the relationship at least from the perspective of the narrator, the level of detail pertinent to the occasion of the photograph itself remains unknown. Therefore, narrative interpretation itself decades later is a construction in the present. A more significant conclusion, however, is that remembrance, no matter how contingent, of the historical and political context,

rather than the details immediate to the affective relationship and the occasion for the photograph registers distance and detachment from the mother figure. The photograph may as well be viewed from another generation entirely. Photographs, however, can represent disassociation just as much as they can also represent reconciliation or reintegration (Rugg 14). In spite of the distance created between the narrator and an earlier version of herself that had a close relationship with the Communist mother, the mere inclusion of these in the photo album and the family story shows candor and an open acknowledgement of one's various past influences.

It is thus no coincidence that a picture of Pawel appears again near the end of the collage in the midst of the protagonist's childhood photographs in order to sustain attention on him throughout the novel. In an effort to make up for lost time and memories, the grandfather figure, who preceded and died under fascism, is emphasized as the point of visual and narrative orientation in the pictorial and imaginative collages, respectively. With this final photograph of Pawel in mind, the time lapse between narrated and narrating, between the referential photographs of GDR childhood and the narrative of post-communist present is an opportunity to develop a *pre-fascist* fantasy of the grandfather. Creating this fantasy of Pawel prior to his victimization under fascism thus paradoxically seeks to close the opportunistic temporal void that gave rise to the fantasy in the first place. By traversing the parent generation and, with it, Germany's forty-year division, the protagonist closes the gap between the grandparent and grandchild generations, likewise between the pre-fascist years of the early twentieth century and the post-communist years at its end. This underlines a return to the original task of the family story: reconstructing Pawel's life. Though the narrative at times diverts attention towards the mother's biography or the narrator's, for example, it attempts proximity between grandparent and grandchild generations with the aid of photography. Autobiographical memory and

postmemory therefore, as noted above, need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Questioning one's past in Communism and engaging in self-reflection on the contingent, subjective memory of it is a stage in the self-conscious postmemory reconstruction of Pawel's life, not necessarily a mere distraction from that project.

While Hirsch's work on photography emphasizes the ideology of family romance that underpins and distorts it, Julia Hell's *Post-Fascist Fantasies* complements Hirsch's ideological, relational, and psychoanalytical approach because it connects these aspects to the literary depictions of family in East German novels. Hell's project is invested in the conscious and unconscious fantasies that these novels narrate from within the "ideological formation based on the family" (19). In sum, she argues that "[conscious and unconscious fantasies] are *ideological fantasies*: texts that narrate the work of the unconscious and its fantasies in ideology" (19). Hell employs a symptomatic reading of GDR texts from the 1940s to the 1980s, meaning "with a view to their formal incoherences and sudden failures, which relate to unresolved and often unresolvable contradictions" (20). I use a similar strategy in analyzing the selection and arrangement of photography in Maron's family story from 1999 to argue that *Pawels Briefe* as a post-GDR text uses photography as a means to create distance from the maternal GDR narrative, and a new proximity to the pre-fascist paternal narrative, and thereby distance from ideological fantasies altogether.

*Pawels Briefe* both responds to and echoes dynamics explored in Hell's work on post-1945 novels by GDR writers. While Hell conceives of the family narrative as structurally conducive to "the ideological project of constructing a coherent paternal order, advocating a form of unity centered on the figure of the father" (35), *Pawels Briefe*, as a post-communist family story recalling the GDR years, complicates this in myriad ways. First, paternal figures

like Pawel and the narrator's biological father Walter are largely absent and are instead mediated through character recall and/or memory artifacts. Moreover, Hell observes displacement of "the positive resolution of the Oedipal complex from the biological father onto a series of substitute fathers, thus elaborating a particular identity that is sustained by a series of icons of (Communist) virility and constructed as the opposite of the 'real' father..." (44). The stepfather Karl Maron connotes strict political order as replacement patriarch, and his commitment to antifascism as a communist functionary is distinct from the "real father" Walter to the extent that Walter fought for, though was supposedly not a political supporter of, the Nazis in WWII. Furthermore, while Hell argues that the "rewriting of the Oedipal story eliminates the 'real' father and constructs the father(s) with whom identification is possible..." (44) Karl Maron is a figure resisted rather than obeyed, and whose death leads to the protagonist's psychosomatic breakdown followed by a burst of intellectual and political energy. The body is thus shown to be a site that shows psychosomatic symptoms of unexpressed, repressed (Lewis, "Die Sehnsucht" 83) or "unhaltbare Lebensweise" (Gilson, *Wie Literatur Hilft* 151).<sup>197</sup> The stepfather's death means a blockade has been removed, resulting in a sort of fever by which the protagonist writes over and out of the restrictive bonds of the stepfather's existence.

Politically active female figures in the novel are thus given more attention, since the autobiographical narrator is female and women characters consistently remain in the fore and resist paternal order. This contrasts with Hell's assertion about early GDR novels in which "femininity means, above all, motherhood" and that they "focus unfailingly on male characters, while female characters and their stories remain peripheral" (Hell 36). The maternal figure in *Pawels Briefe* plays a leading, provocative role in the novel which overturns secondary roles of

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<sup>197</sup> "unsustainable way of life."

women and mothers in the GDR family novel, but one must naturally keep in mind the novel's writing and publication in the post-1989 context, not the post-war context. Hella as GDR mother figure in *Pawels Briefe* accrues more significance in the novel as the point of orientation and conflict from which the GDR child later seeks to detach.

Despite these divergences between *Pawels Briefe*, as a post-GDR text, and Hell's ideas about the family romance in GDR texts, the gender dynamics in this post-communist family story draws from and expands on Hell's ideas. First and foremost, the paternal orienting force is upheld through the deceased grandfather's spectral presence in the narrator's engagement with his pre-fascist past in the post-communist present. The ambiguity surrounding Pawel's political convictions and his absence from Germany's divisive political context after the war complicates his central role. In spite of or perhaps because of these inconsistencies, the grandfather is reclaimed as the orienting paternal figure in the narrative, evidenced by his photographic intervention near the end of the novel in the middle of the narrator's childhood pictures.

What could the intervention of Pawel's photograph mean here? On the one hand, the arrangement of photographs here could tell the story of how Pawel's memory had long been obscured within and overshadowed by post-war political relations that once bonded mother and daughter and, at the same time, glossed over Jewish extermination on national and personal levels. Yet the narrative in adulthood salvages, frames, and privileges Pawel's photograph as the centripetal force. At the beginning of the novel, Maron's narrator recalls choosing the grandfather as the person in her family from which she originates as a sort of "Versuch, dem eigenem Leben einen Sinn und ein Geheimnis zu erfinden" (9).<sup>198</sup> As Fuchs notes, "post-'Wende' memory contests," employ "affective memory icons that aid or trigger the narrator's

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<sup>198</sup> "attempt to invent a meaning and a secret for one's own life."

investigations of a historical event that is perceived as a disturbance” (“From” 184). The photographic arrangement retraces both the Holocaust and the GDR childhood as disturbances and reveals a change from forgetting the war and being politically active with the mother to bonding with the grandfather by investigating his life prior to fascist terror. Pawel is simultaneously returned to his pre-fascist life in that the text attempts to bring his life out from the shadow of his death. In the process, however, his life is dislocated to the post-communist present.

The character dynamics thus also echo and expand upon the literary portrayal of the East German family described by Hell. In line with Hell’s interpretation is the narrative and visual concentration on the grandfather as an orienting figure for the post-communist present but in addition to that, focus on Pawel, in turn, enacts distancing from the mother figure and a reunion of pre-fascist and post-communist temporalities and generations. The family story is thus not only a critical, literary revisiting of childhood years that coincide with the GDR’s formative years but is also overlaid with a critical, adult perspective long after the childhood milieu and the state itself have ceased to exist. The texts from Maron, Ruge, and Honigmann reflect ambivalence toward childhood beginnings set in the early stages of the East German state. On the one hand, the formative years in the GDR, and therefore also the GDR itself, are commemorated in their texts but from a post-Wende standpoint that negotiates connection to and distance from that chapter of their own lives.

In *Pawels Briefe*, postmemory as a subjective construction becomes manifest both narratively in the self-reflexive engagement with Pawel’s alleged political affiliation, and visually through the selection and arrangement of photographs. Both are subject to, in differing ways and differing degrees, the narrator’s present standpoint after 1989 and recollection on her



past of changing positionalities. Bonds appear to be more easily forged with Pawel in imaginative projections, especially when one may more easily select what to include in the reconstruction of his life.

Photography, however, demands a different approach, particularly in negotiating the relationship with the mother. There, writing accrues more significance in the photographic bonds with the mother out of which Maron attempts to write herself. The photograph of Pawel towards the end, though, is nevertheless one into which the narrator cannot so easily write herself due to generational distance. Roland Barthes calls the “photographic paradox” that in which there is a “co-existence of two messages, one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the...treatment, or the ‘writing’...of the photograph)” (Barthes, *Image* 19). That is, there is the image, on the one hand, and its interpretation, on the other. In spite of the referentiality<sup>199</sup> of Pawel’s photograph or proof that he had once existed and “been there” (Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76), it still refuses narrative framing that would try to contain, integrate, and familiarize it among the photographs of the narrator’s childhood in the years after Pawel’s death. The encoding of Pawel’s photograph (180-3) is speculative as indicated by the use of subjunctive: “Ich kann mir einfach nicht vorstellen, daß unser Leben mit Pawel ebenso verlaufen wäre, wie es ohne ihn verlaufen ist” (180-1).<sup>200</sup> Thus the mere placement of Pawel’s photograph amidst those of Maron’s childhood and of Hella’s years as an active Communist may seem anachronistic, but it gives the impression of desired proximity to the formative years of childhood and sustains attention to Pawel’s *life* throughout the novel. The postmemory engagement with photographs of Pawel in *Pawels Briefe* relies on the “photographic paradox” of documentary evidence of his existence, on the one hand, and its speculative encoding or treatment, on the other.

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<sup>199</sup> For theory on referentiality, see the discussion in Rugg 9-15. See also Trachtenberg.

<sup>200</sup> “I simply cannot imagine that our life with Pawel would have developed in the same way as it did without him.”

While Maron attempts to contain the image of Pawel within both imaginative ties and photographic embeddedness in her autobiography, his past unfolds in a larger context than what Maron accounts for in her postmemory work. In spite of an attempt at maternal detachment, the trip to Poland in the text challenges not only that detachment but also the generation after's hitherto malleable interpretation of Pawel's life.

### **Fluid Identities in Poland**

Keeping in mind the temporal overlap of the 1.5 generation, the depicted journey to Poland in the mid-1990s in *Pawels Briefe* bars spatial overlap between Pawel's last months of life in Poland and the narrator's first months of life in Germany in 1942. That is, Poland becomes the site of the grandfather's birth into an identity he did not choose for himself as well as the site of his death because of that identity. Pawel was born a Jew (in Poland) and died as a Jew (in Poland) but he *lived* as a non-Jew in Germany (Maron 53). Poland, since it is associated with his birth as a Jew, death as a Jew, and precisely the category he chose to abandon, is rejected as part of the grandfather's *life* and therefore remains bracketed in the narrative as a national and cultural context that cannot be integrated into the narrator's construction of the family past. Therefore, the trip to Poland does not so much connect the protagonist to her grandfather as it does mend the relationship to the mother in the present.

The depicted trip sets up binaries of Germans versus Poles, Jews versus Catholics, familiar versus foreign, memory versus forgetting. Up until the traveling sections, the family past in *Pawels Briefe* is recalled and reconstructed through postmemory imaginative investment, and shows residual *division* in depicted intergenerational discussions about the past in the post-unification German context. Poland and its implication in the family past is constructed as a distant, foreign place. For these reasons, in the travel segment of the novel, the reader cannot

help but feel coopted into the binaries that make Poland unfamiliar, while the protagonist and her mother, in contrast, become our familiar travel companions.

The narrator reflects on the GDR part of her own biography with remnant skepticism, but she visits Poland with even more skepticism. The portrayal of physical spaces in Poland where the grandparents are from render them “unbrauchbare Träger von Erinnerung” (Klötzer 46).<sup>201</sup> Joanna Stimmel is also one of few scholars who investigates the travel sections of *Pawels Briefe* and their portrayal of Poland. According to her, this part of the family story “complicates Maron’s rewriting of her biography” since “The narrator realizes [...] that attempting to identify with his [Pawel’s] multi-ethnic background proves exceptionally difficult” (163). Rather than supplementing or revising mental images of the grandparents’ past lives with the new impressions in Poland, they are perceived instead as a hindrance: “...fragte ich mich, ob mich all diese Bilder nicht eher störten, ob die Festlegungen mir meinen Weg der Annäherung nicht verstellten” (94).<sup>202</sup> Given the space of Poland is an obstacle rather than an opportunity for generational proximity, it is doubtful that this displacement in the text can be characterized as a return.

In contrast to Ruge’s *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, in which the generations come close to one another in the space of Mexican exile, the circumstances in Maron’s family story are drastically different and challenge the idea of return and closure or at least demand more nuance of this idea, since returning to Poland means returning to the grandparents’ place of birth and death, but not life. In *Pawels Briefe*, the grandparents’ paradoxical banishment to their home country and the descendants’ travel there hinge on the racial and ethnic violence of National

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<sup>201</sup> “useless carriers of memory.”

<sup>202</sup> “...I wondered if all these images didn’t rather disturb, if these determinations [of fact] didn’t rather obstruct my path of coming closer [to the past].”

Socialism. That is, the circumstances of the grandfather's deportation were based on racial exclusion. In contrast, the circumstances of travel for the following generations in the post-unification present are based on remembrance of that exclusion but also an overcoming of the violent circumstances to find out more about those short chapters of the grandparents' *life* spent there before death.

This part of the novel is an attempted return insofar as the goal is to trace the pre-fascist past into the post-communist Poland of the present, but joining these temporalities proves more fruitful within the elusive imaginative and photographic grounds of postmemory explored in the previous section. For example, while postmemory in the German context takes place in the imagination and photography, reliance on not only national memory but also official documents becomes even more important in Poland. Walking through Pawel's hometown, the protagonist attempts to ground Pawel's memory in space which would bring generational proximity: "Wo Pawel in Ostrow gelebt hatte, was uns vor allem interessierte, in welcher Straße, in welchem Haus..." (108).<sup>203</sup> The town registrar could not tell them where he had lived and refers them to another "Amt in einer anderen Stadt" (108),<sup>204</sup> perpetually displacing the journey and its questions, like a postmemory dead-end, across the Polish bureaucratic network only to remain unanswered. The protagonist walks away from bureaucratic interactions and their lack of answers about Pawel's former living place with skepticism. She assumes that Polish bureaucratic resistance bulwarks local anxieties: "Jüdische Nachkommen, die nach den Häusern ihrer Vorfahren fragten, erweckten Argwohn" (108).<sup>205</sup> The protagonist ultimately relies on official documents brought along from Germany:

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<sup>203</sup> "where Pawel had lived in Ostrow, what interested us above all, on which street, in which house."

<sup>204</sup> "bureau in another city."

<sup>205</sup> "Jewish descendants who ask about the houses of their ancestors aroused suspicion."

...es sei bis dahin nicht sicher gewesen, daß wirklich Iglarz in Ostrow gelebt hatten, obwohl ich doch die Geburtsurkunde meines Großvaters besaß, sogar in zwei Sprachen, und die Trauungsurkunde meiner Großeltern. (103-104)<sup>206</sup>

The birth and marriage certificates as bureaucratic proof of Pawel's previous habitation in Ostrow-Mazowiecka comprise the roadmap and impetus for return, however, once brought into the town itself, these documents remain mere markers, traces of the past that no longer match their contemporary, albeit original, context.

National resentments between Germany and Poland that hinge on the Jewish question affect the Poles' perceptions of them and vice versa.<sup>207</sup> The trip to Poland foregrounds present political relations between Germany and Poland rather than Poland's pre-Holocaust past. Joanna Stimmel explores the "dynamic between private remembrance, cosmopolitan memory, and nation-specific cultural memories" of the Holocaust in *Pawels Briefe* (152). Furthermore, she examines the "role images of the neighboring land and people play in coming to terms with personal and public memory and forgetting" (152-153). This part of the novel indeed reflects and complicates national conflicts between Germans and Poles especially along the lines of culpability because Maron's family past cuts across German, Polish, and Jewish identities. Nevertheless, despite shared, albeit conflicted memory of the Holocaust on the basis of camps located in Poland, the text reinforces perceived difference in memory cultures. Stimmel notes that "Representations of Poland as a nation...serve as a screen upon which more positive images of post-war and post-Wall Germany as a nation that 'learned its lesson' can be projected" (168). A well-developed memory culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany is reflected and

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<sup>206</sup> "...it had been unclear whether Iglarz had really lived in Ostrow, even though I had my grandfather's birth certificate with me, in two languages, and the wedding certificate of my grandparents."

<sup>207</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on national memory conflicts and alliances between Germany and Poland since WWII, see Kopp and Niżyńska's edited volume.

accentuated in the sections of *Pawels Briefe* that take place in Poland, thereby implying deficits in Polish memory culture.

According to Stimmel, postmemory draws on both the private and public spheres, but the national and cultural contexts of Poland do little in the way of reconstructing Pawel's pre-war life in Ostrow-Mazowiecka, thus bracketing Polish national memory of the Holocaust, or its represented lack thereof in the text, from the narrator's more private engagements with letters, photographs, documents, and with her mother. Even when the narrator explores spaces of Poland on her own without Polish interlocutors, Poland is still perceived as a postmemory dead-end in which death, not life, prevails. For example, the narrator walks through a forest with her son at the site of the former Chelmno/Kulmhof concentration camp and wonders "War es [sein möglicher Tod durch Schuß] hier? In diesem Wald? Oder ein paar Kilometer weiter?...Wie stellt man sich das vor inmitten dieses sommerlichen Friedens?" (184).<sup>208</sup> Given uncertainty surrounding the exact method and place of Pawel's death, it could have happened anywhere. The text thus gives the impression that death in Poland is all-pervasive, even in serene Polish landscapes.

Moreover, there is only one photograph included from the trip to Poland, Josefa's grave (94), further symbolizing Poland as a place of death for this particular family story. Nevertheless, as the narrator views Josefa's grave, she recalls "das Foto von Josefa, auf dem sie die dicke Wolljacke trägt und die Hände gerade in die Spülschüssel taucht" (95).<sup>209</sup> At the site of burial, the narrator conjures the photograph (also depicted earlier in the text) of the grandmother alive, healthy, and living in Germany. Poland therefore fails to inspire the narrator's imaginations of

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<sup>208</sup> "Was it [his possible death by shooting] here? In this forest? Or a few kilometers further?...how does one imagine that in the midst of this summer paradise?"

<sup>209</sup> "the photo of Josefa in which she wears a thick wool coat, her hands momentarily submerged in a wash bowl."

the grandparents' lives in this place where they died. In terms of postmemory and the attempt to reconstruct Pawel's life, and to a certain extent Josefa's as well, Poland is included in the family story to the extent that part of the narrative takes place there. However, it is still noticeably bracketed from the rest of the conversations and imaginative investments about the grandparents' lives spent in Germany before and during the war. This is visible in the text through skeptical interactions with and perceptions of Poles, including the narrator's own distant relatives, and through a photograph of Josefa's grave.

Postmemory work in an unfamiliar context, thus arguably serves as an instrument to negotiate belonging and alienation not only with regards to attempt at reconstruction of Pawel's or Josefa's life but also to the mother-daughter relationship in the present as travelers. Poland undermines the more private, photographic mode of detachment from the mother/GDR association described in the previous section. While the collage of Pawel's life becomes jeopardized and the narrator cannot easily make or maintain affective connections with the grandparents there, the ideological, East-West German boundary between mother and daughter, in contrast, breaks down in Poland, as Poles' perception of them sometimes as Jews, at others as Germans, but never as Poles, reveals both of their shifting positionalities. Just as the protagonist imagines a similarity with Pawel in terms of their difference, in Poland, the protagonist and her mother find common ground based on their difference as travelers to another country.

Jewish heritage interestingly becomes the key arbiter of identity in interactions with the Poles, despite the protagonist's weakest attachment to that part of her family past. It features most prominently for the Poles as the purpose of the protagonist's visit and downplays their connection to Poland and their current German identity:

Abends im Hotel Lomza, waren wir keine Juden mehr; in Lomza waren wir Deutsche. Polen waren wir nirgends und für niemanden, obwohl wir alle mehr polnische Anteile als jüdische haben, und obwohl Hella und ich bis 1953 sogar polnische Staatsbürger waren. (108)<sup>210</sup>

In this passage, the protagonist only feels an identification with Germany or, rather, is identified by others as German only in the transitory visitor space of the hotel. The narrator and Hella feel out of place on a religious level in the predominantly Christian areas of Poland they visit, but the unease is attributed more to the locals' assumption that the two women are *Jewish* Germans. Traveling to Poland accentuates the multiple crossings, conversions, and disavowals within this family past. At the same time, though, the shifting identities of the narrator and her mother in the present in Poland depend on others' perceptions, whether in the hotel, on the street, or in a local archive.

The narrative excursion to Poland contradicts the novel's overall maternal detachment read in its photographic arrangement, aligning mother and daughter on the grounds of national identity as Germans. While it remains unknown what had attracted Hella's and Monika's gazes in the final childhood photograph presented, the work of postmemory seems to be the binding agent decades later in Poland, in which they focus anew on the forgotten grandparent generation. That is, readers are not looking at a photograph of them looking at something else. In contrast, we are now in the narrated depiction with them, looking with and through the narrator as she recalls the journey to Poland. In the process, she portrays Poland as a one-dimensional snapshot but nevertheless the space of shifting familial alliances.

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<sup>210</sup> "In the evening at Hotel Lomza we weren't Jews anymore; in Lomza we were Germans. We weren't Poles anywhere for anyone, even though we were more Polish than Jewish, and Hella and I were even Polish citizens until 1953."



The example of postmemory on the move in Poland in this novel implies a nationalized view of postmemory in which national boundaries are reinscribed, yet intranational political boundaries of East and West Germany represented through Hella and the narrator, respectively, seem to fade away. While Poland is literally a point of departure for this family story, the narrative does not come full circle to culminate in a return. However, postmemory on the move in a new context binds the generations in their joint exploration of the family past. The mother-daughter relationship and the intentions of postmemory in the present displaces memory of the grandparent generation, thus preventing proximity. The trip to Poland, though, displaces their ongoing disagreements about Germany's divided past. Poland thus serves as a screen of difference against which mother and daughter are alliances, for it unifies them as Germans and erases the East-West fault line that dictates their relationship nearly everywhere else in the novel.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*Pawels Briefe* is a post-1989 attempt at critically reflecting on a family past of multiple conversions and contradictions, including those of Maron's own autobiographical narrator. Maron thereby contemplates yet expands upon the "doubleness" noted of Maron's earlier protagonists (Gilson, *Wie Literatur Hilft* 142) at a particularly opportunistic time when Maron herself faces criticism of complicity with the Stasi. Sustaining an anti-communist orientation throughout, the narrator nevertheless approaches the GDR past and the mother's continued political convictions with more openness to render this era as more complex, historically and personally. Even within the narrative and photographic reconstructions of her grandfather's life, in trying to bring it out from the shadow of the Holocaust, the protagonist confronts particular facets of Pawel's identity that do not fit neatly in the present. Instead, they force her to reflect on her own changing perspectives of Communism over the decades. The narrative and photographic

engagements with Pawel's life, and thereby also the narrator's biography, negotiate proximity and distance. This is performed in the text through, for example, the slippage between 1.5 and second generation and also via photographic arrangement.

As to be seen in Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, the project undertaken in *Pawels Briefe* explores the grandparent generation but ultimately relies on and engages in some way with the parent generation. Maron's protagonist rewrites and distances herself from the GDR past/mother figure through photographic arrangement, which, as I have argued, enacts maternal detachment. Relying on imaginative and photographic collection, which lend themselves well to postmemory, the protagonist strives to substitute the maternal GDR narrative with a paternal narrative of pre-fascism, thereby dislocating it to the post-communist present. The image of the grandfather risks unraveling when further imagined against the backdrop of his home country of Poland, however. The shift in setting lends postmemory a different, nationally-inflected register, as the deep seated resentment between Polish and German national memory cultures since the war takes the upper hand and bars the potential for the protagonist's affective connection to the landscape of Ostrow-Mazowiecka. Distance thus proves unproductive for postmemory in this case, but it brings mother and daughter closer to one another on a level of national belonging to Germany when they encounter the foreign Poles. While in Poland, previous memory contests between East-West German perspectives smooth over temporarily to unify on a national front when facing Poles. Monika Maron may have her particular political aversions and contradictory facets of her identity and past that others find problematic, but *Pawels Briefe* shows Maron's ever-involving, candid reflection on parts of her own past, good and bad, that are situated within a complicated family history full of conversions, disavowals, and border crossings.

### Chapter Three: The Poetics of the Search in Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Anatolin* (2008)

The search for a postunification German identity and for insights about transgenerational effects of German flight and expulsion permeates and drives Hans-Ulrich Treichel's prose and poetry:

Hier bin ich wieder, ich,  
 der Vertriebene, doch diesmal  
 mit dem Gesicht nach unten,  
 ins Gras gedrückt, in die  
 schwarze westfälische Erde,  
 in den staubigen Grunewaldsand.  
 irgendwo müsst ihr doch sein,  
 Urahnen, ihr, meine Wurzeln,  
 die Tante mit Hut, der Onkel  
 mit Koffer, der Opa aus Sonstwo,  
 die rissige Holzbank, das Pferd.  
 Farne, Libellen und Kiesel,  
 warum redet ihr nicht? (Treichel "Ich, der Vertriebene")<sup>211</sup>

Hans-Ulrich Treichel's poem "Ich der Vertriebene" captures in poetic form a feeling of transgenerational dislocation, as the narrator tries to connect family and history to geography. Speaking of a return ("Hier bin ich wieder") that is "diesmal" or this time different from the last,

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<sup>211</sup> "Here I am again, I, the expelled, but this time with my face down, pressed into the grass, in the black Westphalian soil, in the dusty Grunewald sand, you all must be somewhere, ancestors, you all, my roots, the aunt with hat, the uncle with suitcase, the grandpa from elsewhere, the cracked wooden bench, the horse. Ferns, dragonflies, and pebbles, why don't you speak?" Quoted from Basker 5.

the narrator searches for answers and family members in the ground. Calling himself “der Vertriebene” and searching for answers in Westphalian soil, in a region where the author himself happens to be from, signals his own sense of dislocation in a place of familiarity to which he does not belong.

However, a poetic search only seems to take Treichel so far. Treichel himself says : “Das Ich als Lyrik-Ich aber, dem wir in Gedichten als sogenanntes lyrisches Ich begegnen, ... hatte... aber auch feststellen müssen, daß sich gewisse Dinge im Gedicht nicht sagen beziehungsweise erfahrbar machen lassen” (*Entwurf* 105-6).<sup>212</sup> That is, according to Treichel, poetry does not convey or arouse the same impressions that prose can.

Treichel has increasingly turned to prose rather than poetry to further explore dislocation, return, and self-implication, which carry over from his poetry. Prose is therefore a means for Treichel to not only continue to make sense of his family’s past but also to develop and reflect on his own autobiography. Treichel’s parents’ experience of post-war flight from East Prussia, as well as the missing brother, both figure prominently, yet differently, across Treichel’s writing, especially in his loosely autobiographic trio of novels. *Der Verlorene* from 1998 is a fictionalized account of childhood in the post-war Federal Republic in which the child narrator endures rigorous biological testing in the parents’ hopes of identifying a foster child as their lost son. *Menschenflug* (2005) reflects on the blurred lines between life and writing in that the main character, an author, continues his parents’ search for the lost brother and also considers visiting his father’s birthplace in Ukraine but ultimately decides to travel to Egypt instead. And finally *Anatolin* (2008), perhaps the most autobiographical of the three, explicitly references these two other novels and their protagonists and is about a concurrent search for the lost brother and the

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<sup>212</sup> “But the ‘I’ as lyric-‘I’ that we encounter in poems as the so called lyrical ‘I’ had to realize that certain things do not let themselves be said or experienced.”

mother's hometown in today's Poland. En route to Poland, the narrator reflects on an earlier trip taken to Ukraine, the father's birth place.

Treichel shows in his oeuvre a reliance on the specters in his and his parents' past, namely his own fragmented childhood, the intimidating father figure, the phantom lost brother, and the Polish landscape that is often construed as simply "the East." The term "reliance" is important here, rather than something like "fixation" or "haunting" because in Treichel's turn to prose, he negotiates through his autobiographical narrator in *Anatolin* both proximity and distance in the process of forming his own autobiography. This development relies on and is indeed implicated in the family past, but is not overwhelmed by it, thereby emphasizing the *auto* in autobiography. Beyond the autobiographical text itself, though, the development of one's own biography, unlike writing someone else's biography, is also open-ended and "processual," adapting to one's changing viewpoints as broader German memory discourses change over time (Holdenried 40).

Because of *Anatolin*'s highly self-reflexive and autobiographical tone, I argue that it performs a poetic search for a connection to the family past. *Anatolin*, for Treichel, is the poetic search for one's own autobiography and a family narrative with which he can negotiate this autobiography. The narrator in *Anatolin* "fehlt das, was man eine narrative Identität nennt. In der Bibliothek meines Unbewußten fehlt der Familienroman. Er ist nicht da, aber ich suche ihn dauernd" (105).<sup>213</sup> As in the opening poem, the search is "diesmal" different, as it also confronts the parents' birthplaces in the east, unlike Treichel's protagonist in *Menschenflug* (*Anatolin* 8-9). Poetics of the search thus means a narrative, self-reflexive process of development and revision that is marked in and by the text itself. By self-reflexive I mean here that the "narrator can

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<sup>213</sup> "I don't think of myself as autobiographical. I am missing what one calls a narrative identity. In the library of my unconscious the family novel is missing. It is not there but I constantly search for it."

observe, reflect, adjust the amount of distance, and correct the self that is being created” (Linde 105), for, according to Marianne Gullestad, “the modern self” is the “continuous and processual effort of a person—with no definitive end product—to bring together her various roles, identities, and experiences” (218). Postmemory drives and enables the ongoing search for the family narrative, where one fits into it, and to what extent one’s identity is shaped by it. Thematizing flight and expulsion, Treichel walks a fine line between an apolitical and political approach to the family past of flight and expulsion.

### **Germans as Victims: from pre-1989 margins and divisions to post-1989 discursive center**

The other texts explored here from Maron, Honigmann, and Ruge invoke discourses of victimhood related to the Holocaust, political persecution, and violations of privacy in the GDR; however, Treichel’s works are both unique to this archive and are provocative to the contemporary German literary scene at large for shaping discussions of Germans as victims of flight and expulsion after WWII. The shift in public discourses from Germans as perpetrators to Germans as victims was no smooth transition. In fact, rather than describing it as a linear process, it was more a reorganization in which notions of German victimization were pulled from the margins into the center of discussions about the past. Stuart Taberner summarizes why depicting German suffering had been problematic and controversial: “the portrayal of German losses had been prohibited lest it distract from Auschwitz, aestheticize German pain as more compelling, or fuel the patriotism that has been embraced by the conservatives, especially since reunification,” (Taberner, “Hans-Ulrich” 126). More attention toward and open discussions of German victimhood make up a significant part of the public renegotiations of the past after 1989, particularly in the 1990s, to justify what Graham Jackman calls the “Diskurswandel.”<sup>214</sup> One of

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<sup>214</sup> See Jackman.

its main instigators was W.G. Sebald who brought German suffering and its portrayal front and center in the post-unification era with his published collection of essays *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999). In these lectures published into essays, Sebald argued that German writers of the post-war years inadequately portrayed the destruction unleashed on German cities by the Allied powers' air raid (8). Furthermore, Sebald argued that such inadequacy in depicting the gruesomeness following the air bombings was the result of a taboo (18).

The debates following Sebald's controversial statements about the depiction of Allied air bombings perhaps mark the pinnacle moment of a discussion about German victimhood, which had taken place in both Germanys since after the war.<sup>215</sup> In fact, scholars such as Bill Niven, Robert G. Moeller, Eva Hahn, and Hans-Henning Hahn have challenged Sebald by asserting that the topic of German suffering has never been taboo in either public discourses or literature. I argue that Treichel's novels continue the critical and reflective approaches that Hahn and Hahn point out in the works of writers of the early post-war years, for example, Peter Härtling, who reflected not only on the causes, guilt, and responsibility preceding German flight and expulsion (349) but also on the expellees as subjects with particular moral and political stances (349).

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<sup>215</sup> In the post-war era, public discussion and literary representations specifically of German suffering was largely divided along East-West ideologies (Jackman 345). Jackman explains that in East Germany, not only was everyone a victim of fascism, but flight and expulsion of Germans from Eastern territories by Poles, Czechs, and the advancing Soviet army was not to be discussed, lest it create conflict within the Soviet brotherhood. On this point, however, Bill Niven has brought forth important evidence that the issues of flight and expulsion were broached even in East German TV series and filmic representations ("Reactive Memory" 55). Remembrance of the aerial bombings by the West, however, was widespread (Jackman 345). In West Germany, the situation was reversed. While there were some literary portrayals of the Allied air raids over Germany during the war, this was difficult since the Federal Republic had been dependent on the West at least in those first years after the war. Portrayals of flight and expulsion, however, as an experience to be blamed on those in the Soviet bloc, abounded in West German literature, even if viewed with suspicion (Karina Berger 42).

### **Remembrance of German Flight and Expulsion from post-1945 into the post-1989 era**

Millions of Germans fled or were driven from former German territories in east, central, and southeast Europe near or at the end of WWII by local Poles and Czechs or by the advancing Soviet army. Contrary to Sebald's thesis of German suffering as a postwar taboo, particularly related to the air war, and also to the issue of flight and expulsion,<sup>216</sup> Eva Hahn and Hans-Henning Hahn show that flight and expulsion discourse and literary representation can be traced back to the immediate post-war era (338-39). Bill Niven cites several examples of widely-received West German television series and documentaries that engaged memory of flight and expulsion from the late 1950s to the 1980s ("Reactive Memory" 55). In the public and political spheres, there had been open discussions of flight and expulsion in the immediate postwar years, namely through the *Vertriebenenverbände* (expellee organizations) who protested the new German-Polish borders by claiming rights to the German East (338). Hahn and Hahn emphasize the way in which the political actors in the expellee organizations portrayed themselves as passive objects to which harm had been done. Therefore, representations of suffering related to expulsion were overwhelmingly viewed with suspicion (Karina Berger 42) for possibly decontextualizing German suffering and implying its significance over Jewish victimization. In fact, Hermann Beyersdorf blames the expellee organizations for postwar writers' hesitation to write about flight and expulsion (41).

There was a small group of writers and intellectuals in the postwar years, however, who wrote critical reflections of their own experiences of flight and expulsion rather than conforming to a political agenda. These are what Hahn and Hahn call "Die anderen Vertriebenen/the other refugees" who had "andere Erinnerungen/other memories" (339). Among them are writers such

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<sup>216</sup> See Niven "Reactive Memory" 54-59 on the validity and extent of taboo on the topics of flight and expulsion in both East and West Germany.



as Horst Bienek, Peter Härtling, and Siegfried Lenz who write about losing their homes in the east but also point out the German colonial situation and the Nazi dictatorship that had preceded this suffering in the first place. These accepted, albeit narrowly circulated, memories of the “other” refugees in the West German intellectual milieu paled in comparison to revisionist narratives that used flight and expulsion for specific political ends.

West German literature continued to portray flight and expulsion as a form of German victimhood into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in spite of the so-called ’68-er generation that focused on confronting the first generation’s perpetration and complicity in the Third Reich (Niven “Introduction” *Germans as Victims* 23). In addition to the post-unification era’s “Diskurswandel” (Jackman 349) with regards to the sheer prevalence of debate about German wartime suffering, there seems to be another shift in the discourses of flight and expulsion, namely in what positions are deemed revisionist or conservative.

The shift is not just quantitative; the discourses of flight and expulsion in the post-unification era have also qualitatively changed in content and scope. There is, for example, a notable turn toward more open expression of painful memories. While Hahn and Hahn associate post-war conservative political ends with recuperating material loss,<sup>217</sup> it seems what is deemed conservative in the post-unification discourses tend precisely to the difficult, personalized stories of suffering that Hahn and Hahn say had been marginalized in the post-war era or at least had not become part of institutionalized cultural memory (348).

This has changed in the meantime. On the one hand, after years of recognizing Jewish suffering, many have argued for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the sense of once and for all

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<sup>217</sup> To be sure, there are contemporary expellee organizations that lobby political interests related to material reparations (Salzborn 89-90). The most extreme example of today is the non-governmental organization *Preußische Treuhand* that seeks legal redress against Poland for lost property (Lutomski 252).

overcoming and drawing a *Schlußstrich* under the German burden of guilt in order to voice experiences of German suffering which was largely viewed by the Left as a threat to diminish or forget German culpability.<sup>218</sup> That is, not only has there been a shift from claims of material loss to painful loss but also a change in scope. German victims of flight and expulsion have become a community seeking public acknowledgment of their grief and traumatic experiences. Samuel Salzborn, for example, notes a tendency to remove flight and expulsion from its historical context and collectivize Germans as victims by highlighting their individual experiences (94). By focusing on individualized stories of traumatization, Salzborn argues, revisionists aim to depoliticize German suffering by removing it from a victim-perpetrator paradigm altogether (95). On the other hand, as Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger note, not every contemporary representation of German victimhood is revisionist per se. Some do keep in mind what Taberner and Berger see as a contemporary emphasis on “blurriness of the historical picture, and the intriguing tension between the desire to ‘understand’ and the requirement to view the actions and omissions of historical actors within a larger moral and ethical framework” (4). Treichel, in his post-1989 turn towards prose is one of the contemporary authors who self-reflexively engages his family past of flight as an event embedded within a historical context of numerous wartime atrocities.

### **Treichel’s Post-1989 Literary Engagement with Flight and Expulsion**

German reunification arguably, though subtly, marks an underlying provocateur for dislocation in Treichel’s work, as it brought about public and private renegotiations of the past,

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<sup>218</sup> One well-known example is Martin Walser’s 1998 speech in acceptance of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade which sparked a debate between him and Ignaz Bubis. Walser pleaded for normalization of German society which implied drawing a “Schlußstrich” under history. He also criticized the culture of political correctness in German cultural memory put forth by the 68er-generation and asserted rights to his own personal memories of the Nazi past.

both of which are, to varying extents, observed in his oeuvre. It is difficult to find direct mention of reunification in both Treichel's work and in his public remarks, but Treichel has explicitly commented on how the reunification has affected him as a writer, for example, in his volume of lectures *Der Entwurf des Autors* (2000). Here Treichel attributes both his transition from poetry to prose and his need to address the family past to the political changes in Germany:

Ich habe den Verlust Westberlins, wenn ich die Wiedervereinigung einmal so nennen darf, in gewisser Weise verschoben verarbeitet, in dem sich mir plötzlich der Verlust meines ältesten Bruders im Jahr 1945 aufdrängte. Er wurde nun für mich, das heißt für meinen damaligen Schreibzustand, zu einer aktuellen Erfahrung, die verarbeitet werden mußte. Und ich schließe nicht aus, daß das Aktuellwerden dieser weit zurückliegenden Verlustgeschichte auch etwas mit den Umbrüchen der damaligen deutschen und Berliner Gegenwart zu tun hatte (*Entwurf* 46).<sup>219</sup>

In the words of David Clarke, for Treichel “it was the loss of the enclosed world of West Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a place in which Treichel felt he had achieved a provisional sense of identity, which compelled him to reconsider his childhood and particularly the loss of his eldest brother, Günther, during his parents’ trek from East Prussia to Westphalia in 1945” (“Guilt and Shame” 61; *Entwurf* 46). The 1989 historical caesura thus prompted Treichel backwards in time to the historical and familial caesura of 1945. As Rhys Williams observes, “...politics and history are by no means absent from his writing, but that they impinge on his literary strategies is [sic] a curiously indirect and subtle fashion” (“Mein Unbewusstes” 208-9).

In spite of, and, in fact, because of their tangential embedding into the broader context of national reunification, Treichel's texts are largely viewed as more personal and introspective.

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<sup>219</sup> “I worked through the loss of West Berlin, if I may call it that, in that suddenly the loss of my oldest brother in the year 1945 imposed itself upon me.”

This explains why Günter Grass, with his 2002 novel *Im Krebsgang*, is seen as the “Tabubrecher” or taboo breaker of flight and expulsion in public discourses and not Treichel, with his 1998 novel *Der Verlorene* (Ölke 120). Not only does Treichel himself refrain from declaring himself a breaker of taboo (Ölke 121), but his remarks elsewhere underscore his more modest and personal reasons for revisiting the family past, which Ölke calls Treichel’s “persönliche[n]-private[n], beinahe individuell psychologische[n] Anspruch” (Ölke 122).<sup>220</sup> Treichel’s own comments confirm this: “After the death of my mother in 1991 I found a file folder among the things she left behind which corrected my knowledge. In these files was a new story” (“Wahrheit und Lüge” 210). Treichel had always thought that his brother had died of starvation on the westward trek. The new story he speaks of here is that the brother went missing, and the Red Cross documents he finds reveals the parents’ persistent efforts to find their son throughout the post-war era.

Judith Butler explains that the self projects outward as a result of confrontation with an other:

An encounter with an other effects a transformation of the self from which there is no return. What is recognized about a self in the course of this exchange is that the self is the sort of being for whom staying inside itself proves impossible. One is compelled and comported *outside oneself*; one finds that the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside oneself, exterior to oneself, by virtue of a conversation or a norm that one did not make, in which one cannot discern oneself as an author or an agent of one’s own making (28).

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<sup>220</sup> “personal, private, nearly individually psychological demand.”

Treichel's personal discovery in his mother's folder of the possibility of having a brother who is alive holds significant implications for his writing career. This new information sets off a chain of written engagements and experimentations with the family narrative, which I argue constitutes the self-reflexivity of Treichel's "poetics of the search." This process of creating something outside of oneself through writing shows an ambivalent haunting by, yet also reliance on specters of the past. Reliance here could mean manipulation of and experimentation with that past from the perspective of the second generation.

### **Self-Reflection in *Anatolin***

Treichel's texts reflect an intergenerational trauma, which is explicitly thematized in *Anatolin*. In fact, Treichel himself, in an earlier volume dedicated to his oeuvre, partially attributes his belated interest in the family past to a traumatic latency. Treichel says of his first novel *Der Verlorene* from 1998 that it is about his traumatization absorbed from the parents' experience and that "For me it is symptomatic that I wrote this book only in the 1990s and not ten or fifteen years earlier...In this regard the book portrays a late reaction of someone born after to a suffering that was not so often talked about" (Rhys Williams, "Leseerfahrungen" 22). He continues on by saying "I wrote it out of a strong feeling of presence. Something must have forced it or made it possible that I suddenly in the mid-90s thematized a strong after-effect of the flight" (Rhys Williams, "Leseerfahrungen" 22). Self-distortion and anxiety of one's own person in *Der Verlorene* indicates a sort of traumatization that is echoed in Treichel's other family novels.

The narrator in *Anatolin*, for example, admits he has no propensity for "wohlige Selbstbetrachtung" (58)<sup>221</sup> and proceeds to describe a lifelong discomfort of seeing his own

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<sup>221</sup> "comforting self-reflection."

reflection in a mirror. The narrator even describes himself as “etwas Bedrohliches, Fremdes oder gar...ei[n] Angreifer (60).<sup>222</sup> A bit later, the narrator then says “Ich war mir vielmehr mein ärgster Feind und bin gelegentlich schreiend von mir davongelaufen” (61)<sup>223</sup> and credits the start of his writing career with achieving a relieving separation from his own threatening self:

Wobei dieses Standhalten ganz neue Effekte der Selbstbegegnung hervorruft. Vor allem dann, wenn das Schreiben autobiographisch motiviert ist und den Persönlichkeits- und Lebensspuren des Schreibenden nachforscht. Doch ist jenes Selbst, dem man im eigenen Text begegnet, immer ein anderes und fremdes .... Das kann eine große Erleichterung sein (61).<sup>224</sup>

The writing process is therefore presented as an indirect means for the protagonist to confront himself or at least diminish the vexing effects of his own self-image. In this way, it seems to reverse, or at least modify, what Butler described above as a confrontation with the other that compels an outward comporting of oneself. In the passage here from Treichel, the outward projection of the self through writing creates an other that is comfortably distant from the writer. Self-reflection in writing thus helps the writer deal with his self-reflection in a mirror. That is, Treichel makes Butler’s complex notion of a self moving outward a more symmetrical self-identical model that is based on the relationship between the writing self and the written self.

The poetics of the search is not only constituted by a self-reflexive approach to dealing with one’s own reflection, but also by a critical empathy that expands beyond the self by engaging the source of intergenerational traumatization: the parents’ flight at the end of the war.

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<sup>222</sup> “something threatening, foreign, or even an attacker.”

<sup>223</sup> “I was more so my worst enemy and occasionally ran screaming from myself.”

<sup>224</sup> “Whereby this standstill brings about quite new effects of self-confrontation. Above all when writing is autobiographically motivated and investigates the personality and life traces of the one writing. Yet whatever self one encounters in his own text is always another foreign self. That can be a huge relief.”

Empathetic intersubjectivity between generations or, more generally, between self and other is a key part of Marianne Hirsch's postmemory. Hirsch relies on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's term "allo-identification," which is "identification with" as opposed to "identification as" (*Generation* 85), thereby maintaining distance (87) and "displacing an incorporative, ingestive look of self-sameness and familiarization in favor of an openness to the other, a granting of alterity and opaqueness" (90).

### **The Poetics of the Search for a Family Narrative**

Treichel received little to no information from the parents about their difficult war-torn past. The transgenerational effects of wartime trauma thus lead to an internal conflict in relation to one's own biography. Treichel attributes his feeling of having an underdeveloped biography and cut-off family lineage to the lack of knowledge about his parents, let alone their ancestors. In one of his essays, Treichel speaks of his family past as an inheritance for which he takes ownership and responsibility but finds that this provides no solid grounding for his identity "denn das, was ich über meine Kindheit schreibe, und in gewisser Weise schreibe ich immer auch über meine Kindheit, ist eben keine gesicherte Erfahrung. Ich bin kein Mensch mit gesicherter biografischer Erfahrung..." ("Wahrheit und Lüge" 211).<sup>225</sup> Treichel has thus begun to doubt or even forget chapters of his own life that seem to stand in the shadows of the family trauma; an event that he himself has not directly experienced nevertheless overshadows his life.

*Der Spiegel* journalist Hans-Joachim Noack writes that refugee descendants "scheinen nun einen unverstellten Blick jenseits von Schuld und Selbstkasteiung zu riskieren. Sie wollen

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<sup>225</sup> "...because what I write about my childhood, and in a way I always also write about my childhood, is an uncertain experience. I am not someone with a secure sense of biographical experience...."

das Unabänderliche nicht infrage stellen, sondern wissen, was war” (9).<sup>226</sup> Aside from the fact that Treichel actually does thematize transgenerational feelings of guilt and shame in some of his novels, he is indeed one of those born-after who wants to learn more, given the prevailing silence regarding the parents’ experience of flight, indicating an unresolved tension between feeling affected in some way, yet not knowing enough. Treichel has commented on the way in which events that precede birth continue to affect one’s own biography, as if to say that biography is not really ever one’s own, rather embedded within a network of historical, political, and social networks:

Das Leben und unsere biografische Erfahrung sind immer auch transgenerationell. Wir erfahren, was vor uns erfahren wurde. Wir erleben, was vor uns erlebt wurde. Was aber auch heißt: Wenn wir uns nicht einrichten mit den Illusionen, die wir Wahrheiten nennen, wozu auch die biografischen Illusionen gehören, dann sind wir andauernd mit Selbstkorrekturen beschäftigt—oder sollten es zumindest sein (Treichel, “Wahrheit und Lüge” 210).<sup>227</sup>

Treichel uses the term self-correction in reference to the illusion that a biography is based on a never-changing truth and therefore points out the necessity to revise what one once thought to be truth: “...meine eigene biografische Geschäftsgrundlage [hat sich] immer wieder geändert und [wird sich] womöglich erneut ändern” (Treichel, “Wahrheit und Lüge” 210).<sup>228</sup> Indeed, “a

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<sup>226</sup> “...appear to risk an undisguised look beyond guilt and self-mortification. They don’t want to question the irrevocable, rather they want to know what was, what happened.” This is true too of East German writers, the most prominent example likely being Christa Wolf in her 1976 novel *Kindheitsmuster*.

<sup>227</sup> “Life and our biographical experience are always transgenerational. We learn about what others before us had experienced. We experience that which had been experienced before us. Which also means: if we do not situate ourselves in the illusions that we call truths, of which biographical illusions are also a part, then we are continuously dealing with self-corrections—or at least we should be.”

<sup>228</sup> “my own biographical basis for writing has always changed and, where possible, will change once again.”



biography has to be both flexible and definite, integrating and open for new, unexpected situations and needs.” (Fischer-Rosenthal 115).

What makes Treichel’s family novels extraordinary is that each text represents part of this process of continuous “Selbstkorrektur” or revision, particularly with regards to learning that his brother had been lost and, in fact, was not confirmed dead during the post-war westward trek (Treichel “Wahrheit und Lüge” 210). Amir Eshel notes in Treichel’s works the current search of those “born after” for a language that does justice to the historical loss and the historical caesura without constructing a uniform meaning and lesson from it (“Die Grammatik” 63). Treichel’s search for a language is at the same time a search for the missing family narrative, in which his own identity is at stake. The family narrative itself is constituted through a forced uprooting and undergoes continuous development through the writings of the second generation.

The poetic search for the family narrative begins with the parent generation. By attributing the shifting grounds of his own biography to those of his parents,’ Treichel emphasizes the links between biography and autobiography whose differences literary theorists have striven to articulate. Michaela Holdenried roughly summarizes the differences in terms of subject-object as well as structure. A biography is about someone else’s life, while the autobiography is a “vom Referenzsubjekt selbst erzählte Lebensgeschichte” (37).<sup>229</sup> Moreover, the structure differs; a biography as “closed” with a beginning, middle, and end (40), while writing an autobiography is more open-ended (40). The sixth chapter of *Anatolin* shows the narrator trying to reconstruct his father’s biography, which is embedded within the autobiographical narrative. It therefore does not present a linear outline of the father’s life from birth to death but rather draws out particular fragments, in an effort to not only fill in between the

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<sup>229</sup> “a life story narrated by the reference subject themselves.”

already known birth and death years but perhaps, in doing so, also to create an emotional attachment to the father. In this way, the biography of an other becomes unlocked, the ending is opened. Treichel shuttles at times between biographer and autobiographer but makes himself, as biographer of his father, visible in the biographical sections.<sup>230</sup>

The father's *Lebenslauf* or *personal vita* is essentially a disorderly "fragmentarische[r] Sammlung von Anekdoten, Ortsnamen, Personen und Ereignissen" that makes the narrator realize "Ich wußte so gut wie nichts über den Mann, der mich gezeugt...hatte" (111).<sup>231</sup> Here, the narrator's description of the different types of information without any detail conveys distance. One gets the sense that the narrator sees this biographical information as an overwhelming, jumbled heap that does not seem to address him or invite him in. What is more significant for the narrator, however, is that upon engaging with the father's *vita*, the father's unfamiliarity becomes apparent.

The rest of the chapter is therefore a sort of attempt at arranging and narrativizing facts in order to fill in a narrative between the father's birth and death years. Veering off of the biographical project seems to be unavoidable, however, as Treichel plays with the line between his own life and his writing by referencing another novel he has written: *Menschenflug*. The autobiographical narrator in *Anatolin* reflects on the role this *vita* played in *Menschenflug* and the decision of how to insert the father's life history: as "tabellarisches Dokument" or as a sort of biographical narration. The narrator in *Anatolin* reveals that he had decided to contextualize the father's *vita* with biographical narration in *Menschenflug* (117) and therefore wants to take a different approach in *Anatolin* by listing off years with corresponding life events in a somewhat

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<sup>230</sup> For more on the presence of the biographer and, by extension, autobiographical aspects in a biography as a result of identification with the biographical object, see Holdenried 42 and Scheuer 223 and 240.

<sup>231</sup> "fragmentary collection of anecdotes, place names, people, and events"; "I knew as good as nothing about the man who had created me."

cold manner: “Dort ist mein Vater in den Jahren 1915 bis 1924 zur Volksschule gegangen, um dann die Höhere Handelsschule in Posen zu besuchen, diese nach einem halben Jahr abzubrechen...” (117).<sup>232</sup> Before long, however, this dry list of events gives way to a speculative and more fluid narration:

...und schließlich sechs Jahre lang von 1924 bis 1930 wieder auf dem elterlichen Bauernhof in Bryschtsche zu arbeiten. Offensichtlich war mein Vater für etwas Höheres als die Landwirtschaft vorgesehen, möglicherweise konnten meine Großeltern auf die Arbeitskraft des Sohns nicht verzichten. Das kam mir bekannt vor. Mein Vater konnte auf die Arbeitskraft von mir und meinen Brüdern im elterlichen Tabakwarenhandel auch nicht verzichten. (117)<sup>233</sup>

Not only does the biography turn into interpretation and speculation, but the narrator also cannot help but to insert himself into this biography by drawing parallels to his own childhood experiences. The narrator continues to do this as he connects his father’s various life experiences with his own childhood memories from after the war, underscoring what Astrid Erll sees as an entanglement between biography and autobiography: “Über andere schreiben bedeutet immer auch, über sich selbst zu schreiben, denn die Rekonstruktion des Lebens anderer wird (bewusst oder unbewusst) geleitet von den eigenen Erfahrungen und Lebenserinnerungen” (“Biographie” 81).<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> “There my father went to grade school from 1915 to 1924 to attend the higher commerce school in Posen only to stop going after half of a year.”

<sup>233</sup> “...and finally back on the family farm in Bryschtsche to work for six years from 1924 to 1930. Apparently my father was meant for something more than farming, but maybe my grandparents could not do without their son’s labor. That was familiar to me. My father could not do without labor from me and my brothers in the family tobacco product business.”

<sup>234</sup> “to write about others also always means to write about yourself because the reconstruction of the life of an other is, consciously or not, guided by one’s own experiences and life memories.”

The father's biographical facts seem to be a static, concrete document, a *vitae* that is solidified in history. Yet the second generation recovers, reworks, and reanimates the *vita* in the process of writing its own autobiography and fiction in *Anatolin* and *Menschenflug*, respectively.<sup>235</sup> The process of transforming fragmentary biographical information into a family narrative as well as drawing parallels to one's own autobiographical project reanimates the facts of the father's past while creating similarities between father and son that draw them nearer to one another.

Treichel's representations of family memories related to flight and expulsion are quite individualized, honing in on a partially fictionalized family's private grappling with loss. This has not been lost on critics, such as David Clarke, who see precisely the individualizing aspect as a point of critique in Treichel's oeuvre, as German perpetration and its targeted groups are, according to him, markedly absent. Clarke argues that Treichel's highly individualized accounts preclude any differentiated engagement with the parents' experiences and draws on Silke Horstkotte's view that family texts run the risk of focusing only on their suffering at the expense of other groups ("The Place" 130). Helmut Schmitz poses the problem faced by those like Treichel who write about German wartime suffering as such and therefore risk depoliticization and decontextualization: "How to adequately portray German wartime experience without either suppressing their status as members of a Nazi community or having constantly to refer to Nazi crimes to ward off potential accusations of leveling German responsibility?" ("Introduction" 15).

Besides Treichel's obvious references to the Holocaust in *Der Verlorene*, this is perhaps where my more poetic reading of *Anatolin* in relation to postmemory intervenes to assert that the ambiguous and imaginative components of postmemory in Treichel's search do hold back from a

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<sup>235</sup> See Woolf for her explanation of "the new biography" as one achieving balance between fact and fiction, truth and personality, fossil and man.

sharper political message in his texts. However, simply because there is no explicit mention of Jews in Treichel's texts does not mean that Treichel is ignoring historical context. Treichel's texts, in the self-reflexivity shown in his poetics of the search, are not so simple and naïve as to ignore historical context of his parents' flight.

The predominantly personal and familial view of German suffering in Treichel's texts has also led some critics to compare him to the politically conservative writer Martin Walser.<sup>236</sup> Stuart Taberner, for example, has challenged such parallels, however, arguing that Treichel's writing does not put forth a political agenda, but rather a critical, reflective approach to German suffering ("Hans-Ulrich" 126). Taberner also points out that Treichel neither revises German history nor indulges in Leftist self-righteousness, but widens interpretive possibilities of flight and expulsion in the German literary scene (Taberner "Hans-Ulrich" 134). That is, Treichel tackles unavoidable political themes with the family past of German flight, but in a way that reflects multiple perspectives.

For example, the imagined scenarios in the father's life and the speculative connections the father and son share in the process of narrativizing the father's biography soon comes to an abrupt halt with some questions about later facts from the father's life:

Im Jahr 1943 bis 1944 hat mein Vater laut Lebenslauf als selbständiger Landwirt in Rakowiec bei Zychlin im Kreis Gostynin gearbeitet. Was heißt das nun wieder—als *selbständiger Landwirt*? Woher hatte er das Land? (118)<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> See Taberner "Hans-Ulrich" and his essay in Basker's volume "'sehnsüchtig'" for arguments on why this is not an accurate assessment of Treichel's oeuvre.

<sup>237</sup> "In the year 1943 until 1944 my father, according to his vita, worked as an independent farmer in Rakowiec near Zychlin in the Gostynin district. What does that mean again—as *independent farmer*? Where did he get the land from?"

The narrative continues to oscillate between historical facts and imagined scenes of the father living and working in occupied parts of Poland after 1939. However, this too is tied back to the narrator and his own evolving understanding of not only his father's past, but the German past.

### **Intergenerational continuities and developments**

Treichel, as part of the second-generation, continues the precedent set by the small group of post-war writers and intellectuals by exploring personal ties to flight and expulsion without making conservative political claims, implicitly or explicitly, about material loss, traumatization, and/or their placement above Jewish suffering. What sets Treichel's family novels apart from the earlier authors and their writing, though, is the poetics of the search that takes shape in them due to his own generational distance from the events about which he writes. The poetics of the search is constituted by Treichel's continuous process of "Selbstkorrektur" or self-correction through prose writing. This development is attributed to the family silences, Treichel's not-knowing in the postmemory framework.

The self-reflexivity of the narration in *Anatolin* is exemplified by two seemingly influential words related to perpetration and victimhood and instilled into the generation born after: "*Warthegau*" and "*Lastenausgleich*." The Warthegau was an area in Poland which the Nazis had taken over after 1939. The narrator's father resided over part of this land in the early 1940s. The term "*Lastenausgleich*" describes the post-war money settlements to those who had fled former German territories after the war, obviously having left nearly everything behind. The narrator recalls the apparently influential role of these words in his upbringing and childhood:

Sollte mich jemand nach meinen frühesten Worterinnerungen fragen, dann würde ich antworten: Warthegau und Lastenausgleich. ... Bevor ich Mama und Papa gesagt habe,

habe ich Warthegau und Lastenausgleich gesagt. Mit der Muttermilch eingesogen habe ich den Lastenausgleich. Und den Warthegau auch. (120)<sup>238</sup>

Treichel's ironic tone in having his narrator recall his first words, Warthegau and *Lastenausgleich*, reveals the conflicted situation between perpetration and victimhood, respectively, into which the second generation was born. However, the interpretation and meaning making associated with larger post-war memory discourses only becomes apparent as the narrator contemplates further childhood memories of words and how their meanings are only realized in retrospect during adulthood. Only as the narrator reflects on the role these words, particularly Warthegau, played later on in his childhood years do they become associated with perpetration and victimhood.

The narrator recalls a time when Warthegau had not yet had a deeper meaning in his young mind and how, as a child, he had told others, without reserve, that his mother was from Warthegau:

...ich wußte von Anfang an, daß sie [die Mutter] aus dem Warthegau stammt. Wo immer das auch war. Wenn mich früher jemand fragte, woher meine Mutter stamme, dann antwortete ich als kleines Kind wie aus der Pistole geschossen: 'Aus dem Warthegau.' Das reichte den Leuten als Antwort, Nachfragen gab es keine. Anscheinend wußte jeder, was gemeint war. Nur ich wußte es nicht. (120-1)<sup>239</sup>

What the narrator remembers to have been, for himself, a mere word he could freely utter is corrected or juxtaposed with recollected reactions from others in the post-war period, all of

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<sup>238</sup> "If one should ask me about my earliest word memories, then I would answer: 'Warthegau' and balance of burden. ... Before I said Mama and Papa I said 'Warthegau' and balance of burden. With my mother's milk I absorbed the balance of burden. And the Warthegau too."

<sup>239</sup> "I knew from the beginning that she came from Warthegau. Wherever that was. When someone asked me earlier where my mother is from, then I answered as a small child like a shot out of a pistol: 'from Warthegau.' That answer was enough for people, there were no further questions. Apparently everyone knew what that meant. Only I did not know."

which only seem to be clear in the hindsight of this self-reflexive narrative. This shows not only the second generation's inherited contradiction of positionalities but also discrepancies between interpretations in the family sphere as opposed to that in the public sphere in the years following the war. Given the supposed lack of hesitation with which the narrator remembers having said the word "Warthegau," it seems to have been a word freely used at home with no repercussions. In public, however, the narrator's memory indicates others' associations of "Warthegau" with the National Socialist political program in the east. Treichel's peculiar use of a pistol metaphor insinuates these perpetrator connotations and allows degrees of separation from earlier, younger selves and previous understandings.

The narrator remembers innocently declaring the "Warthegau" as his mother's place of origin, a seemingly imaginary place that the narrator had known existed but had not known where it was located. The student movement of the late 1960s, however, shapes the meaning of "Warthegau" for the narrator in young adulthood. That is, while the text shows the child born after the war in an innocent role, uttering without hesitation that the mother is from Warthegau, the child is presented as a sort of victim of not having known better, as can be gleaned from the narrator's reflection that everyone knew what that meant, "nur ich wußte es nicht" (121).<sup>240</sup> While the narrator recalls his childhood mouth having shot out the word, "Warthegau," like a pistol, he reflects on how it later become for him a "*Naziwort*" or Nazi word that he "nicht mehr in den Mund genommen [hat]" (121).<sup>241</sup> This naïve post-war innocence can be seen to develop into a later strategic awareness of innocence in the late 1960s for the second generation to wield against the first generation as perpetrators. Treichel indirectly references through his narrator the 1968 student movement, of which Treichel himself had later taken part in West Berlin.

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<sup>240</sup> "only I did not know."

<sup>241</sup> "no longer took in his mouth."



Treichel portrays even this later oral disarmament of one's arsenal of vocabulary as naïve. Treichel's narrator recalls that as a student he stopped saying "Warthegau" "[n]icht wegen Warthe. Sondern wegen Gau. Gau wie Gauleiter. Und auch nicht wegen der historischen Tatsachen. Von denen ich hatte weder als Schüler noch als Student eine Ahnung" (121).<sup>242</sup> That is, Treichel, through his narrator, airs critique of this earlier movement in which he had previously participated. On the one hand, the narrator recalls the naïve innocence behind his childhood self freely speaking the word, "Warthegau," while on the other, he recalls the uncritical naïveté in his young adult years for having stopped saying this word because of another negatively associated word "*Gauleiter*," rather than because of historical facts.

This refusal or at least hesitation to say "Warthegau" persists for the narrator in the present well into his adulthood but for different reasons:

Und selbst heute scheue ich mich, das Wort Warthegau auszusprechen, obwohl ich inzwischen genügend seriöse Literatur kenne, in der es ohne jede Distanzierung benutzt wird. Das dabei angewendete Verfahren nennt sich erlebte Rede. Ich benutze das Wort dagegen lieber zitierend und mit Anführungszeichen. (121)<sup>243</sup>

That is, the narrator gives us an evolution of the word "Warthegau" and his changing understanding or experiencing of it. According to the above passages, what was once before a word loosely enforced as a taboo word in social contexts in the 1950s transformed in the 1960s to a more strictly leftist enforced political taboo, and finally in the present day is a word loosely used again but embedded within historical facts. The narrator proceeds to list historical facts

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<sup>242</sup> "not because of Warthe [a river in Poland]. Rather because of district. District as in NSDAP district leader. And also not because of historical facts. Of which I had any idea neither as pupil nor as student."

<sup>243</sup> "And even today I hesitate to say the word Warthegau, even though in the meantime I know enough serious literature in which it is used without any distance. That kind of approach is called lived speech. I, however, would rather use the word as cited and in quotation marks."

about the area occupied by the Nazis in Poland as of late 1939, but in spite of historical context, Treichel's narrator indicates his own discomfort in the above passage with the banal, informal approach "ohne jede Distanzierung" that writers take toward "Warthegau" even in serious literature (121). Given the variety of historical data available, "Warthegau" no longer seems to be a word that has any emotional attachment to it—neither pride, nor revulsion—as seen in the childhood and young adult memories recalled here. Yet in its prevalence within historical texts, the word "Warthegau" seems, for the narrator, to be too close and too familiar.

The narrator thus reflects on the word "Warthegau" from various perspectives connected to the different phases of his own life—childhood, young adulthood, and middle adulthood. The current stage in the approach to this word is that it is only to be used in quotation marks (121), that is, with hesitation and distancing by bracketing off through quotation marks, given the narrator's family past, the changing German memory discourses over the decades, and perhaps most importantly, his own changing understanding of and connection to both of these contexts. According to Fischer-Rosenthal, "if we are able to narrate how we became who we are, then we can integrate ourselves, because we can present ourselves as both consistent *and* contingent" (115). Treichel's narrator indirectly ties his own personal development with regards to such words as "Lastenausgleich" and especially "Warthegau" into the larger post-war discourses and their development.

A mere document detailing events in the father's life prompts a more in-depth reflection in the narrator not only about his childhood and student years but also how this relates to the phases of West German memory discourses, namely from post-war repression, to open confrontation in the 1960s, and finally to a well-known part of German history in the East. Treichel, through subtle references and self-reflexive narration, negotiates the personal with the

historical, even when not at all mentioning Jews, placing his parents' pre-war and post-war lives into a more complex historical picture. Above all, Treichel's narrator, through reflexive autobiographical narrative, needles around these various phases and perspectives of his younger self and his generational cohort of the post-war period. In doing so, a sort of biographical structuring is at play in which "a network of events" is "combined and continuously reinterpreted over a lifetime" (Fischer-Rosenthal 117). More importantly, however, biographical structuring is "an interpretive, open *process of becoming*" (Fischer-Rosenthal 118). The autobiographical narrator maintains a critical distance not only from these earlier versions of himself and those of his generation but also in the present as he continues to question himself.

The second generation is in a position to investigate the first generation's pain while still maintaining a critical distance. The search for a family narrative and an autobiography is displaced spatially to Poland where empathy gets as spatially close as possible through the work of postmemory; however, the generational distance also inherent to postmemory allows the narrator to maintain critical reflection on this space of both victimization and perpetration.

### **Traveling to Poland**

Each of Treichel's texts represents part of an ongoing process of "Selbstkorrektur" and of the poetics of the search for an empathetic, yet critical family narrative. *Anatolin* and its depicted journeys to Ukraine and Poland make up part of that development. The narrative's depicted displacement to Poland represents a setting in which the narrator spatially and affectively negotiates proximity and distance to the parent generation.

The family past may be, as David Basker notes, "literally and figuratively a foreign country" (48) but we see the work of postmemory at play as the narrator in *Anatolin* spins imaginative webs around the literal foreign country of Poland in order to make the figurative

foreign country of the family past more knowable. That is, in contrast to Warthegau, which is associated with the father's ties to the Nazi past and is therefore kept at a distance, today's Poland is a space of unfamiliarity that the narrator seeks to examine more closely. As the protagonist arrives in the small town of Anatolin and walks down the single main road, he arbitrarily picks one of the dilapidated houses and declares it as his grandparents' and, by extension, his mother's:

Ich bildete mir ein, dieses Ruine hätte das Großelternhaus gewesen sein können.... Ich ging ein paarmal um die Ruine herum. Ich hatte das Haus jetzt adoptiert. Mein Großelternhaus! Mein Ursprung! Ich war gerührt (184-5).<sup>244</sup>

In this scene it is clear that the protagonist needs to attach his imaginative thoughts to a concrete structure in this town, regardless of historical accuracy. There is desire for proximity to a fixed point in space on which to concentrate all hitherto ideas and musings about the town, and it underscores ambiguity, imagination, and arbitrariness as components of postmemory. In spite of any emotional proximity conveyed in this scene, however, Treichel's characteristically ironic tone comes through in the sudden exclamation of attachment to the house. In writing it this way, Treichel has his narrator maintain a distance from the Polish landscape.

After the moving moment the protagonist experiences at the decrepit house, the passage afterward becomes increasingly mystical and dreamy. The protagonist is drawn to a nearby forest where he finds a soft-looking depression in the soil:

...und ich spürte plötzlich, wie müde ich war. Ich legte mich in die Mulde. Der Boden war warm. Ich legte mich in ein gemachtes Bett. ... Der Boden war so warm und die Mulde so weich, daß ich schon nach wenigen Minuten einschlief. Ich lag in der Muttererde. Ich

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<sup>244</sup> "I made myself believe that this ruin could have been my grandparents' house. I walked around the ruin a couple times. I had now adopted this house. My grandparents' house! My origin! I was touched."

träumte, wie mein junger Vater meiner jungen Mutter in diesem Wäldchen ein Kind machte. ... Ich träumte, wie mein nicht mehr so junger Vater die warme Milch der Polen trank. Ich wachte verschwitzt und mit einem bitteren Geschmack im Mund auf. Ich vertrieb mich aus dem Paradies (187-8).<sup>245</sup>

Given the numerous organic and biological invocations, one may easily note the echoes of “*Blut und Boden*” which connote a natural rooted connection to this landscape. Rather than reading this as an earthly, nostalgic connection to what was once German soil or as a desire to reclaim lost German territory, the dream instead shows a profound point of postmemory contact between generations within this particular setting. In stepping off this main road, off the map, in this Polish town, the protagonist goes from tourist to a sleeping body that serves as a conduit for reunion between the parents’ pre-flight life with Günther, the lost brother, and the present. Thus the war and the trauma it inflicted on this family are momentarily bridged over in a dream that is quite simple, primitive, yet also alarming, given the narrator’s sudden wakening in a cold sweat. In contrast to the ironic distance upheld in the prior scene, the dream scenario draws the protagonist, perhaps dangerously close, into his parents’ pre-trauma life and perhaps even back into the safety and warmth of the maternal womb.

This scene of confrontation in Poland, along with the above described confrontations with the narrator’s self-constructedness and with the father’s biography, makes *Anatolin* different from the attempted confrontations in Treichel’s previous novels. The protagonist confronts here in Poland an imaginary primal scene not just of his parents engaging in intercourse but of the

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<sup>245</sup> “Directly in front of me was a grassy, sunlit depression in the ground, and I suddenly felt how tired I was. I laid myself in the pit. The ground was warm. I laid myself down in a made bed. The ground was so warm and the depression so soft that I fell asleep already after a short time. I was lying in the mother earth. I dreamed how my young father made a child with my mother in this little forest. ... I dreamed how my not so young father drank the warm milk of the Poles. I woke up in a sweat and with a bitter taste in my mouth. I drove myself out of the paradise.”

beginning of the brother's existence. David Clarke takes this to be a dream about the narrator's own conception, even though the narrator, like Treichel, was born in Germany ("The Place" 27). Since the lost brother and the East as something foreign and scary are two themes that haunt Treichel's narrators, especially in *Der Verlorene*, I suggest to interpret the dream as a two-fold confrontation with the brother and with the menacing East where he and, indeed, the family story began. In *Der Verlorene* the young protagonist begins to worry about how the family dynamics will change if the parents actually find his brother who was "einige bedrohliche Jahre älter" (51).<sup>246</sup> Moreover, when the father tells the protagonist that the foundling in foster care is "[ihm] aus dem Gesicht geschnitten"<sup>247</sup> (*Verlorene* 55), this fear of resembling and having someone else's physiognomy cut out of one's own sets forth uncontrollable facial twitches and pains that signal psychosomatic reaction to something traumatic. In fact, that Treichel even wrote this semi-fictional novel is in itself a way of addressing a latent childhood trauma in Ostwestfalen (Rhys Williams, "Mein Unbewusstes" 211),<sup>248</sup> making this town in the western part of Germany a further source of angst for the author and his protagonists.

In *Menschenflug*, the protagonist is more curious and forthright in determining whether the foundling 2307 is indeed his biological brother, and the narrator in *Anatolin* highlights this other protagonist as his inspiration and model to do the same:

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<sup>246</sup> "a few threatening years older."

<sup>247</sup> "carved out of his [the protagonist's] face," meaning something to the effect of "the spitting image."

<sup>248</sup> Rhys Williams also notes Treichel's stay in Rome in 1988 which led him to start writing short prose pieces, including some about his family past, that were later published as a collection titled *Von Leib und Seele* (1992) (Rhys Williams, "Mein Unbewusstes" 209 and 213-4). This underscores the significance of spatial displacement outside of Germany and the memories associated with it in order to confront precisely that context and one's past.

Nachdem ich meinen Helden Stephan aus *Menschenflug* das hatte tun lassen, was ich selbst nicht getan hatte, nahm ich mir meine eigene Romanfigur zum Vorbild und machte mich auf die Suche nach dem Findelkind 2307. (138)<sup>249</sup>

In the process of waiting for the DNA test results back in Germany, the protagonist confronts the lost brother in the dream and in Poland, where the brother had lived, albeit for a short time before his disappearance.

In light of intertextual references and the highly self-reflexive narration, *Anatolin* contains numerous confrontations to show a poetics of the search that develops across Treichel's oeuvre and even more so within this particular novel itself. Treichel's other, more fictional texts show that the "tatsächliche[r] Bruch der Realität in die Fiktion wird jedoch eher ablehnend oder mit Panik registriert," (Ölke 129). *Anatolin*, however, undertakes parts of the search for the family narrative that had not yet taken place or had only taken place in written form through protagonists in Treichel's other fictional texts. In *Anatolin*, the poetics of the search develops through contact with the potential lost brother and spatially in Poland, but in conjunction with the writing process and in reference to broader discourses, thereby maintaining distance in spite of emotional and spatial proximity.

As in the passages about the father's vitae where the narrator keeps drawing connections to his own memories, the narrator, with an interesting twist of a verb, inserts himself into the family's experience of flight but in a way that prevents him from identifying with it or construing it as a decontextualized story of German victimization. The dream scene in Poland is perhaps the closest the protagonist can get to the parents and their pre-trauma life; however, Treichel employs a succinct, yet powerful self-reflexive technique in his transformation of the verb

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<sup>249</sup> "After I had my hero Stephan in *Menschenflug* do what I had not yet done myself, I took my own novel character as an example and began my search for the foundling 2307."

“*vertreiben*” (to drive out or expel) into a self-reflexive verb: “*sich vertreiben*” or to expel oneself. In spite of and indeed because of the dream in the forest, the text maintains and underscores distance at the end, given not only Treichel’s ironic undertones in the house scene, but also his use of the word “*vertrieben*” in the dream itself as a self-reflexive verb at the end of the dream passage: “*Ich vertrieb mich aus diesem Paradies*” (188). Treichel’s transformation of this verb into a reflexive verb is highly curious, though not coincidental and reveals yet another nuance through which to argue that Treichel’s poetics of the search maintains a balance between empathy and distance. Elke Mehnert breaks down the verb “*vertreiben*,” or expel, and its accompanying noun by comparing it with the verb “*flüchten*,” to flee, and its accompanying noun:

Er [der Umsiedler] ist—wie der Flüchtling—Träger eines durch das Verb ausgedrückten Verhaltens; *er* agiert, wird tätig. Anders der Vertriebene. Er ist Patiens, ist das Ziel eines durch das Verb ausgedrückten Verhaltens; er wird vertrieben, *erleidet* Vertreibung (135).<sup>250</sup>

Notably, Treichel turns this on its head by making the protagonist the agent who drives himself out of the paradise, as if aware that a transgression that has been made. Biblical interpretations are helpful in illuminating this scene of transgression that results in banishment from paradise.

Tadeusz Namowicz cites the allegory of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as the biblical passage to which many fictionalized accounts refer when thematizing flight and expulsion: “An erster Stelle steht die biblische Erzählung von der Vertreibung aus dem Paradies (1. Mose 3, 24): ‘Und [Gott] trieb Adam aus und lagerte vor den Garten Eden die Cherubim mit

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<sup>250</sup> “He [the resettler] is—like the refugee—the carrier of an action that is expressed through the verb; *he* acts, becomes active. It is different for the expellee. He is passive, the object of an action expressed through the verb; he is expelled, *suffers* expulsion.”



dem bloßen hauenden Schwert, zu bewahren den Weg zu dem Baum des Lebens” (174).<sup>251</sup> If one is to interpret the dream passage in *Anatolin* in this way, then Treichel shows his protagonist’s awareness of having violated a physical and discursive boundary. While the passive dreamer involuntarily trespasses into dangerous proximity to the parents’ pre-flight idyll, or “*Paradies*,” Treichel shows a pang of conscience by twisting the meaning of “vertreiben” into a self-reflexive “sich vertreiben” as way of overcoming a self-imposed or self-realized transgression. This small yet significant choice of words reveals Treichel’s resistance against the seduction of too much emotional proximity to the paradise that is seemingly removed from all historical circumstance.

Treichel directly refers to himself in the opening poem as “*der Vertriebene*” and in *Anatolin*, through his use of the verb, “sich vertreiben,” indirectly renders the narrator a “Vertriebene” and shows transgenerational implication into the post-war flight and expulsion of Germans. Displacement for the second generation thus manifests itself spatially via travel and discursively via a kind of self-expulsion signaled by “*sich vertreiben*” which highlights the second generation’s self-consciousness when dealing with memory of expulsion.

Elsewhere, and in a less critical tone, David Clarke has drawn on *Anatolin* to support his claim that Treichel’s family texts only recently acknowledge the father’s ambiguous role in colonizing Poland during the war (“The Place” 130). The side by side occurrence in the dream of sexuality and beginning of life, on the one hand, and invocations of perpetration through “drinking warm milk of the Poles,” on the other, indicates simultaneous awareness that the family reunion, connoted by contact with the lost brother through a dream of the brother’s conception, is inseparable from acknowledging Polish expulsion upon German invasion in 1939.

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<sup>251</sup> “The biblical story of the expulsion from paradise most often stands in: ‘And [God] drove Adam out and placed the cherub in front of the garden of Eden with a mere chopping sword to guard the path to the tree of life.’”

This dream experience of the traveling protagonist in *Anatolin* is in keeping with what Taberner and Berger observe in recent literary representations of German suffering, namely empathy and understanding, on the one hand, and critical distance and knowledge of broader historical context, on the other (7-8).

Though Treichel's writing process and the finished products are means to a more personal, apolitical end, his novels nevertheless inform our understanding of a particular generation's development across decades. His novels, as stages of Treichel's own aesthetic and personal experimentation and rumination, widen the scope of ways to engage with German experiences of suffering at the end of WWII. It is therefore inaccurate to assert, as Clarke does, that Treichel's novels are too individualized to provide a nuanced understanding of flight and expulsion's significance for current German literature. The novel shows, on the one hand, an attempt to work through a family trauma by depicting travel to the space of flight and expulsion from within the postmemory framework. On the other hand, in doing so, Treichel also takes care to acknowledge the history of perpetration that lies at the center of this family trauma.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In spite of the apparent imbalance of public and private impulses for Treichel, with the latter gaining the upper hand in reception of his works and in his classification as an author, Treichel undoubtedly "contribut[es] to the contemporary reassessment of German wartime suffering and to the breaking of alleged taboos surrounding representations of that suffering" (Clarke, "Guilt and Shame" 61). Moreover, Treichel's focus on the private family past "does not betoken a refusal to ask fundamental societal and political questions, so much as an indirect method of addressing precisely those questions" (Rhys Williams, "Mein Unbewusstes" 208, 217). Though Williams does not explicitly state what these questions are, Treichel's highly

personal accounts of his parents' flight and expulsion, in my view, tend to at least two questions: how can one reclaim or at least partially reconstruct, through writing, a past overshadowed by what came before one's birth, and how can the second generation, also through writing, negotiate emotional proximity and distance to the parent generation's experiences? In negotiating critical empathy, Treichel's writing shows a reliance on the family past to not only create an autobiography but also to provide a nuanced engagement with postwar and contemporary discourses alike.

Without in any way prioritizing German over Jewish wartime suffering, on the one hand, and without repressing transgenerational effects of a family trauma, on the other, Hans-Ulrich Treichel's texts develop a poetics of the search for a critical, yet empathetic family narrative that engages memory of flight and expulsion. That is, Treichel's oeuvre, but particularly his most recent autobiographical narrative *Anatolin*, makes up a process of searching within the framework of postmemory for the autobiography that is located both within the family novel and within broader German history and memory discourses. Treichel's literary contributions show not only "belated empathy" (Schmitz, "Introduction" 12), but also "critical empathy" (Schmitz, "Historicism" 202). In other words, Treichel achieves balance in his writing between unchecked empathy and the critical distance that is characteristic of the postwar second generation. And indeed it may even be the generational distance that allows a critical stance in the poetics of the search. With regard to his family past, Treichel breaks away from indictments of the 68-er generation and, instead, probes the very ambiguity of these categories but at a distance afforded him as part of the second generation in the postmemory framework. In this way, Treichel continues the post-war West German intellectuals' critical engagements of flight and expulsion,

but he inflects these topics with both the insight and ambiguity of the second generation in the post-1989 context.

The poetics of the search particularly takes shape in a spatial aspect of *Anatolin* as its narrative outsteps German national and discursive boundaries altogether in order to embark on a personal twenty-first century journey to Poland that markedly differs from his parents' historical twentieth-century flight from East Prussia. In spite of the agency associated with voluntary travel, a sense of precarious belonging in the post-unification present is at stake. The main protagonist, like Treichel himself and countless other Germans, feels the need to revisit the past because of political changes of reunification in the early 1990s, the continued European integration of the 2000s, as well as personal discoveries of collected family materials. This particular postunification era presents opportunities to engage all these aspects in an open-ended way via travel to sites that are pertinent to family pasts. Poland and Ukraine as post-Soviet spaces are not so much remembered in the post-1989 context as they are *used* to remember earlier traumatic events from WWII. In *Anatolin* body, space, and memory unite in Poland to integrate the foreign or unknown into one's identity in the second generation. At the same time, this does not mean construal of decontextualized victimhood, let alone over-identification with it, nor does it mean that the past overwhelms the present of the generation that came after. Treichel skillfully negotiates in his prose his parents' plight with the history of potential perpetration or, at the very least, complicity that lies at the heart of the family trauma. Though the protagonist's reflections in *Anatolin* do not explicitly reference Jews or reinforce a discursive *Trennungsstrich* from the parent generation, the ruminations about how his father came to inhabit the Warthegau in Poland (124), his dream at the end about the father drinking Poles' milk, and the subsequent self-expulsion out of the forest, all represent distance that counterbalances the allure of a

romantic countryside home or a seductive dream. The development across Treichel's texts is inevitably political in subject matter, yet apolitical in approach. The second generation's postmemory work that relies on, but is not consumed by, the pain or the polemics of the past allows this ambivalence.

The memory work undertaken here in *Anatolin*, as with the novels from Honigmann, Maron, and Ruge is riddled with forgetting and knowledge gaps. The second generation will never know or experience precisely what the first generation did, but it can come close and it can take a step back. In the face of a lost generation (the parents, born in the interwar period around 1920) and a lost East-West framework through which to understand history and the world, Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Anatolin*, along with the three other novels, analyzed in this dissertation, reveal a reliance on the specters of the parents, of the former Soviet bloc, and the memories they both still invoke today in the twenty-first century. Reliance, rather than haunting, more adequately describes the way in which Treichel and the other authors explored in this project engage anew with the family past. Contrary to the core of postmemory, renewed engagements with family pasts in newer German family novels are motivated by desires to find *non-traumatic* continuities in the postmemory framework.

## Chapter Four: Finding a Future for the GDR in German Contemporary Literature in Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (In Times of Fading Light) (2011)

### Introduction: Where are we?

Author Eugen Ruge posed the following question in his eulogy at his father's funeral in 2007:

Sind die Erfahrungen von Wolfgang Ruge für die nachfolgenden Generationen noch relevant – oder wird das, was wir heute als ›Wende‹ bezeichnen, zum Graben, der ihn und sein Leben von den Heutigen und Morgigen abtrennt?  
(Radisch)<sup>252</sup>

Eugen Ruge's father, Wolfgang Ruge, had been a GDR historian and committed Communist. Ruge began writing his debut multigenerational novel *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011) shortly after his father's death in his secluded former GDR family home. In this book the relatively new author affirms both the continuity of and the caesura from the GDR past more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The novel is more than a commemorative act. Ruge uses his father's biography and his own as material in order to, perhaps unwittingly, contemplate larger questions about contemporary Germany and how far its past, particularly the forty-year division, casts a shadow on the present. Why is the former GDR emerging in literary texts more than twenty-five years after reunification?<sup>253</sup> And can we still classify these texts as post-1989 literature? Such a question forces us to meditate on the meaning of "post," whether in post-Wende, post-1989 or

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<sup>252</sup> "Are the experiences of Wolfgang Ruge still relevant for the coming generations?—or will that what we call 'the turn,' become a grave that separates him and his life from the lives of today and tomorrow?"

<sup>253</sup> Though not specifically about the GDR per se, Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014) thematizes memory of WWII and the ensuing Cold War period through travel across various post-Soviet countries. Further contemporary examples are to be found in Maxim Leo's *Haltet Euer Herz Bereit* (2009) and Marion Brasch's *Ab jetzt ist Ruhe* (2012).

postmemory. “Post” could mean, for example, an era that is “supposedly no longer” (Bammer, “Introduction” xii) but whose effects are still palpably felt. East Germany as a satellite state of the Soviet Union as well as its institutions have ceased to exist, hence the ubiquitous term “post-1989.” Pakier and Stráth point out that 1989 marked “a new zero hour,” thereby invoking parallels to the immediate post-WWII context in Germany (3).<sup>254</sup>

In the immediate post-Wende period, the proponents of unification in both East and West framed the fall of the wall as a euphoric event, but some looked on with hesitation if not disappointment. Badiou, for example, notes that “a finally integrated world” had been “stripped of hope or purpose” (196). These thinkers and those “partisans of market democracy” (Badiou 196) who had changed their minds found themselves disempowered amidst the changes sweeping across Germany’s new provinces. Attempts abounded at finding a so-called “third way”<sup>255</sup> to bridge the freedoms of the West with humanitarian facets of antifascism from the East. These attempts proved futile, however, against the changes driven by a Western narrative of victory over Communism (Buck-Morss xi-xii; Badiou 197).

In spite of the demise of East Germany and its institutional structures, however, there has been an ambivalent disappearance and persistence of the GDR since reunification. While all its institutions and structures rapidly dissolved, memories and physical traces, such as buildings and monuments, remain. This shows a time lag between a historical turning point, on the one hand, and landscape, systemic, and mentality changes, on the other. As Marta Rabikowska puts it, “the everyday is still influenced by the past, but it is impossible to define with precision...where it starts or ends in relation to the present or the future” (1). Aleida Assmann also expresses the

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<sup>254</sup> See part 3 of Pinkert, *Film and Memory*.

<sup>255</sup> The “third way” is in reference to Christa Wolf’s famous speech “Aufruf für unser Land” in East Berlin in 1989 just a few days before the wall fell. In it, she addressed and acknowledged East Germans’ growing unrest, calling for a more democratic form of socialism (Klocke 34).

slower pace of change in culture and mentality: “Während politische Strukturen von heute auf morgen verändert werden können, braucht der Wandel verinnerlichter Vorstellungsmuster und Mentalitäten sehr viel mehr Zeit” (*Der lange Schatten* 108).<sup>256</sup> She leaves this “time” unquantified and thus open-ended. How long did or does the German reunification continue to resonate in national,<sup>257</sup> cultural,<sup>258</sup> and familial<sup>259</sup> memory?

This ambivalence is reflected in continued literary negotiation of the GDR past, not in order to cling to it but to keep a space open for continued cultural remembrance and negotiation of what that bygone era means for today. As Detlef Rohweder noted of the post-Wende dismantling of the prolific East German DEFA film studio, “Now that we are taking away everything from those in the East, at least we should leave them DEFA, because it is there that the consciousness of East Germany finds its artistic expression” (quoted from Pinkert, “Vacant History” 264).<sup>260</sup> German literature is a site of ambivalent negotiation. The texts navigate between welcoming the end of the GDR era while also adding more nuance to German cultural memory of this era more than a quarter-century after the *Wende*. The terms “GDR memory” or “memory of GDR” used interchangeably throughout this chapter refer to the cultural memory of

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<sup>256</sup> “While political structures can change overnight, absorbed patterns and mentalities need much more time to transform.” All translations are my own.

<sup>257</sup> See Pierre Nora “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*.” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24; see also Hobsbawm and Ranger on the “inventions of tradition” in the process of creating a national memory.

<sup>258</sup> Cultural memory, according to Jan Assmann, is characterized by its concretion of identity in determining what a group is (not), its reconstructability according to contemporary needs, its formation through language, ritual, pictorial representations, etc., its widespread institutional support, and finally its obligatory effect in creating a group’s normative self-image (130-1).

<sup>259</sup> “Family memory is an intergenerational memory. This type of collective memory is constituted through social interaction and communication.” (Erl, *Memory in Culture* 17).

<sup>260</sup> In response to the Rohweder quote that follows, Pinkert points out that “What Rohweder might have recognized here, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, is that there is no way in which people can act, speak, create, come out from the margins and talk, or begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from somewhere, come from some history, unless they inherit certain cultural traditions,” therefore making cultural memory “crucial” (“Vacant History” 264).



the GDR as reflected in works of art such as literature. Though Ruge's text primarily focuses on a family story, this family story is deeply shaped by cultural memory outside of the text itself.

The family story of Ruge's novel negotiates the ambivalent disappearance yet remembrance of a bygone era through postmemory, with an emphasis on the present moment of recall. Marianne Hirsch's term, "postmemory," addresses or, perhaps better put, thrives on the tension between continuity and caesura, but this tension is more than the sum of its two parts: "The 'post' in 'postmemory' signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath" ("Generation" 106). The "post" of postmemory means neither that we are over and done with memory, nor does it mean that there are clean lines of memory transmission from one generation to the next. Postmemory signals a *relationship* between past and present. In any case, the "post," as Angelika Bammer states, is a way to "ever more obsessively attempt to specify our precise locations" making "our sense of identity...it seems, marked by the peculiarly postmodern geography of identity: both here *and* there and neither here *nor* there at one and the same time" ("Introduction" xii). Postmemory is therefore a productive, fluid process of engaging with a memory that will always contain gaps or be just out of reach. As times or, rather, geopolitics change, people and their memories subsequently, yet more slowly, change as well.

If 1989 marked the proclamation of "various postmodern 'endings' ...including the end of history [and] ideology," (Pinkert, "Vacant History" 273), Eugen Ruge's 2011 novel *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* reveals how recent literature imagines new productive uses for the GDR past, as the text negotiates both the GDR's "pastness" and its continuities. The notion of "post" implies a tension between a break/caesura and continuity.<sup>261</sup> The tensions of divide and

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<sup>261</sup> See Huyssen's discussion about negotiating postmodernism's break from yet continued reference to high modernism (*After the Great Divide*, x).

continuity of the “post,” for example, in postmemory are reflected in Ruge’s novel through the mode of travel and engagement with memory objects.

To better understand the role that travel plays for negotiating breaks and continuity, the work of ethnographers can be helpful because it foregrounds the power relations involved in who is traveling, where to, and why. James Clifford, for example, places travel and displacement at the center of his attempt to “trace old and new maps and histories of people in transit, variously empowered and compelled” (2).<sup>262</sup> His essays are concerned, among other things, with finding and articulating “resources for a diverse future” and “possibilities of an increasingly connected but not homogeneous world” which the study of “people going places” may engender (2).

Travel in Ruge’s novel is employed as a way to negotiate fluid positionalities of caesura and continuity of GDR memory and postmemory. This negotiation of the “posts” through travel work with and against the power structures that influence what is included and emphasized in cultural memory of today’s unified Germany. Travel is also a way to negotiate intergenerational memory. On the one hand, the instance of travel presented in Ruge’s novel establishes connections to a particular family past of antifascist exile in Mexico during WWII. On the other hand, these connections are nevertheless interrupted by complications in the present, such as illness and terrorism. These vulnerabilities are brought about by the real and imagined contact<sup>263</sup> of the contemporary narrator with the people and culture of the travel destination where his grandmother was in exile more than fifty years prior. Pressing concerns and vulnerabilities of the present may therefore seem at odds with a personal endeavor of finding out more about the

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<sup>262</sup> For thoughts on nomadic practices and their implications for critical theory related to (sexual) difference, visions for the future, etc., see the interview with Rosi Braidotti in Dolphijn and van der Tuin “The Notion.”

<sup>263</sup> Pratt provides a useful term “contact zone” to describe the interactions between “travelers” and “travelees” or colonizers and colonized, respectively, that are constituted by asymmetrical power relations (8). Though Pratt frames these terms in a colonial understanding, I find them useful here to keep in mind the imbalance in power between the voluntary traveler and the involuntary worker at the travel destination.

family past. But in the analyses presented here I read these complications or concerns in the present not as distractions or dead-ends in the text, but rather as new opportunities for the East German protagonist to realize new uses for the vanished GDR where he comes from, namely for sensibilities and attunements in the present. In other words, the pastness of the GDR as a social and cultural milieu can be repurposed for noticing present vulnerabilities. This, in turn, opens a future for the memory of the GDR out of the discursive entrapments of trauma, loss, and disorientation. The GDR may be gone, yet it lives on in different and productive forms and can still serve as a point of reference. I therefore contend that Ruge's novel, by representing revisited family memory, reinvigorates the GDR past's role in German cultural memory and engages it anew within transcultural constellations of the twenty-first century.

The narrative and temporal structure in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* further contributes to the way in which memory of East Germany becomes open-ended. It is a four-generation family novel that interconnects a variety of perspectives and episodes from the post-war years. Ruge's novel references, yet revises the traditional German family epic, such as Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901). While, according to Bakhtin, the traditional epic depicts an "absolute past" that is "finished," "immutable," and walled off from the present (30), Ruge's multi-perspectival novel proceeds in a non-chronological order, with each chapter set in a particular year from the early 1950s up to 2001. The years 1989 and 2001 are two timeframes to which the narrative repeatedly returns, however, the text revisits 1989 from differing perspectives while it always gives 2001 through the main character Alexander's perspective. Born after WWII in East Germany in the 1950s, Alexander is of the second generation, but he belongs to the third of the total of four generations presented in this novel.

In the following, I first describe how the novel's structure links the past into the present, and the present opens up to an unclear future. The various episodes of the post-war period link to the present in 2001. At the same time, the chapters taking place in 2001 open up to contemporary concerns both personal and widely public, such as terminal illness and September 11. The seams between the protagonist's own past in the GDR and concerns of the present are perhaps most apparent in the opening chapter of the novel that takes place in the protagonist's former GDR home. I reveal the underlying historical and biographical urgency in the opening chapter of the novel, in which the protagonist simultaneously faces past and present. On the one hand, he faces his senile father – a representative of the GDR academic establishment – in his childhood home, both of which represent a bygone era of the protagonist's life. On the other hand, the protagonist's own imminent death is approaching sooner than expected due to a recent terminal diagnosis. Past, present, and an uncertain, indeed shortened, future converge at the beginning to give readers the feeling that we are at the threshold of something new.

This urgency spurs the main protagonist's spontaneous trip to Mexico where his grandmother had spent the war and a few postwar years in antifascist exile during WWII. In the text's spatial shift to Mexico I then focus on the continued engagement with material memory objects brought along from the GDR home. The protagonist once again becomes mediator of past and present in Mexico as he looks for the first time or yet again at these objects. Mexico is not just about confronting the GDR family past, however. I therefore also tend to the protagonist's interactions with others in Mexico and with the Mexican landscape. This opens up and situates the longer trajectory of the GDR past within a larger argument based on Amir Eshel's notion of futurity in contemporary literature. He uses the term futurity to describe the future-oriented impulses engendered in contemporary literature by paradoxically revisiting the

darkest moments of modernity, for example, the Holocaust (*Futurity* 8). A specific privatized GDR past wrought with wounds from the preceding war opens up to a complex twenty-first century mosaic in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*. Mexico becomes the space in which urgency is in suspense, only if temporarily. On his own terms, the protagonist confronts the father, the father's folder, and the GDR past. Concomitantly, the protagonist eventually gains a sense of timelessness in Mexico. This comes through in the text's narration as well, appealing to the reader's senses. He becomes unafraid of, perhaps even welcomes, impending death. The sense of time in the novel therefore changes from one of scarcity in the beginning of the novel to one of abundance at the end.

### **Remarks on the Novel's Structure**

The relational structure of *In Zeiten des Abnehmenden Lichts* shows links among points of the twentieth into the twenty-first centuries. Moreover, these points are linked to various contexts both within and outside of Germany. The depicted family memories are therefore brought out from the enclosure of the GDR home into a wider transcultural framework. Exploring pre- and post-1989 novels, Elizabeth Boa distinguishes narrative forms as labyrinths, mazes, or mosaics. In doing so, she shows a variety of relationships to the past that seem to mark a larger development in German literature, of which *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* is arguably a part. While labyrinthine narrative modes threaten to overpower the present, mazes are represented in meandering journeys that open up a variety of directions to take in the present, and mosaic-like texts consist of fragments brought together without a center (Boa, "Labyrinths" 132).

All three are arguably present in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*. The structure, at least at first glance, certainly seems to be a mosaic made up not only of different narratives but also

different years, places, and generational perspectives. The novel consists of a collection of non-linear episodes from the early 1950s to 2001 that nevertheless suggests continuities of the GDR years into the twenty-first century. In spite or perhaps because of continuities, the novel's non-linear arrangement with chapters set in different years speaks to a non-periodization of postwar German history or, at least, links non-sequential time periods.<sup>264</sup>

The *Wende* is arguably the absent center of this mosaic. Reunification and its effects are likewise implied throughout the novel, but it does not dwell upon November 9, 1989 as a moment of historical rupture, which is indicative of a larger trend that Boa notices in other novels after 1989 ("Labyrinths" 151).<sup>265</sup> As reviewer Sandra Kegel notes, "Natürlich ist das Buch ein *Wende-Roman*, aber die *Wende* und Ereignisse, die dazu führten, kommen gar nicht vor. Weil sie schon hundertfach erzählt worden seien, so Ruge."<sup>266</sup> It is not so much that the pre-conditions for unease that led to the East Germans' peaceful revolutions<sup>267</sup> in the late 1980s are completely absent from the text. Instead, these tensions are implied in the familial interactions

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<sup>264</sup> See Peter Fritzsche, "1989 and the Chronological Imagination." *Debating German Cultural Identity Since 1989*. Ed. Anne Fuchs, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, and Linda Shortt. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. 17-29. This is echoed in Walter Benjamin's ideas on history and historicism. Rather than writing history as a sequence of events threaded together like beads on a rosary (Leslie 195), Benjamin, in his "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," presents the idea that "History writing is allegorical and filmic, based on fragmentation, montage, and construction" (Leslie 198).

<sup>265</sup> Pinkert, in exploring post-Communist films of the 1990s as part of a post-traumatic culture after unification, points out lacunae that emerge in these films to signal traumatic re-adjustments to a new political order ("Vacant History" 267). In this study, Maron's novel, having been published at the wane of the 1990s, and Ruge's, appearing in 2011, are the only works explored here that explicitly comment on the GDR and its coming to an end. There are, of course, numerous other examples of novels which engage, critically or not, with the aftermath of the unification, for example, Ingo Schulze's *Simple Storys*, Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder*, Max Leo's *Haltet Euer Herz bereit*, Marion Brasch's *Ab jetzt ist Ruhe*. Honigmann and Treichel, in contrast, do not explicitly take up Germany's unification in their writing but for different reasons or in ways that go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Honigmann's *Alles, alles liebe!* and *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, for instance, are both set in the GDR. The extent to which and how these depictions comment on reunification, let alone whether they signal a traumatic engagement with the loss of the GDR, goes beyond the scope of this project. In the Honigmann chapter of this study, *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* is presented as a commemoration of Honigmann's father in light of his death but also, though less directly, of the GDR's beginnings and its discontents later on. Treichel, coming from the West German context, only briefly addresses reunification in interviews but rarely in his written works.

<sup>266</sup> "Of course the book is a *Wende*-novel, but the reunification and the events that led to it are not present at all. Because they have already been narrated a hundred times, according to Ruge."

<sup>267</sup> See Glaeser 3-5.

depicted throughout. Rather than seeing this mosaic's absent center as a symptom of a trauma, it may instead be yet another of the text's liberatory gestures.

In fact, given that the novel barely focuses on historical specificity of the family past and the pivotal moment of the wall falling, Ruge's text may even be located within larger discussions about the role of literature with regard to the "end of history."<sup>268</sup> The first, last, and many intermittent chapters of the novel take place in the year 2001. The text, by subtly invoking September 11 at some points, also hints at the challenges in the new millennium. I do not wish to propose that Ruge's text and others that Boa classifies as mosaics are free-floating narratives derailed from a teleological view of history; rather, the instance of travel to Mexico and memory of the GDR sparked there are the grounding aspects in the novel. They allow multiple "horizontal connections" between past and present (Boa, "Labyrinths" 132). The dissolution of the former East Germany does not lead to a complete unraveling of literary narrative after the "end of history." Rather, memory of the GDR triggered in the instance of travel is precisely what gives the text some grounding and new directions. Ruge's novel shows memory of the former East Germany as relational and transcultural, binding yet also fluid—open to new purposes in the present and future.

### **Where time stands still: The GDR Home**

As noted in the introductory chapter to this study, scholars have long discussed the disappearance of the former GDR and its past in terms of loss,<sup>269</sup> disorientation,<sup>270</sup> and trauma.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> See Scribner 9 or Eshel, *Futurity* 169-182. The "end of history," according to Eshel, describes the "noticeable shift [after 1989] in our cultural and intellectual discussion of the past as it relates to the future..." (170). There had been a teleological view of history that rendered subjects passively swept along in a current that draws ever forward towards a utopian vision of the future. Eshel explains that after this turning point, the trajectory rooted in Marxism that had guided us into the future came to an end or was no longer seen as valid (*Futurity* 170-1).

<sup>269</sup> See Pinkert, *Film and Memory* and "Vacant History"; Rutschky; Scribner.

<sup>270</sup> See Hell.

<sup>271</sup> See Lewis "Unity"; Pinkert "Vacant History"; Hell 252-3; Žižek 1; Gook 117-118.

Ruge's novel echoes these discourses at the same time that it overcomes them or least renders them inadequate. While modes of "paralysis" and "loss of utopian imagination" (Pinkert, "Vacant History" 267) punctuate the opening chapter of Ruge's novel, the book overall reveals their inadequacy in regard to facing difficult realities of the new millennium, both personal and public. For example, confronting the aging and dying parent generation, terminal illness, and terrorism. The deficits of earlier coping mechanisms for disorientation after reunification produces a sense of urgency in this 2011 novel for new directions in reflecting on the GDR past.

The opening chapter of Ruge's novel hints at complexities of the family past that had been implicated into the GDR past, thus prompting analepsis or a narrative backward unfolding of the hidden storylines that trigger a feeling of loss in the present—loss of the patriarch, his voice, and the family unit that ostensibly, perhaps dysfunctionally, upheld East German political and social order. This loss is not to be mistaken for a nostalgic yearning for East Germany. In contrast, it produces, on the one hand, a sense of urgency felt in the text that culminates in the protagonist's escaping to another continent altogether. On the other hand, the protagonist's determination to leave the GDR home to the past and flee to Mexico, as I argue here, breaks open the claustrophobic family home and situates its memories and memory objects into a fluid transcultural constellation of intergenerational experiences from throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* describes the home in quite static, uniform terms that are echoed in the description of the GDR family home in the beginning of Ruge's novel. According to Bachelard, the home "*retains*" (6, emphasis my own) memories and the "*land of Motionless Childhood*" (5, emphasis my own). Moreover, we are to approach the house images "*with care not to break up the solidarity of memory and imagination*" (6, emphasis my own), as



if to say the house is a fragile structure stuck in the past and is to be maintained but not deconstructed or tampered with. While Bachelard describes the home in a more positive sense,<sup>272</sup> I use it here negatively to describe the deadening motionlessness of the GDR home which serves the purpose of a sort of museum or “something *closed*” that, again, “*retains*” memories (6).

The opening passage in the novel shows the former GDR home, “wo die Zeit stillzustehen [scheint]” (8),<sup>273</sup> unkempt with its unruly landscaping and untouched by the construction and renovations taking place nearby thanks to money flowing from the West.<sup>274</sup> Instead of being a quiet safe-haven from change that evokes “motionless” memories of childhood, the former GDR home and the main protagonist’s interaction with the father there registers an unsettling impatience, a space that is paradoxically devoid of meaning in the present, yet full of memories.

To illustrate, the father is portrayed from the outset as a senile old man who cannot communicate.<sup>275</sup> The father’s cognitive decline and Alexander’s one-sided conversation indicate a continuing barrier between father and son and a culmination of communicative breaches stemming from ideological disagreements that trace back over decades. The protagonist watches his father eat and wonders, “Was geht in diesem Kopf vor? In diesem immer durch einen Schädel von der Welt abgegrenzten Raum, der immer noch eine Art Ich enthielt” (9).<sup>276</sup> A belated opportunity for what Jan Assmann calls communicative memory is foreclosed here: “those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications”

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<sup>272</sup> “. . . we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live fixations, fixations of happiness” (5-6).

<sup>273</sup> “where time seems to stand still.”

<sup>274</sup> See Leaman.

<sup>275</sup> Similarly, the father figure in Maxim Leo’s *Haltet Euer Herz Bereit* is mute.

<sup>276</sup> “What is going on in this head? In this space always separated from the world by a skull and that still contains some kind of ‘I.’”

(Jan Assmann 126).<sup>277</sup> The one-sided dialogue and silences between father and son in the beginning of the novel register a loss of something still present but that can no longer be comprehended.<sup>278</sup> The barriers of conversation with the father who is a former GDR historian underscores Scribner's observation that the "second world and its aftermath are [often] best captured in pauses and absences" (9).

While the communicative breaches are apparent on the level of thematics and character relations in this novel, the narrative itself participates in these gaps. In spite of the obvious silence between father and son, we learn through an omniscient, third person narrator that Alexander knows of Kurt's exile in a Soviet labor camp—something to be discovered only through communicative modes of memory transmission. Yet the text never depicts the scenes of communicative memory that must have been present, which on the narrative level means that the text itself harbors secrets that leave readers with unanswered questions. On the one hand, as Kegel notes above, it seems that Ruge does not explicitly narrate or comment on the turning points of German history for the sake of sparing readers any redundancy. Everyone apparently already knows of these events. On the other hand, curious gaps emerge in the narrative itself: "Dass der Leser sich in die Leerstellen hineindenken muss, gehört zu den Prinzipien des Romans" (Kegel).<sup>279</sup> This process works in the reverse as well, for, unlike the main character, readers have access to other family members' perspectives, including the father's. Readers can follow Alexander's movements and changing perceptions of the past while keeping in mind the others' viewpoints in previous chapters.

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<sup>277</sup> Hereafter every abbreviated "Assmann" citation refers to Aleida Assmann.

<sup>278</sup> See Pinkert, *Film and Memory* 208.

<sup>279</sup> "One of the principles of this novel is that the reader has to invest thought into the empty spaces."

The initial scene in Ruge's novel unfolds into past scenes that render the family structure in East Germany as unstable and thus even more broken in the chapters set in a time when East Germany no longer exists. *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* plays on and revises tropes of GDR family literature to show that the GDR is truly gone but nevertheless, in this process of recycling, is fuel for continuity. Julia Hell, for example, highlights GDR literature's engagement with the dominant antifascist discourse through "conscious and unconscious fantasies" in the East German family sphere (Hell 17). She draws out the way in which literature of the immediate post-war period portends to the family as an ideological fantasy of a stable structure at the head of which stands the authoritative anti-fascist patriarch. Hell explains that after the Third Reich era, "German Communists reacted [...] by shifting their focus from Germany's present to its past, from the political register to the register of family, making the family model the privileged model of Communist politics" (Hell 28). The family and the home were perhaps the most immediate spheres in which to begin what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger call the "invention of tradition" that gave the GDR a foundation of national symbols and memories from which to draw.

Published in 2011, Ruge's novel is not a foundational GDR text, but it does recycle some of the tropes that Hell investigates. With a sort of insight in hindsight, Ruge portrays GDR family dynamics decades later from a contemporary standpoint, disentangled from the political order that had once prevailed. The novel thus echoes Hell's work by rendering the East German family narrative as a heterogeneous one propelled by fissures in the destabilized GDR family framework instead of one organized under the banner of antifascism and patriarchy. Ruge's

novel, in this way, challenges reductive assumptions about the GDR upheld by its critics, especially during the Wende.<sup>280</sup>

So how do the conflicts change in the novel once the prevailing political and familial order vanish after 1989? *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* breaks ground for a continuation and perhaps response to Hell's work on East German texts to investigate memory's time lag and the kinds of memories that persist well after reunification. Thomas Fox's work expounds upon Hell's post-fascist fantasies by proposing post-Communist fantasies:

Post-Wall authors found their post-fascist fantasies metamorphosing into post-Communist ones; the admiration, gratitude, deference, and guilt regarding the generation of the fathers, a central aspect of the foundational novels and their successors, yielded to fantasies of revolt, castration, and murder. ("Post-Communist" 209)

This is also reflected in the beginning of the novel as the main character imagines murdering his father: "Alexander überkam der starke Drang, Kurt wehzutun ... irgendwann war ihm [Alexander] der Gedanke gekommen: Kurt umzubringen" (12).<sup>281</sup> The ideological disagreements between Alexander and Kurt throughout the novel culminate in the father's dethroning, castration, or fantasies of murder, to use Hell's and Fox's psychoanalytic terminology. Notably, however, these feelings are also driven by the main character's recent Hodgkins Lymphoma diagnosis which presents the possibility of the senile, but otherwise healthy, father outliving him.

No matter the motivation for these thoughts, the narrative works past these post-communist fantasies of murder to suggest a new horizon of engagement with the GDR past,

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<sup>280</sup> Here, I refer to those critics who take part in what Martin Sabrow calls "*Diktaturgedächtnis*" by conflating the GDR with the Third Reich. Glaeser touches on ex post facto debates about how to characterize the GDR, in which scholars such as Mary Fulbrook and Jürgen Kocka attempt to "synthesize the nature of Eastern European socialisms in a crisp concept" (562).

<sup>281</sup> "The overwhelming impulse to hurt Kurt came over Alexander...at some point the idea had come to him: to kill Kurt."

namely one that is more conciliatory. Thoughts of murder followed by nurturing impulses suggest a move beyond post-Communist fantasies to frank reflection on a bygone era. For example, not too long after imagining various ways to kill his father, the main character anticipates that his father will choke on the dry potatoes he is about to eat unless he has a glass of water: “Wahrscheinlich konnte man Kurt auch mit trockenen Kartoffeln ersticken. Alexander stand auf und füllte ein Glas mit Wasser” (14).<sup>282</sup> What is to be made of the curious juxtaposition of murdering and nurturing given at multiple points in the novel’s opening chapter?

According to Hirsch, postmemory is characterized by a “mixture of ambivalence and desire, mourning and recollection, presence and absence” (Hirsch, “Past Lives” 659). By replacing the impulse to kill the father as representative of the bygone GDR with the impulse to nurture him signals neither an acquiescence to Western erasure of the GDR nor a longing for its return. Fox posits that in post-communist German literature, parents come to symbolize relics (Fox, “Post-Communist” 218). With his mere bodily presence in 2001, Kurt fulfills this role as a reminder of a political order that once existed but is now silenced, emphasizing the main protagonist as his interlocutor who knows the father’s past and can perhaps speak for him. But how much does the protagonist really know about his father?

What is left to speak for the father as symbol of the GDR is his museum-like office in which he wrote his “one meter of scholarship” (21) or the history volumes that take up an entire meter-long shelf. The narration takes note of the seemingly untouched condition of the office, as though time had stood still: “...im Gegensatz zum totalrenovierten Wohnzimmer war in Kurts Zimmer noch alles, und zwar auf gespenstische Weise, beim Alten...” (18).<sup>283</sup> To return once

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<sup>282</sup> “One could probably also choke Kurt with dry potatoes. Alexander stood up and filled a glass with water.”

<sup>283</sup> “in contrast to the totally renovated living room, everything in Kurt’s room was still eerily set up as it had always been.”

more to Bachelard, “topoanalysis” is the “systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (8). The father’s office is one of those intimate corners of the GDR home that the protagonist revisits. Like the father’s silent yet physical presence, other actual relics are also present as reminders of the lost GDR era and the years preceding Alexander’s birth, for example, knickknacks, old photographs, and publications. Though the books and documents are initially rendered by the protagonist as a mere “Haufen Sperrmüll,” (Ruge 17)<sup>284</sup> and “MAKULATUR” (21),<sup>285</sup> the office seems to function like a museum or archive whose contents nevertheless spur recall of specific memories. The objects’ ambivalent familiarity and unfamiliarity due to generational, temporal, and ideological distance, prompts negotiation of meaning for the protagonist which is heavily influenced by his recent diagnosis.

The protagonist rummaging through publications and objects from the GDR period gives them new legitimacy in the present not just in the sense that they still remain, but that they prompt negotiation in the present, even deferred negotiation in later scenes set in Mexico.<sup>286</sup> The text also poignantly underscores in this scene that humans and human life, on the other hand, are “vergänglich” (22).<sup>287</sup> Thus, while the publications and objects may have lost their meaning and legitimacy in the present, they nevertheless serve a new, different legitimacy in the name of (post)memory. For example, the protagonist suddenly imagines which of the objects in Kurt’s office, if any, would interest his estranged teenage son: “Einzig das ausgestopfte Haifischbaby und die große rosa Muschel würden ihn vermutlich interessieren, und er würde sie in seiner Bude

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<sup>284</sup> “a pile of junk.”

<sup>285</sup> “waste paper.”

<sup>286</sup> See chapter 5 in Young for his critical discussion on material objects in museums and how we problematically assign these objects as carriers of some pure truth about the past when objects’ meanings are actually continuously negotiated and subject to particular curation agendas.

<sup>287</sup> “short-lived.”

aufstellen, ohne sich über ihre Herkunft Gedanken zu machen” (20).<sup>288</sup> The main protagonist is the final “carrier” of communicative memory (Erl, “Travelling” 12). This ability is at odds, though, with the fact that the protagonist is also the carrier of a terminal illness and that he himself could not identify with the East German antifascist project, therefore abandoning his son to flee westward just before the Berlin wall fell in 1989. The intersection of objects and the next generation’s (in)ability to somehow carry on the past into the future contributes to the feeling of urgency at the novel’s outset. The reader gets the sense that time is running out.

Already in the first scene, the text arrives at an impasse between moving forward from a conflicted history while safeguarding it from “forgetting and erasure” that may result when “places change” and objects “merely [...] approximate the spaces and objects that were left behind” (Hirsch, *Generation* 212). Through negotiating material and ephemeral memory of the GDR despite western historical triumph over and commercialization of such memory,<sup>289</sup> the novel shows a nuanced engagement with the GDR past. On the one hand, it resists erasure of the Communist past in German history or what Pinkert sees as a blind spot in unified Germany’s national imaginary (“Vacant History” 268). On the other hand, however, it contains irony to caution against (restorative) nostalgic tendencies of longing to return to and rebuild a place.<sup>290</sup>

More significantly, though, *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* takes the aspect of presence vs. absence a step further. The novel renders feelings of loss and disorientation in the present as still significant but inadequate. Rather than coming from a place of debilitating loss more than two decades after unification, *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* instead portrays East

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<sup>288</sup> “Only the preserved baby shark and the big pink sea shell would probably interest him, and he would set them up in his little room without thinking about their origin.”

<sup>289</sup> See, for example, Boyer.

<sup>290</sup> Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* 41 or Buchanan 129.

Germany's continued spectral presence in contemporary literary representation for the sake of finding East Germany's future.

As Gook notes, "The GDR is not the past that has passed—but a past that has outlived itself. In film, as in other discursive representation and production, the past carries forward. In this sense, the past can be used to critique the present and point toward a future vision" (123). In other words, the GDR's institutional structures and political order may be gone, but its memories persist into the present in a way that balances looking backward with looking forward. What one does with the memories is more important than their mere persistence.

Furthermore, Gook argues that the *Wende* meant that "the once proper symbols, meanings and ways of being were no longer anchored by the ruling party—the Law's various prohibitions against travel, mass assembly and the like were dissolved" (117). Gook's use of the term, "anchored," or, rather in the context of the quote, "unanchored" to describe the post-*Wende* transformations is interesting here because it implies movement of memory and symbolic artifacts, their displacement into a new time, and perhaps new contexts. Loss registered in this opening chapter motivates a symbolic departure in the novel to a new era that repurposes and transforms the GDR past by engaging with it anew in Mexico.

### **New Beginnings: The Past Repurposed**

In the communicative impasse presented in the beginning of *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, the chapters taking place in the year 2001 undergo, after this initial section, a radical spatial shift to Mexico. Here, GDR memories, often provoked by engagement with objects taken along from the GDR home, accrue new relevance when confronted outside of the secluded family home that paralyzes the present. Reading the spatial shift to Mexico, I maintain that Ruge's novel is well, or rather better, positioned to rethink the GDR past in terms of how it may



be repurposed in the present and future.<sup>291</sup> Charity Scribner suggests that “when the forces of globalization are smoothing over Europe’s industrial wastelands, we can still keep hold of the second world’s cultural memory and claim its remembrance as sites of reflection and resistance” (4).

Twenty-first century travel places the GDR past in a more complex historical network of global travel and tourism.<sup>292</sup> The increasing tendency in recent literature to portray various transnational locales (Eigler, “Beyond” 80; Gerstenberger 99) is evidence of a relatively new proliferation of post-1989 travel narratives, including *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*. These can arguably be seen as explorations of new frontiers of German identities that are no longer merely “post-89,” but rather negotiate the tethering and liberating aspects of unification.

Mexico as a travel destination in the novel is no coincidence, for it is where the main character’s grandmother, Charlotte, spent her antifascist exile during WWII as a committed communist fleeing political persecution. While Hirsch’s narratives of return revisit traumatic memories of the Holocaust, Ruge’s novel revisits memories of antifascist exile.<sup>293</sup> The main character, through travel, establishes proximity to the grandparent generation’s exile memories.

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<sup>291</sup> According to Eshel, “futurity” is a capacity that contemporary literature has to create the “open, future, possible” (*Futurity* 4). Eshel draws from David Grossmann’s *Writing in the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

<sup>292</sup> See Pratt 236-243 in which she describes tourism as one of many flows of movement prevalent at the end of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. She defines here “globalization” as “the epochal shift in global relationships at the end of the twentieth century” (238). The most conspicuous mark of which is “the demise of a narrative or progress that was widely shared by peoples in very different circumstances across the planet” (238). See Dina Berger and Andrew Wood for an overview of various definitions of “tourist” (3).

<sup>293</sup> Joseph and Buchenau point out that in the 1920s and 1930s, Mexico City, for example, “became a mecca for waves of progressive North American (and European) intellectuals and artists who were drawn by the transformative potential of the revolution defining itself next door” (111-2). A formidable wave of European artists and intellectuals, particularly from Germany, emigrated in droves to Latin America following momentous turning points, such as Hitler’s ascension to power in 1933, the passage of the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws in the mid-1930s, and the violence of “Kristallnacht” on November 9-10, 1938 (Moeller 50-1). Marianne O. de Bopp cites the Nazi invasion of France as another contributing factor to the waves of political and ethnic refugees (117).

Yet at the same time, Mexico is experienced in the present,<sup>294</sup> thus negotiating continuity/proximity with modes of distance.

Objects taken along from the GDR home in the first chapter play a key role in this negotiation. Though they are related to communicative memories of this particular family past, engagement with these objects in the present imply a novel approach to the larger cultural memory of the GDR in contemporary Germany. Memory objects are key arbiters in this negotiation of intergenerational overlaps and disjunctures inherent to postmemory work. On the one hand, memory artifacts evoke the past in the present, thus signaling continuities. On the other, some artifacts present challenges to such continuities in the sense that they do not conjure memories or vivid, albeit imaginative, postmemories. This is not only normal for postmemory; complete knowledge or recall of experiences from before birth cannot and will not ever be realized. But perhaps we can view discontinuities<sup>295</sup> of postmemory not as a symptom of the object's insignificance, that the past to which it is connected does not matter, or that it merely denotes a mnemonic dead end. Instead, we can interpret this as an opportunity, namely not to fixate on the past, rather to tend to concerns of the present and the future.

These blockades can therefore be viewed as opportunities to acknowledge the difference between two temporal pieces of this multi-generational mosaic narrative. Elizabeth Boa's reading of Christa Wolf's *Stadt der Engel* is particularly useful for my analysis of the obstacles

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<sup>294</sup> Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood provide a comprehensive overview of foreign encounters in Mexico beginning from the mid-nineteenth century onward, but specifically more recent trends in tourism to Mexico since 1960 can be found on pages 13-16.

<sup>295</sup> See Foucault's theorization of discontinuity in the discipline of history, in which he seems to propose that discontinuity is an opportunity, not a failure. While "Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history" (8), new history, in contrast, integrates the discontinuous "into the discourse of the historian, where it no longer plays the role of an external condition that must be reduced, but that of a working concept; and therefore the inversion of signs by which it is no longer the negative of the historical reading (its underside, its failure, the limit of its power), but the positive element that determines its object and validates its analysis" (9).

of postmemory work. Boa sees Wolf's novel as "a potentially endless mosaic of narrative fragments" ("Labyrinths" 148) that draws parallels between past and present. At the same time, however, the text situates the loss felt by Wolf's autobiographical protagonist among other pasts as well as complex problems of the present:

...compared with the victims of the Third Reich, or with the history of slavery or of indigenous peoples under colonialism, or with the exploitative economic relations marking global capitalism, her own loss shrinks in significance. And seen from Los Angeles, the locus of multiple overlapping histories, the GDR appears a small country on the other side of an ocean that lasted for only forty years. (149)

In a similar manner, Ruge's protagonist, at a continental distance, contemplates the GDR past while often, but not always, engaging with particular memory artifacts brought along. The connections to the past, that the recall of shared memories with family members engenders, as well as inevitable disjunctures in postmemory work, in turn, attunes the protagonist to discontents in the present. Forward-looking gestures in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* therefore do not necessarily mean the GDR and the so-called second world are left behind or completely lost. Precisely the opposite is the case: both continuities and disconnects that constitute ongoing negotiation and (post)memory work inspire these gestures. The East German past is a driving and centering force in this mosaic type narrative. At the same time, it is an opening and expanding force that connects with, or at least attends to other narratives, past and present.

In order to further clarify and support my argument regarding not only the text's spatial shift but also the role of memory objects as opening up different possibilities for the East German past, I would like to return once more to the novel's first chapter. Tending this time less

to the set-up of the home as a sort of museum where time stops and more to the interaction with the various contents of this “museum” scaffolds the later reading of objects in Mexico. The first chapter reflects seemingly objective, spontaneous decisions to remember or forget, keep or abandon various objects and documents in the GDR home. Deciding one way or another is tied to normative discourses and positions of power, as Aleida Assmann touches upon in “Canon and Archive” (100). The protagonist decides to purge some things in a fire, showing what Aleida Assmann would call “active forgetting” (97-8), while keeping others and thus building a sort of “canon” of selected objects. According to Assmann, canonization makes the past present (Assmann “Canon” 98) and contracts cultural memory (102) while archival modes keep the past as past (98) and expand cultural memory (102).

It is not entirely apparent, however, why the protagonist chooses to keep the father’s chessboard and the folder marked “personal” and what will happen with them later on in the narrative. Their inclusion in the bag of items to take to Mexico does not necessarily mean the protagonist will later employ canonizing strategies, which operate on “actively circulated memory” (Assmann, “Canon” 98) and a veneration of “aura” (102).

The work’s depiction of engagement with memory artifacts seems to show both modes of canonization and archiving, particularly in the chapters taking place in Mexico, as the protagonist brings along other remembered objects or fortuitously recalls them during travel. The music record, for example, as an absent but remembered object, portrays the GDR past as poignantly present. The protagonist recalls the music record from childhood that relayed communicative memory between the protagonist and his grandmother Charlotte. These objects that the grandmother brought back with from her antifascist exile in Mexico during the war are markedly absent but the protagonist reflects upon them when he travels to Mexico in adulthood.

Hirsch notes, the “motor of the fictional imagination is fueled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth” (Hirsch, “Past Lives” 661). By traveling to the grandmother’s space of antifascist exile in Mexico, Ruge’s protagonist explores temporal and generational gaps in a place unfamiliar to him, yet part of his family past and his own formative childhood memories. Mexico is just as much a place to which he owes the transmission of memories as the GDR was.

### “Mexico Lindo”

The Mexican song “Mexico Lindo,” particularly but not only in its record form, is an example of a memory object in the text that brings the past into the present, thereby (re)making intergenerational connections in the postmemory framework as well as transcultural connections between the former GDR and twenty-first century Mexico. Music in record form is a symbolic artifact of antifascist exile in the novel, as the grandmother acquired the record while in Mexico and repeatedly played it in the following years during the main character’s childhood in the GDR.

Even thinking of the grandparent’s space of exile triggers momentary recollection of one’s own memories and those handed down from previous generations. For example, in the opening chapter set in the former East German home in 2001, the main character immediately recalls the song “Mexico Lindo” from childhood after hastily booking the flight to Mexico:

Nur die Melodie fiel ihm ein—von Oma Charlottes uralter Schellackplatte, die ihm beim Umzug auf den Gehweg gefallen und in tausend Stücke zersprungen war: *Mexico lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti...* (28)<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> “Only the melody came to his mind—from Grandma Charlotte’s old record that had fallen on the sidewalk during his move and shattered into thousands of pieces: *Mexico lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti...*”

“Mexico lindo” is a famous and traditional mariachi song that characterizes patriotism and loyalty to Mexico. The most recognizable stanza, which happens to be the one Alexander partially recites, translates to “Lovely, beloved Mexico, if I die far from you, may they say that I’m asleep, and may they bring me back here.” As he sings this line in 2001, Alexander struggles to remember how the lyrics proceed after “if I die far from you...” This cryptic invocation of the deceased grandmother is an injunction upon Alexander to return to Mexico and therefore anticipates more than a leisurely trip. Alexander’s displacement there is a metaphorical attempt at reassembling the record that has since shattered, notably while in transit, and at filling some gaps in his third-generation knowledge of his family past. Displacing the setting of the East German family past to Mexico reanimates and metaphorically re-members a long forgotten shattered music record.

The absent record as a concrete artifact can be re-membered in a more fluid, ephemeral form. The notion of performance as an ephemeral experience is a key arbiter for intergenerational layering of memories in Mexico. Given its fortuitous, ephemeral nature, performance evades the matter of canonization vs. archiving, in the sense that we are then no longer dealing with objects. Performance of an absent record renders the family past, particularly the GDR childhood, as transcultural in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*. The “Mexico Lindo” lyrics and Alexander’s incomplete recitation of the words up to the point about return anticipates Alexander’s performative return to Mexico rather than a mnemonic completion of the lyrics. Alexander’s traveling body vicariously reactivates the grandmother’s memories of exile in the site of their origin—Mexico.<sup>297</sup> By chance, the main character encounters street performers in

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<sup>297</sup> Hirsch refers in her description of narratives of return to Aleida Assmann’s concept of the “symbolon” in which two separated halves reunite. Assmann explains that happens when, for example, one’s memory is reunited or joined with spaces and/or objects: “Orte und Gegenstände sind mächtige ‘Trigger’ dieses somatisch gefühlten Gedächtnisses, zu dem es freilich keinen Schlüssel, keine Landkarte und keinen anderweitig bewussten und

Mexico and requests that they play “Mexico lindo.” As the performance takes place, the protagonist feels thrust back into a distant time and mistrusts his senses:

Ungläubig starrt Alexander den Sänger an. ... die weißen Zähne, die unter dem Schnurrbart aufblitzen und Laute formen, die genau denen auf der Schellackplatte entsprechen, die vor tausend Jahren in tausend Stücke zersprungen ist... Natürlich kann das alles nicht stimmen. Warscheinlich eine Sinnestäuschung. Ein Trickbetrug. (Ruge 102)<sup>298</sup>

The protagonist exhibits a charged affective state, becoming teary-eyed from a visceral connection to childhood and the grandmother in that moment, echoing what Hirsch calls the release of “latent, repressed, or dissociated memories” (Hirsch, *Generation* 212), except here the performance, not an object or places, invokes this release. The performance brings childhood memories of the past into the present and performatively reassembles the record that had shattered “a thousand years ago” (Ruge 102). Hirsch notes that “return journeys can have the effect of [...] reconnection of severed parts, and, if this indeed happens, they can release latent, repressed, or dissociated memories—memories that, metaphorically speaking, remained behind, concealed within the object” (*Generation* 211-2). The record may be gone, in this case shattered, however, the live performance reactivates memory of the song “Mexico lindo,” enabling recall and a layering of shared intergenerational memories for the main character, yet in the space of the grandparent generation’s exile. The main character’s mediated memories of the grandmother Charlotte’s memories, which are themselves mediated, are latent dispositions that “*schlummern*,”

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kontrollierten Zugang gibt” (“Places and objects are the powerful triggers of this somatically felt memory, to which there is of course no key, map or conscious and controlled access,” Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 122, discussed in Hirsch, *Generation* 211-2).

<sup>298</sup> “Alexander incredulously stares at the singer...the white teeth that flash out from underneath the mustache and form the sounds that match exactly those on the record that shattered into a thousand pieces a thousand years ago. This can’t really be happening. Probably an illusion. A trick.”

“slumber,” in what Aleida Assmann calls the “Mich-Gedächtnis,” “passive memory” (*Der lange Schatten* 122). These latent memories are randomly reawakened, “nicht wirklich steuerbar, sondern beruht weitgehend auf Zufällen” (Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 123).<sup>299</sup>

The performance reanimates the absent and shattered record as a symbol of communicative memory, expanding communicative memory of the past into transcultural memory of the present. Performance studies scholar Diana Taylor explores the relationship between repertoire and archive as two interchanging modes of memory. She defines the repertoire as “embodied practice/knowledge” and argues that “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action” (Taylor xvi). In contrast, the “*archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, and bones)” “works across distance, over time and space...succeeds in separating the source of ‘knowledge’ from the knower” (Taylor 19). That is, present-day accessibility of textual documents and recorded testimonies lends staying power, but such archival sources cannot necessarily convey knowledge of temporally distant experiences. Reactivating the past in an affective, embodied way here aids recalls of childhood memories and allows proximity to another’s wartime exile experience.

While Aleida Assmann’s “Canon and Archive” focuses more on the selection and collection of artifacts, Taylor’s work seems to complement this approach in the sense that, for one, she deals with ephemerality and embodiment. Additionally, Taylor’s juxtaposition of archive with performance brings an element of fortuity that remains outside the realms of power and judgment associated with Assmann’s processes of canonization and archiving. In Assmann’s terms, the record here is a “passively forgotten” object due to its absence or loss, thus becoming part of the archive. It was something not deliberately chosen from the house in the beginning of

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<sup>299</sup> “and not really able to be manipulated, rather they depend on largely on chance.”



the novel. Viewing the performance of “Mexico lindo” through a frame of mobility, the memory is reactivated by chance outside of the GDR home and brought into the present. This contradicts what Assmann says about the canon bringing past and present together because the encounter happened by chance. Nothing was chosen; an object was not even available to choose. The song “Mexico lindo” is thereby a mnemonic “form” that evades the constrictions of materiality that inform Assmann’s and Taylor’s ideas of archive.<sup>300</sup>

The novel moves the engagement with memory artifacts, deliberate or fortuitous, and thus also the memory of the GDR beyond discursive powers involved in the decision of what is significant or how something is to be remembered in the present. GDR communicative memory, represented by the music record as something that could be grasped and selected, is reincarnated, indeed expanded, into GDR transcultural memory in this scene of travel and mobility.

What happens, though, when there are disconnects in postmemory work and when memory objects render past as past? It does not simply end there. These objects still exist. So what can be done with them? Past and present can still co-mingle here in way that expands cultural memory of East Germany and constitutes what I argue are the forward-looking gestures in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*.

### **The photograph and the house**

While “Mexico lindo” in both record and ephemeral form conjures memories of GDR childhood and expands this communicative memory into a larger network of transcultural memory in the twenty-first century, the novel also shows objects as blockages to postmemory.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Erll in “Travelling” calls for focus on mnemonic process that “unfol[d] *across* and *beyond* cultures” (9) rather than through the lens of the nation that contains “a” culture. The “form” is one of the five dimensions of movement she observes. Erll defines forms as “condensed figures” or “symbols, icons, schemata” (12).

<sup>301</sup> This reflects larger debates in critical theory on new materiality that seek to move beyond a dual mode of thinking, for example, between animated active agents and de-animated passive objects. See, for example, Latour or Dolphijn and van der Tuin “The Transversality.”

Marianne Hirsch also focuses in one of her chapters on the role of objects in narratives of return precisely for their power to paradoxically motivate yet foreclose reconciliation to events, people, and places significant to a time that preceded one's birth (*Generation 225*). She also acknowledges, however, that such dead-ends that may occur need not lead to a melancholic fixation on the failure to overcome temporal and generational distance that separates the generation after from the first generation; rather, she prefers to see these frustrated narratives of return as "versions, or approximations--drafts of a narrative process, subject to re-vision. It is an open-ended narrative that embraces the need for return and for repair, even as it accepts its implausibility" (225). Though I agree, and take a similar approach to the narrative of return depicted in Treichel's *Anatolin* as one that is constituted by an ongoing search and self-corrections or "re-visions," I propose that the hindrances presented in Ruge's novel are implicated within a larger constellation of changes taking place globally, not only, but especially after the fall of Communism in eastern Europe.

Kirstin Gwyer presents contemporary German texts that advance a new understanding of postmemory that liberates it from the burden of finding answers and the truth (148). Focusing on the "process rather than the product" (Gwyer 151) leaves postmemory work open-ended and, crucial here to my reading of Ruge, leaves the generation after "free to consider future perspectives" (151). The text links the present and future to the past by invoking curious parallels between the abandoned landscapes depicted in the former East Germany and on the outskirts of Mexico City.

The text participates in not only recapturing the parts of the Communist past that remain abandoned in the former East German landscape but also in invoking parallels in two different

national contexts related to the genesis of East Germany: the house of exile in Mexico<sup>302</sup> and the GDR family home in Neuendorf where the father still lives. The text portrays both as structures still standing in the early twenty-first century, but whose meaning for the present continues to be negotiated. For example, significant parallels emerge if we compare the portrayal of the former East German landscape in the first chapter with the peripheral route to the grandmother's exile house located beyond the reaches of the tourist industry in Mexico. Surrounding the former GDR home in Neuendorf are "frisch renovierte Häuser" (Ruge 7)<sup>303</sup> that adhere to "irgendeiner EU-Norm" (7),<sup>304</sup> indicating the home's precarious existence.<sup>305</sup> One only needs to turn down a twisted gravel path to find a place where "time seems to stand still" (8)<sup>306</sup> and arrive at "eins der wenigen Häuser..., die noch bewohnt waren: Am Fuchsbau sieben" (8)<sup>307</sup>: the GDR home where the main character's father still lives.

Comparing this initial scene in the village of Neuendorf to one later in the text invokes parallel precariousness in the Mexican context on the periphery of the tourism industry. When the main character is in Mexico, he travels through Mexico City along the "*Avenida des los Insurgentes*—Allee der Aufständischen" (107)<sup>308</sup> in order to get to his grandmother's house of exile whose address lies beyond the scope of the tourist maps. Here, the narrator describes the landscape as similarly desolate to the one in Neuendorf, Germany:

Die Häuser am Rande der Straße: unbeholfene Stilkopien, irgendwann einmal, man glaubt es noch zu erkennen, von stolzen Besitzern errichtet, inzwischen verwahrlost,

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<sup>302</sup> See Herf for more about the community of Communist exiles formed in Mexico during WWII that included prominent figures such as Anna Seghers, Paul Merker, etc.

<sup>303</sup> "freshly renovated houses."

<sup>304</sup> "some EU norm."

<sup>305</sup> See Leaman on continued economic disparities in post-unified Germany.

<sup>306</sup> "hier schien die Zeit stillzustehen."

<sup>307</sup> "one of the few houses still inhabited: Fox Den seven."

<sup>308</sup> "avenue of the insurgents."

verwittert, mit schon wieder sich lösender Farbe übertüncht, mit Plakaten beklebt. ... Er geht vorbei an Kneipen und Läden...an Abwasserpfützen und an Baustellen, an kaputten Motorrädern, kaputten Fahrrädern, kaputten Leitungen: Eigentlich ist alles kaputt. (Ruge 107)<sup>309</sup>

Without context, the reader could think the narrator is describing a landscape in East Germany with its abandoned, identically styled buildings once proudly erected by owners, invoking the collective work of builders in East Germany after the war who erected Soviet-style apartment buildings meant to be part of a socialist living space. Except, whereas the surrounding area of the GDR home is in the process of being incorporated into EU norms of the first world, the Mexican landscape seems to remain excluded, for better or for worse, from the urban landscape of Mexico City. While one invokes colonialization,<sup>310</sup> the other invokes exclusion.

The stark contrasts between broken down houses and pipelines, on the one hand, and commercial sites, such as bars and shops, on the other, highlight traces of the capitalistic so-called “first world” that has failed to be lucrative in this broken landscape reminiscent of the so-called “third world.” The protagonist, having grown up in the so-called “second world” of the Soviet Union (Scribner 4), serves as a mediating interlocutor who can see disparities in the twenty-first century. The description of the former GDR home, particularly its exterior, denotes a bleak post-1989 landscape marked with a paradoxical continuous pastness where time stands still. However, given the portrayal of Mexico City’s outskirts, the way in which the narrator tells us what the protagonist sees and how what he sees, at least in part, remarkably resembles the

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<sup>309</sup> “the houses on the edge of the street: awkwardly styled replicas at some point once, one believes to still recognize it, erected by proud owners, in the meantime neglected, weathered, varnished with color that is already wearing away, pasted with flyers. ...He goes past pubs and shops...past puddles of waste water and construction sites, past broken mopeds, broken bicycles, broken pipelines: actually everything is broken.”

<sup>310</sup> Leaman, for example, describes unification as the “absorption” of state socialist society (the GDR) “into a prosperous capitalist economy” (31).

East German landscape is a textual move out of post-1989 Germany and into dystopian realities of the present day in which some societies are rebuilt and reconstructed according to Western (EU) standards, while societies on another continent and in the southern hemisphere are dependent upon, for example, the tourist industry. Interestingly, however, the point of view from a generation that did not live through wartime exile but grew up in the second-world Soviet satellite of the GDR shows an insightful opportunity in the present: this character is attuned to the present's discontent and the forgotten, peripheral pockets that seemed to have missed out, debatably for better or for worse, on capitalistic gentrification.

The present overlays the past and prevents connection to it. Yet, the past informs and motivates the travel experiences of the generation after in the present. The grandmother Charlotte's former residence in exile is a spatial engagement that reinforces gaps in postmemory. More importantly, however, this blockage is attributed to the text's invocation of a black and white photograph of the same house:

Eine schmale, baumlose Straße. Anstelle von Bäumen: Straßenlaternen und Masten, zwischen denen sich ein spinnenartiges Netz von Kabeln ausbreitet. Nummer 56 A...er erkennt die Zinnen der Dachgartenbrüstung, von dort oben hat seine Großmutter heruntergeschaut, aber auf dem Foto, obwohl es schwarz-weiß war, hat das alles irgendwie grün ausgesehen. Irgendwie tropisch und großzügig" (Ruge 108).<sup>311</sup>

Here, trees or rather the lack thereof, are mentioned as if they were expected to be there, whether by recollection of the photograph or by the workings of imagination while viewing the photograph. The expectation of trees compared to the street lamps and cable lines exposes a

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<sup>311</sup> "A narrow, treeless street. In place of trees: street lamps and poles between which a spider-like web of cables spread out. Number 56 A...he recognizes the pinnacles of the roof garden railing, from up there his grandmother looked down, but on the photo, even though it was black and white, all of it looked green. Somewhat tropical and bountiful."

discrepancy between memory, albeit possibly imaginative, of a photograph and what is actually found at the site where the photograph had been taken decades prior. This scene, through the various frames of mediation, namely textual recollection of a photograph, reveals a disconnect in postmemory work that tries to negotiate the past in the present. A desolate landscape conflicts with memory of a black and white photograph taken during the grandmother's time in exile that had nevertheless been imagined as green and lush.<sup>312</sup> Unlike the song performance passage, seeing the house fails to create a connection to the photographed house in the present. Drawing nearer to and further from the house proves futile:

Vorsichtig schaut er durch das vergitterte Fenster im Erdgeschoss. Kisten stehen dort, anscheinend ein Lager. Er klingelt, niemand macht auf. Er wechselt die Straßenseite, betrachtet das Haus. Versucht, etwas zu empfinden. Wie empfindet man die einstmalige Anwesenheit einer Großmutter? Das Einzige, was er empfindet: dass seine Fußsohlen schmerzen. Sein Rücken. Seine während des Krankenhausaufenthalts merklich erschlaffte Beinmuskulatur. (Ruge 108)<sup>313</sup>

In this passage, the text literalizes the house as a concrete artifact that reinforces impenetrable boundaries between the generations, as something one may view but not touch, similar to the way that the photograph had been viewed but not touched.<sup>314</sup> The description of the house as a storage space leads the reader to believe that these are former belongings that the grandmother

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<sup>312</sup> Maron's text presents a similar inconsistency, yet in the reverse, in that her narrator can only imagine the grandparents in black and white due to the black and white photographs of them with which she is familiar. The photographs therefore stubbornly shape the imagination in black and white rather than in color.

<sup>313</sup> "He cautiously looks through the caged windows on the first floor. Boxes stand there, apparently a storage place. He rings the doorbell, no one opens the door. Then walked to the other side of the street, looks at the house. Tries to feel something. How does one feel the former presence of a grandmother? The only thing he feels: that the soles of his feet ache. His back. His leg muscles that had noticeably atrophied during his hospital stay."

<sup>314</sup> See Hirsch, *Generation* and Barthes, *Camera Lucida* for explanations of studium vs. punctum, both of which center on the idea that photography reinforces boundaries of experience and resist, yet fuel the desire for, identification.

left behind and that harbor secrets of the past in exile. The house as a locked vault of concrete artifacts that may or may not provide knowledge about the grandmother's exile represents par excellence the challenges inherent to postmemory. The scene exemplifies a literal blockage in postmemory work and, in general, the occasional inaccessibility to information that may corroborate what otherwise remains as imaginative speculation. The text thus portrays the house where the grandmother lived during exile as somewhat of a sealed archive whose very structure and walls render its holdings inaccessible.

Just as the house in the present overshadows memories of the same house's photographic depiction, so too do present bodily states overpower the attempt to feel anything from the sight of the house in the first place. Physically taking steps back to get a better view only produces bodily pain, perhaps of being locked out, abandoned by the grandmother who will never come to the front door.

The memory of the photograph seen before intervenes in the present as instigator of both discrepancy, yet also continuity. The text does not reveal more information about this particular photograph, however, it may be yet another invoked memory from GDR childhood, much like the record had been symbolic of communicative memory between the protagonist and his grandmother. Another possible interpretation entirely is that the house's foreclosure of connection between past and present, grandparent's and grandchild's generations is an opportunity to focus on the present, as the protagonist's, even the surrounding environment's, finitude and vulnerabilities in the present overshadow physical proximity to the house.

The lack of a structural home to explore leads to more fluid postmemory encounters with space in Maron's and Treichel's works. This is the case as well in the presence of a former exile home as presented in Honigmann's and Ruge's novels. The house in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* and

*In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* is sought after yet also fails to produce connections when found. Though Bachelard's notion of the house is presented as appealing to our "consciousness for centrality," giving us "at least the illusion of stability," and thereby serving as a steady point of origin, he also acknowledges that "Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at others, stimulating one another" (6). Therefore, although remnants of the Communist period, whether buildings or relic-like bodies, are reminders of the past that are still standing, memories can powerfully engage with these remainders to create continuities, but still also sometimes emphasize incongruities in the present. The memories these silent structures and bodies invoke, however, are what the text foregrounds in order to show contingency of memory in the present, at times wrought with inconsistencies and blockages.

The text harbors a significant opportunity here as well, though. By, for example, drawing parallels among the twenty-first century urban peripheries in Mexico, the house of exile for the East German "Aufbaugeneration" or founding generation once supposedly lush and green, but now amidst urban decay, and the dilapidated GDR home, the narrator focuses the protagonist's and reader's gazes to a world that bears traces of the GDR and the perhaps not totally lost fight for inequality that the bygone "second world" had advocated. Instead of dismissing the passage as a mere blockage to postmemory, the text enacts a way of seeing in the present and contemplating twenty-first century challenges beyond Germany. Seeing this solely within the generational construct of the GDR,<sup>315</sup> this scene indeed draws connections between the GDR's founding generation and the generation that was born into the GDR, became disenchanted with it later, but now, as Ruge's novel shows, returns to it in memory, albeit still with a critical eye. The

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<sup>315</sup> See Dietrich chapter 2.



past thus does not become irrelevant in light of problems in the present (Michaels 167-8).<sup>316</sup> Instead, in line with Eshel's argument, past and present work together (*Futurity* 179). That is, the past allows us to see these problems in the first place.

### **Finitude, the Future, and the Father's Folder**

The final chapter of the novel is set in 2001 in Mexico and is quite different from the other chapters that are set in 2001. The narrative takes a meditative turn or evokes an "oceanic feeling," as the beginning and end of this final chapter bracket it off from the others by conveying a sense of stillness where nearly everything, except the ocean, is silenced. Kaja Silverman, in her chapter "The Oceanic Feeling," provides the history of this idea originally conceived by French playwright, novelist, and professor of musicology, Romain Rolland, and later used in Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (29). In short, the "oceanic feeling" is a "'sensation' instead of a thought—the sensation of 'contact' between ourselves and other things" (29). And this is an idea that Silverman traces through earlier writings of Nietzsche, Freud, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Lou Andreas-Salome.

Nietzsche and Freud, in thinking about the role of religion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tried to determine the extent to which humans are subjugated under, can find comfort in, or even, through reason and the power of will, overcome God.<sup>317</sup> Silverman shows how these thoughts develop later in the twentieth century through the writings of Rainer Maria Rilke and Lou Andreas-Salome. Particularly Salome's written reflections put forth the idea that recognizing our human finitude is actually expansionary (25). Human mortality, according to Salome's writings, relates us to (but does not conflate us with) everything else in a larger totality

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<sup>316</sup> Originally found in Eshel, *Futurity* 178.

<sup>317</sup> Nietzsche had employed an ocean metaphor as well in the sense of abandoning religion and through power of will moving from one's own small plot of land on earth, to the expansive seas (Silverman 25).

that cannot be thought but affectively registered (Silverman 26). Through the exchanges between Freud and Rolland, it becomes apparent that “the oceanic feeling must...be something we access through our finitude” (Silverman 30).

The “oceanic feeling” is a useful tool for analyzing the final chapter of *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* because, firstly, as mentioned before, the last chapter starts and begins with sounds of the ocean. Note, for instance, the similarities in the following opening and closing sentences to the last chapter:

Er schaukelt leicht, stößt sich hin und wieder mit den Fingerspitzen am Terrassengeländer ab. Für einen Moment, in der größten Nachmittagshitze, scheint die Welt stillzustehen. Einzig das gleichmäßige Knirschen der Hanfseile ist noch zu hören. Und das ferne, belanglose Rauschen des Meeres. Schwebезustand. Embryonale Passivität. (407)<sup>318</sup>

Compare this passage to the closing sentences of the last chapter:

...wird er sich in die Hängematte vor seiner Zimmertür legen. Er wird sich mit den Fingerspitzen am Terrassengeländer abstoßen...Dann werden die Palmenblätter aufgehört haben zu rascheln. Verstummt sein wird das Schreien und Lachen im Dorf und das Geklapper in der hauseigenen Küche. Einzig das Knirschen der Hanfseile wird noch zu hören sein. Und das gleichgültige, ferne Rauschen des Meeres. (425-6)<sup>319</sup>

This stillness is different from the quiet setting portrayed in the very beginning where the father barely responds to what the main character says or does. The stillness described as “embryonale

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<sup>318</sup> He swings softly, pushes himself back and forth with his fingertips on the terrace railing. For a moment, in the greatest afternoon heat, the world seems to stand still. Only the regular crunch of the hemp rope can still be heard. And the indifferent hissing of the ocean.”

<sup>319</sup> “...he will lay himself in the hammock in front of the door to his room. He will push himself back and forth with his fingertips against the terrace railing...then the palm leaves will have stopped rustling. The yelling and the laughter in the village and the rattling from the in-house kitchen will be silenced. Only the crunching of the hemp rope will be heard. And the indifferent, distant hissing of the ocean.”

Passivität”<sup>320</sup> (Ruge 407) and the feeling of suspension in the “Schwebezustand”<sup>321</sup> (407) signals new beginnings to come. And these new beginnings do emerge in the text, but in a way that seems to point outside the text itself. Notice, for example, that the second passage is quite similar to the first but, unlike the first, it is in the future tense. The narrative has markedly future-oriented gestures that point beyond the text itself. The narrative, in this way, outlives the pages of the book.

Before the texts drifts off there, however, a new connection with the GDR past in relation to a particular encounter between father and son emerges, and the two ocean scenes book-end this encounter. If time seemed to be running out in the first chapter, that is, a sense of finitude foregrounded and accelerated by illness, there seems to be more time, in fact, an expanse of time represented by the ocean in the last chapter. Besides the obvious links to the “oceanic feeling” through the novel’s ocean imagery near the end, however, the “oceanic feeling” on a theoretical level is useful in showing how in this final chapter, a lot of things come together. For example, different temporalities converge, again through engagement with an object, and the insecurities related to mortality in the beginning of the novel come full circle at its end. In the end, however, intergenerational connections can be made and, more broadly, the specificities of the East German past melt away into a larger totality that includes the present and future.

By melting away, I do not propose that we read the end of Ruge’s novel as forgetting memory of East Germany. The “oceanic feeling” is similar to the mosaic-like description borrowed from Boa in the previous sections in that it relates various temporalities and memories to one another. There are various constituents that differ from, yet relate to one another, but that seem to create a totality greater than the sum of these individual mosaic pieces or ocean drops.

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<sup>320</sup> “embryonic passivity.”

<sup>321</sup> “State of suspension.”

Notably, in between the opening and closing passages of the final chapter, much of the narrative shifts to the future tense, but the past and present tenses occasionally appear as well to suggest a convergence of temporalities that happens in yet another, but final encounter with a memory object: the father's chessboard that he had acquired during his internment in a Gulag camp (even containing some hand-carved pieces from other inmates) and serves as a folder for documents the protagonist had taken from a folder in the father's office labeled "personal."

In the previous sections I examined how childhood memories connected to a record are invoked through the open-air performative mode of one of its songs and the protagonist's frustrated connections to the house of exile. The father's folder from the former GDR home, however, shows not just a bridge for intergenerational connection, rather a multi-relational connection in which multiple generations, spaces, and experiences collide. In fact, the folder sets off a film-like technique of montage in the text, splicing past and present together. Is the encounter with the father's documents taking place in the narrative present? Or is it a previous encounter now recalled? A momentary analepsis, or step back in time, before the narrative continues on in the future tense? It seems to be that the text indeed presents a momentary analepsis in which the protagonist had previously and at first only "ungeduldig und unsystematisch"<sup>322</sup> looked through the papers (Ruge 421).

Following a break in the text, however, the narrative returns to "diese[r] Tag—am Tag von Mazunte" in which "Alexander auf eine Notiz vom Februar 1979 stoßen [wird]" (422).<sup>323</sup> The shifts in time, place, and tense present a confusing mix of time and place. The reader cannot quite follow the order of events, but the text thereby seems to suggest the protagonist's multiple

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<sup>322</sup> "impatiently and unsystematically."

<sup>323</sup> "this day—on the day of Mazunte"; "Alexander will stumble upon a note from February 1979."

looks into the documents, each time revealing something new about the GDR past in general, particular episodes in the family past, and written memories that pertain to the protagonist.

In spite of the previously uninterested rummaging through of the notes, the memory of 1979 seems to take hold in the protagonist's mind, signaling a more empathetic approach. The previously combative intergenerational relations recalled from 1979 are juxtaposed with failed dialogues between father and son in the present and, at the same time, more open-mindedness on the part of the protagonist. At the very end of the novel, the notes draw the protagonist further into the past, even seemingly immersing him in past sights and sounds,<sup>324</sup> showing a gradual peeling back of layers to get at the protagonist's own memories and thus revealing a chain of events that lead from past into the present.

The text moves us through the various layers of this particular episode in 1979, all of which converge in the final chapter. For instance, there is indeed a chapter in the text that takes place in 1979 and is given through the father, Kurt's, perspective. In this chapter, the father and son confront one another in a tense conversation that somewhat resembles the communicative blocks of the first chapter. And now in the final chapter, through the son's perspective, we see notes from that same encounter. These notes aid recall for the protagonist and for us as readers at first, but the protagonist also gains a glimpse for the first time into the father's memory of this event. As the protagonist uses the chessboard in a game with another boarder at the guesthouse

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<sup>324</sup> See Gumbrecht's *Stimmungen Lesen* in which he puts forth the idea, "dass solche textuellen Töne, Atmosphären und Stimmungen nie ganz unabhängig von den materiellen Komponenten der Texte sind, ...und dass Texte deshalb in sehr ähnlicher Weise auf die 'inneren Gefühle' ihrer Leser wirken, wie es das Wetter oder die Musik tun" (such textual tones, atmospheres, and moods, are never completely independent from the material components of the texts...and that texts therefore in very similar ways affect the "inner feelings" of their readers as the weather or music do, 12).

in Mexico, the scene from 1979 continues to unfold in the main protagonist's mind, and the text interestingly employs a cinematic metaphor:

Alexanders Gedanken werden, während er mechanisch 2....c5, 3. E3 e6, 4. B3 Sc6, 5. Lb2 Sf6 und 6. Ld3 spielt, noch einmal zu jenem Wintertag zurückkehren: zu den verreisten Gehwegen auf der Schönhauser, zu dem merkwürdigen, ziellosen Gang ... Aber plötzlich wird der Film weitergehen: Alexanderplatz, kalter Wind. Das alte, längst nicht mehr existierende Automatenrestaurant links neben der Weltzeituhr—ist das möglich? (Ruge 424)<sup>325</sup>

Mix of present (chess moves) and the past scene with the father in 1979 give rise to yet another sense of disorientation, as though the reader is simultaneously watching two different films along with the narrator who keeps splicing these two times and settings together in fragmentary and somewhat cryptic ways.

The film continues to unspool uncontrollably in the protagonist's mind, provoking recall of the scene and its banal details:

Alexander wird...sich...plötzlich an Details erinnern...Er wird Kurt sehen. ... er wird sich selbst sehen, von außen: kahl geschoren, in seinem zerschlissenen Parka und—unglaublich, auch das weiß er noch!—in jenem blauen, mehrfach und in nicht ganz passender Farbe geflickten Pullover.... (424)<sup>326</sup>

In spite of the banal details, however, the text gives the effect here of the protagonist being transplanted back into the sights and sounds of that scene more than twenty years later while in

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<sup>325</sup> “Alexander’s thoughts will once more return to that winter day while he mechanically plays 2...c5, 3. E3 e6, 4. B3 Sc6, 5. Lb2 Sf6 und 6. Ld3: to the iced over pathways on Schönhauser street, to the strange, aimless walk ... But suddenly the film will continue: Alexanderplatz, cold wind. The old, long gone vending machine restaurant to the left of the World Clock—is that possible?”

<sup>326</sup> “Alexander will...suddenly remember Details...He will see Kurt. ... he will see himself from outside: bald-shaven, in his tattered parka and—unbelievable, he also remembers this!—in that pullover sweater that had been repeatedly patched and in a color that did not quite fit.”

the country of the grandmother's antifascist exile. The text also co-opts us as readers back into the 1979 chapter previously read. Vivid recall of sights, sounds, and feelings from this memory of the late 1970s in East Germany is not a "restorative nostalgia"<sup>327</sup> or desire to return to a place. The protagonist as spectator of his own memory film resists a suspension of disbelief, so to speak, by invoking the present which means the text is enacting a way to remember without being overcome by the past.

The opening scene portrays the GDR home as a sort of dead-end bulwark that stubbornly resists the changes taking place outside. In a somewhat different way, the final scene in Mexico resists, indeed withholds, feelings of sentimentality through actions and reactions in the present. While the memories that the father's folder involuntarily evokes are described as somehow "tröstlich" (425) for the protagonist, these memories are nevertheless met more with surprise at the vividness of recall. The film-like spool of memory continues somewhat like a stream of consciousness, but it produces neither nostalgia nor critique—just comfort in something from the past that remains past. Though the scene of discovering the documents shows the second generation's increasingly open-minded approach (from mindlessly mulling through at first to taking pause later), doing so has less to do with revisiting or mending a tenuous father-son relationship than it does with the persistent, fortuitous memories of banal GDR life in the present. According to Aleida Assmann,

Das Projekt des aktiven Ich-Gedächtnisses besteht folglich darin, Erinnerungen bewusst aufzurufen und ihnen die Form einer Erzählung zu geben, die ihnen Bedeutung zu verleihen und Perspektiven für die Zukunft zu öffnen vermag. Das autobiographische Gedächtnis ordnet sich nicht von selbst in dieses Format; um den Vorrat unsortierten

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<sup>327</sup> See Boym *Future* 41 or Buchanan 129.

Erinnerungen in eine Form zu bringen, muss man Distanz zu sich selbst gewinnen, eine dialogische Haltung einnehmen und eine Position beziehen. Diese autobiographische Erinnerungen haben eine soziale Komponente: wir müssen in der Lage sein, sie entweder anderen oder uns selbst zu erzählen. (*Der lange Schatten* 120)<sup>328</sup>

The Mexican setting as a spatial imagining provides the distance that Assmann proposes is necessary in order to connect the spatially scattered family past into autobiographical memory and consequently acquire vision for the future. Interestingly, however, the text refuses a containment into a coherent narrative, given employment of a film metaphor to show splicing and involuntary forward and backward spooling of scenes. Furthermore, given the position of the main protagonist as a surprised and incredulous spectator of his own film of memory, the text creates a certain distance that prevents the past from overcoming present and future.

In the final chapter the chessboard and its contents inspire a convergence of times, spaces, and generations that produce a feeling of disorientation for the reader. The chessboard and documents function as links among wartime Siberia, antifascist exile in Mexico, the GDR home, and twenty-first century travel to Mexico. A stronger takeaway, however, is that the folder, as an object in tow during travel, reanimates the GDR home and the action and meaning making that used to occur within it. This becomes especially apparent if we juxtapose the personal notes in tow with the static “ein Meter Wissenschaft” (21)<sup>329</sup> that the father had achieved as a prolific GDR historian and sits on a shelf in the office.

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<sup>328</sup> “The project of the active I-memory consists of the conscious recall of memories and their shaping into a story that lends them meaning and enables future perspectives. The autobiographical memory does not come together in this way on its own; in order to bring the supply of unsorted memories into a form, one must gain distance from oneself, take a dialogical stance, and take up a position. These autobiographical memories have a social component: we have to be able to tell them to others or to ourselves.”

<sup>329</sup> “one meter of scholarship.”



In the process of canonization, or the selection of what objects to take along from the office, past(s) and present do come together and, in the process, contract cultural memory. In fact, the final chapter seems to funnel into communicative memory at the expense of the wider historical context (the father's history publications). This, however, echoes tendencies of the wider post-unification context, for example, the increased significance of *Erinnerungsliteratur* and, more specifically, the genre of *Familienroman* among the renewed debates about German history after 1989 (Assmann, "Limits 33"). An additional trend is the traveling of cultural media (Erl, "Travelling" 12) that lend themselves to memory on the move in newer German literature as opposed to, for example, a weighty "one meter" of history books. These moving memory artifacts that travel with the protagonist are the literary means through which memory of the GDR is animated within a complex, dizzying constellation in which past(s) and present converge. At the same time, the selected, canonized objects show an orienting force of family memory.

There is also an expansionary force at play here as well. The "oceanic feeling" generated in the text at the end is the very nexus at which the text and the protagonist negotiate past, present, and future not just of GDR memory and its ongoing role in contemporary German culture but of questions regarding human omnipotence and limitation. The protagonist negotiates his past, present, and unpredictable future from within the very limits imposed upon him by illness and inevitable mortality. But this present vulnerability is precisely what gets him to the point of revisiting the past, which, in turn, enables, and had enabled all along, the modes of seeing present and future.

## Concluding Remarks

Some unintended consequences may be gleaned from Eugen Ruge's literary commemoration of his late father. Returning to the eulogy quoted at the beginning of the chapter, the Wende did constitute a trench that stands between father's experiences and that of Ruge's generation as one born after the war and growing up in the East German context. It even creates a trench in the author's own life between the one lived in the GDR and the one lived in a post-1989 Germany. In other words, post-1989 does denote an end of a particular era in world history. However, the novel mobilizes memories in the twenty-first century, thereby inviting us to examine continuities that nonetheless do not mean the past looms large over the present.

In chapter 2 of Hirsch's book she reflects on (literally) focusing on the past. She cautions against forfeiting vision for the future by focusing too much on the implausibility of determining answers to the past. Hirsch describes her engagement with her own parents' photographs, in particular one in which her father bears an indiscernible object, presumably a star of David pin, on his lapel (Hirsch, *Generation* 57-61). In an effort to find out whether the blurred object is indeed the star pin, she enlarges and pours over the picture. However, she ultimately argues that extracting whatever information we can from fragmentary documents, unreadable sources, and blurry, indeterminate spots in a tiny pale image, we also realize that allowing the image to fade back to its initial size, we might be able to make space for the possibility of "life" rather than "death in the future." (Hirsch, *Generation* 76)

In other words, the quest for answers or insights in the past should not displace one's own memories and life in the present and future. *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* is not about negotiation of East Germany as something to either cling to or to condemn, keep or purge. Though also depicting these modes in some way in the various chapters, the novel, on the whole,

does something entirely different. It provides new insights as to how memories are formed, recalibrated, given new life in a different context (Mexico). It takes memory of East Germany a step further by making it a *means* to see and connect to the present.

The selected objects build a canon that is displaced to Mexico, yet in that context, the memory artifacts brought along actually expand GDR cultural memory, which, according to Assmann, is akin to the archival mode. The deferred engagement with the selected artifacts is not about evaluative judgments of what is significant, rather about the possibilities and connections to be made, even amidst obstacles. This has implications for moving away from nostalgic or dismissive modes of engaging with the GDR past that come from a place of judgment and, therefore, power.

Moreover, though they are not mutually exclusive, the inner workings of the text deals with communicative memory rather than cultural memory, yet as a whole, the text is a piece of cultural memory itself and shapes the current cultural memory of the GDR in new ways. I therefore hope to have shown that perhaps by starting with a smaller, but by no means isolated, family framework in *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, a fresh way to approach the GDR past emerges—one that transforms GDR memory from an ideologically-charged object of scholarly study at large to a spatial imaginary that, in literature for instance, enables powerful transnational connections to other cultures and contexts of the present.

## Epilogue

In contemporary German literature, (post)memory is clearly on the move, reflecting post-1989 literary trends of exploring transnational constellations as well as the growing popularity of the memory literature genre itself. The greater mobility afforded after reunification, the sweeping political and social reordering during the *Wende*, and the gradual disappearance of first-generation witnesses coalesce to inspire new visits to the past, particularly the family past, through travel.

In the four novels explored in this study, authors born into the post-war societies of both East and West Germany have shown that in spite and also because of the changes attributed to the *Wende*, they are motivated, through writing, to use travel in order to revisit their respective family pasts. Honigmann, Maron, Treichel, and Ruge are no longer constrained by Cold War frames of historical interpretation or influenced by utopian aspirations, both of which shaped most of the twentieth century. They have thus been able to inflect and revise earlier confrontational tones with a more conciliatory approach and, as this study has shown, use travel in their writing to attempt critical empathy towards the parent generation. Thus, returning to conflict-laden postwar memories, in turn, enables the second generation to negotiate their relationship to wartime traumas still felt but not experienced directly. First-generation experiences of forced spatial displacements, for example exile, internment, and flight are reanimated through the mode of contemporary travel by the second generation. Depicting real or imagined travel to spaces pertinent to the family past creates the context for the negotiation of affective proximity and distance regarding these previous events.

Each of the texts negotiates geographical and affective distance through travel and engagement with memory objects, but towards differing ends. In Barbara Honigmann's *Eine*

*Liebe aus Nichts*, the role of Jewish identity in East German identity is at stake. The protagonist emigrates in the 1980s to Paris where the parents had spent their WWII exile as Communist Jews. While in Paris, she explores and attempts to articulate her own Jewish identity. Upon returning to Weimar for her father's funeral she finds a journal her father acquired in exile but wrote in during the immediate post-war years in East Berlin. Writing her own entries into this journal shows not just a continued, posthumous relationship with the father via writing. Her entries in the journal also connote a relationship to the father and to Jewish identity that will continue to be negotiated and in suspension through the act of writing in the seemingly timeless pages of the exile calendar. By accounting for both the rupture of the Holocaust in German-Jewish relations (Diner) and the continuities of assimilation prevalent in the post-war East German context (Scholem, Hartewig), the text represents the GDR in a more complex rather than monolithic manner as a country having dealt with a new and different set of issues following, yet departing from, the Third Reich.

Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* also grapples with Jewish identity but, by focusing on the Polish-Jewish grandfather's life rather than his death, the text reflects more on shifting political identities throughout the twentieth century. This family story of border crossings and shifting identity affiliations deconstructs previously constructed identities and their resulting intergenerational conflicts of the post-war period in East Germany. The constructions give way to a more open-ended process of negotiation in this post-unification text, as (post)memories of earlier identities are negotiated in writing. Maron employs a few different strategies in *Pawels Briefe* for navigating the family past of shifting identities as well as her own. She uses what I have called narrative focalization, photographic focalization, and finally, travel in order to critically examine yet continue to negotiate relationships to different generations of her family.

Most importantly, the previously troubled relationship to the parent generation finds new connections through the second generation's conciliatory, open approach. The connections become especially apparent in the instance of travel, for during travel to Poland previous East-West conflicts between mother and daughter loosen. The eased intergenerational divisiveness indicates a larger literary move beyond intranational divisiveness in a unified Germany, in which East and West experiences and models of interpretation are at odds with one another as are the roles of the GDR and the Third Reich in German cultural memory.

Poland also plays a significant yet quite different role in Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Anatolin*. Here, Poland is where a poetics of the search unfolds. The poetics of the search is what I have referred to as the search the author undertakes via an open-ended, self-reflexive writing process in order to construct a family narrative and an autobiography. The poetics of the search plays out across Treichel's earlier texts. The poetics of the search that develops in *Der Verlorene* and *Menschenflug* culminate in *Anatolin*'s confrontation with tenuous family relationships of post-war Federal Republic and postmemories of flight and expulsion from East Prussia after WWII. As in Maron's work, Treichel revises previously constructed notions about the family past as it fits within earlier post-war discourses in the Federal Republic. Treichel's text, however, engages Poland from the perspective mired in memory of German victimhood which speaks to Poland's varied significance for German cultural memory of both Jewish and German victimhood. The aspect of travel to the site of victimhood places this family memory of flight within a transnational and transcultural context. This counterbalances affective and geographical proximity to the site of German victimhood with crucial historical contextualization and self-reflexivity, evidenced, for example, by Treichel's twist on the verb 'to expel' to *self-expel*. In this instance, Treichel transforms a verb whose passive object is implied into a more active verb

to suggest more agency. This semantic change also indicates an awareness of a borderline transgression in an excess of affective proximity that the protagonist experiences during the seductive dream in a romantic Polish landscape. Such liberties like these that Treichel takes in *Anatolin* shows a flexible utilization of the family past that no longer overwhelms his second-generation autobiographical protagonists. The family past inspires ongoing written negotiations of how past, present, and future intertwine with and inform one another.

Finally, in the fourth case study, I have shown that Eugen Ruge's novel *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* uses travel to Mexico in order to not only engage postmemories of wartime antifascist exile but also to reconsider intergenerational father-son conflicts that had played out in the GDR period. Memory objects, such as a record invoked in performance, the house of exile, and the father's personal folder, play an important role in this process. The novel's major contribution lies in its transcultural inflections on GDR memory that breathe new life into and repurpose this area of German cultural memory. This is also where the novel's future-oriented gestures come into play. The text indicates new horizons for German contemporary literature, the tentative contours of which appear to be a negotiation of a complex relationship among past, present, and future as well as a productive opening of cultural memory from national specificity into transcultural intersectionalities.

Through these case studies, I hope to have demonstrated that both the family framework and memory discourses are intertwined and increasingly under transnational and transcultural influences. In fact, precisely these aspects constitute what I see as a shift in both GDR memory and contemporary German literature, more broadly. These four texts indicate new beginnings through their negotiation of non-traumatic ties to the past. These negotiations imply new opportunities in present memory discourses, namely affinities in German cultural memory for

transcultural and transnational interconnections among various memory narratives, past and present.

The texts I have investigated here engage memory of the divided Germany, the GDR specifically, or other post-Soviet countries in some way. Traveling to or at least invoking the Cold War period of division in the process of negotiating non-traumatic ties to the family past, in turn, generates new modes of thinking about the bygone Cold War era. During and after the *Wende*, predominating modes of nostalgia, loss, and trauma combined with victorious, euphoric Western narratives coalesced into a critical impasse in contemporary German history and culture. It seems at that point two opposed approaches came into direct conflict with one another: nostalgically remembering or victoriously forgetting. This formed a paralyzing gridlock in which no productive way to remember, yet depart from, the GDR era seemed imaginable.

In the meantime, many scholars have advocated not only the significance of remembering the GDR but also doing so in a more nuanced fashion. These new perspectives have counterbalanced discursive binaries that began before reunification and persisted, albeit in different forms perhaps, after reunification when the future of the new Berlin Republic was at stake in various power struggles over interpretation, ownership, governance, and so on. This study has drawn from these scholarly attempts, but it intervenes by arguing that newer German literature mobilizes memory of the former GDR and Soviet Bloc for the negotiation of family memory and repurposes GDR memory for the present and future. Memory of these former geopolitical spaces as they are presented in literary texts shows that this memory no longer functions as an object of condemnation, recuperation, or mere inquiry. Memory of East Germany is also no longer or, at least less, constrained by discursive binaries from before and after the *Wende*, nor is it necessarily associated with particular political or scholarly agendas. Rather,



memory of the former East Germany as it is invoked in literature *performs* the role of a conduit whose potential is realized through protagonists traveling back in historical time to the war and post-war periods. For example, the performative role of GDR memory in these texts is most powerfully captured in protagonist engagement with memory objects. In most of the texts in this study, protagonists take objects along during their travels. These objects represent the GDR in some way and are powerful sites where protagonists generate or negotiate GDR memory by investing these artifacts with new meanings in the present, thereby morphing them from things ‘frozen in time’ (museal objects) to ‘memorial sites.’<sup>330</sup> This is not to say that memory of the GDR and the former Soviet Bloc is completely detached from these earlier discourses or frames of interpretation. The mode of travel captures the way in which memory of East Germany and the Soviet Union is a moving agent in texts, propelling and shaping protagonist travel to other national and cultural contexts. This works in the opposite direction as well. Fortuitous travel encounters evoke memories of the former GDR that the protagonists then revisit and reshape.

In addition, and in relation to the travel/mobility paradigm, my analysis of the four texts has shown that memory of the GDR has acquired transnational and transcultural facets which opens it up for new purposes, namely of productive intersectionality with other narratives both past and present. Via the mode of contemporary voluntary travel, transcultural aspects of GDR memory emerge and, more importantly, this memory is expanded and engaged in a more transnational and transcultural constellation. This is particularly where the new opportunities for GDR memory arise. By engaging memory of the GDR through modes of travel, it is set within a larger constellation that expands beyond Germany. This, in turn, puts memory of the GDR in

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<sup>330</sup> See, for example, Young 127-8 or his entire fifth chapter in *The Texture of Memory* where he explores the role of material objects in museums and problematizes the seemingly unmediated truth with which we invest objects that are in fact curated and collected with certain agendas and narratives in mind.

contact with other memory narratives encountered in travel and allows GDR memory to inform empathetic approaches to present, more universal vulnerabilities of illness and terrorism, for example. This does not mean that the texts employ previous or new utopian narratives, rather they engage present discourses of vulnerability by proposing tentative, perpetual negotiations that proliferate inlets to the future. The texts here show that 1989 was not so much an end of history as an end of a history manipulated and manipulating in its interpretation to serve a particular envisioned utopian end. The past of division and therefore limitation that the Cold War exemplified has not only been opened up by scholarly inquiry but this past itself opens up now, in literature, into multiple future possibilities tentatively negotiated in the present. 1989 was the beginning of multiple futures.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to show how the authors at the center of this study unhinge GDR memory from discursive binaries and paralyzing modes without, of course, advocating a complete forgetting of this part of German history. Yet, these four literary case studies have shown that more is at stake than merely remembering the GDR. The texts challenge us to consider a new purpose for memory of the GDR and Soviet past: its connectivity and openness. To the extent that searching for contact with the family past through travel routes is a main motivator for protagonists, these works open up memory of the GDR and/or the Soviet Union, more generally, to other memory narratives encountered in travel. Furthermore, as travel and its encounters fortuitously invoke memories of the GDR past, that very past takes on its own opening force in which protagonists and, at times, the memory objects with which they engage, enable attention to, at times, unsettling details and circumstances of the present. For example, social inequality apparent in travel destinations today invoke, in Ruge's text especially, the previous GDR utopian narrative that sought to eradicate this very inequality. This is not to say

that *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* is still invested in that utopian aspiration. Simply the memory of it sheds light on discrepancies between pre-Wende utopian narratives and, with the fall of the Wall, their subsequent failure.

But what about the even larger discrepancy between that past and the present, some years after the Wende? The protagonist in Ruge's novel is at a critical juncture in the present, for this larger discrepancy contains an opportunity. He remembers this past era and its failed ambitions because of the present and, in the reverse, by contemplating the past, he sees more possibility in the present. This interconnectivity of past and present, what they enable one another to see, precisely constitutes the future of the (East) German past—the way it is continuously engaged whether through travel, objects, or both. In the texts analyzed in this study, the past viewed through a mobility paradigm enables and informs productive engagement with the present and future.

I hope that my study prompts further thought on whether new directions in contemporary German literature are underway, whither these new directions are headed, and how reorientations and new beginnings are reflected in literary texts. This dissertation has specifically analyzed four contemporary novels in order to show how war and post-war family memories harbor new potential for contemporary German literature. I have attempted to sketch out new literary forays by focusing on newly negotiated non-traumatic ties to family memory and the complex temporal interrelationships which suggest ever-shifting modes of attention and interconnection.

Where are newer German novels and their traveling protagonists taking us? More broadly, toward what are these transnational and transcultural literary itineraries moving German cultural memory? I hope this study will set further critical inquiry into motion, namely with regards to how German literature negotiates interrelationships among past, present, and future

and among various national and cultural contexts in new and open-ended ways through modes of mobility. Barbara Honigmann, Monika Maron, Hans-Ulrich Treichel, and Eugen Ruge have embarked on journeys in their texts that have, in turn, prompted this study on the emergence of a more malleable family memory within a more fluid German cultural memory. In this way, their depicted journeys have prompted this dissertation as a critical journey of analysis that extends beyond the texts yet folds back into our readings of these novels. By drawing on critical discourses of memory, travel, and family to analyze *Eine Liebe aus Nichts*, *Pawels Briefe*, *Anatolin*, and *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts*, this dissertation has not necessarily started a new critical itinerary in German Studies but has highlighted an undercurrent of movement present in German literature and history all along. That is, people and their memories have always been on the move and have produced transnational encounters, whether in the forced circumstances of war or in the voluntary situation of travel. Perhaps these reflections on this undercurrent can now spark further critical itineraries that take readers and scholars alike on new trips through the mediated, layering, and varied forms of past and present displacement.

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