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**A Trans-Atlantic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*:  
Americans Coming to Terms  
with German Wartime Childhoods**

Germanists' attention to recent texts by German gentiles about their wartime and immediate postwar childhoods does not extend to similar texts by Americans who experienced World War II as German children but wrote memoirs in English.<sup>1</sup> Notable examples of such works from the past two decades include Karen Finell's *Goodbye to the Mermaids: A Childhood Lost in Hitler's Berlin*; Jürgen Herbst's *Requiem for a German Past: A Boyhood among the Nazis*; Irmgard Hunt's *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood*; Ursula Mahlendorf's *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood*; Maria Ritter's *Return to Dresden*; Wolfgang W. E. Samuel's *German Boy: A Refugee's Story*; Frederic C. Tubach's and Bernat Rosner's *An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite Sides of the Holocaust*; Sabine de Werth Neu's *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child*; and a spate of books published privately.<sup>2</sup> They address many of the same questions facing their German contemporaries, e.g., how to deal with extreme experiences influencing the psychological make-up of individuals not able to claim absolute innocence; whether these experiences can be represented without distorting historical truths; and finally, whether they should be shared or simply forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, as German-American immigrant autobiographies, these works provide a unique perspective on the discussion of German trauma, victimhood and guilt from the perspective of a second generation with transnational priorities and values different from those of contemporaries who stayed in Germany. The experiences of their authors as adults in the US both shape and are informed by their past memories as they encounter

American Jews, opponents of the Vietnam War, racial inequality, and socio-cultural differences between their childhood homeland and their adoptive one. Thus, although the childhood wartime experiences of these memoirists overlap with those of German contemporaries (combat, population transfer, NS institutions, sense of betrayal and loss), the authors' hybrid German-American identities as adults open different perspectives on individual legacies of wartime German childhood. Although most of these works provide insight into the experience of German gentile children in the Third Reich, I want to focus on four that, in singling out specific institutions such as the military, the church, the family and the school, examine particular moral and political complexities facing American immigrants trying retrospectively to make sense out of their troubled German childhoods: Samuel's *German Boy: A Refugee's Story* (taken together with its sequel *Coming to Colorado: A Young Immigrant's Journey to Become an American Flyer*),<sup>4</sup> Herbst's *Requiem for a German Past: A Boyhood among the Nazis*, Ritter's *Return to Dresden*, and Mahlendorf's *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood*. Examining these works as a body provides Germanists in the United States insight both into how childhood wartime experience shaped emigrants' expectations and how immigration to the US affected individual *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Of these, all published by university presses, Samuel's and Mahlendorf's, the most substantial, have attracted considerable attention from reviewers, both because of their authors' professional visibility—he in the military and she in the Academy—and because of the style and content of their memoirs. Yet reading these two works in conjunction with Jürgen Herbst's and Maria Ritter's, with which they share common themes, uncovers further dimensions of the questions confronting other memoirists. Thus examining Herbst's and Mahlendorf's intense involvement with the Hitler Youth enables us to see the effects of gender, class, and geography on young Germans' experiences of this institution. Viewing Herbst's early immersion in Prussian military culture in conjunction with Samuel's childhood contact with Wehrmacht soldiers illuminates the latter's pursuit of a career with the US Air Force. Reading Mahlendorf's "working through" the "shame of survival" casts light on Ritter's equally troubled retrospective quest for accountability in the narrow religious community of her childhood.

These works, like those others noted but not discussed in detail, appeared after 1990, a watershed year in German discourse about the Nazi past, as East and West faced integration of two divergent national stories, each with its own vocabulary, rhetoric, and criteria for defining perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, a crucial step in creating a stable civic and national identity.<sup>5</sup> Even as late as the 1990s, "forms of public memory" developed in West Germany of the 1950s continued to act as filters for German narratives.<sup>6</sup> As Schaumann

notes, however, “with the end of the Cold War, the narrow and opposing East-West identities vanished, allowing for the opportunity to delineate Germany’s past outside of the lens of communist and capitalist ideologies. Thus Germans are increasingly and with greater openness acknowledging their roles as perpetrators of Nazi crimes and as victims of the war.”<sup>7</sup> The German-American memoirists, all born after 1928, can lay claim to Kohl’s “Gnade der späten Geburt,” while articulating the uneasiness of their original nation’s legacy.<sup>8</sup>

While postwar Germans in East and West wrestled with “contested, divergent” varieties of “cultural memory,”<sup>10</sup> or “collective memory,”<sup>11</sup> German-American memoirists spent formative years in a culture removed from the West Germany of the 1950s with its inability to mourn<sup>12</sup> co-existing with the recurrent evocation of the “lost German East” and the sacrifices of POWs in the USSR.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, writing as middle-aged adults at the turn of the 21st century, they faced in the US a more polarized literary-cultural context than their German counterparts: a readership steeped in literature by and about Holocaust victims, a staple of American school curricula from elementary through high school,<sup>14</sup> on the one hand, and a popular culture obsessed with Nazi perpetrators on the other. Thus these German-American memoirists, as they articulate their own hybrid identities in the light of their childhood experiences, also write within (or against) the context of “the SS-man, the brute in the concentration camp, and the militarist” as “the dominant German character types in fiction, in film, and on television.”<sup>15</sup> It is this US cultural context that the German family therapist, Luise Reddemann addresses in her “Nachwort” to Sabine Bode’s interviews with children of the war, *Die vergessene Generation*. Response to a lecture of hers in Philadelphia suggests to Reddemann that Americans will see even the wartime experiences of German children—the “Verlassenwerden, . . . Verlust der Heimat, . . . Bomben, . . . Hunger, . . . Not, . . . Scham, ein Flüchtling, also Außenseiter zu sein, . . . Verunsicherung der Eltern und daß sie keinen Halt geben können”—always in the light of Hitler and Germany’s initiation of the war rather than as the “alltäglich erfahrenen Nöten eines kleinen Kindes.”<sup>16</sup>

The cultural context addressed by these writers is further complicated by their position as German emigrants. Most escaped the frenzied consumerism often associated with the *Wirtschaftswunder* but came of age, instead, in a world removed from the sites of their difficult childhoods and laden with lore of “limitless opportunity.” None would concur with Wolf Biermann’s statement that his own “Lebensuhr” stopped when he was a 6-year-old running through the firestorm of Hamburg, nor with Dieter Forte’s complementary statement, “und alles, was danach kam, war nicht sehr wichtig und nicht sehr wesentlich.”<sup>17</sup> While not all explicitly address their lives in the US, they

reflect detachment from the Federal Republic and cognizance of their new homeland as a global power. As immigrants in the US, their memories of daily life during the Reich, the war, and the postwar years are often embedded in an emigration narrative of processing these experiences in encounters with various Americans. The wartime childhood trauma, far from preempting the suffering of non-German, or non-gentile victims of the war, occupies a space that accommodates the experience of both those victims and that of others in postwar US history. Thus, rather than competing with other victims in a “zero-sum struggle for preeminence,” these works generate turbulent transgenerational, transcultural, and transnational cross-currents that prove “productive and not privative,” to create what Michael Rothberg has termed “multidirectional memory.”<sup>18</sup> The productive outcome of such memory work, creating “new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice,”<sup>19</sup> appears, for example in Mahlendorf’s development of commitment to activism during the Vietnam war or in Ritter’s tentatively established bond with a young Jewish patient.

The immigration experience emerges with varied insistence in these books. However, in fleeing a Europe devastated by war, the writers inevitably voice the futurist thrust, quest for upward mobility, self-improvement, and equality of various sorts forming stock components of American mythology.<sup>20</sup> Many express a “concern for leaving a positive legacy for future generations”<sup>21</sup> different from their German counterparts, who are concerned more with fusing fragments of the past into a viable narrative for unified Germany. Some of the German-American narratives articulate a tension between the future focus of the emigrant experience and the burden of a German past: “When you emigrate to America, you turn the pages of your life quickly. If you don’t do it yourself, the country will do it for you, or you’ll be ‘history,’ as they say. This is America. In contrast, a contemporary German writer recently stated that not a day had passed since Auschwitz. That is Germany.”<sup>22</sup>

Of the four memoirists discussed here, Wolfgang Samuel developed the earliest awareness of the United States, initially in a military context. In contrast to Herbst, who recounts a boyhood steeped in the Prussian military legacy, which he saw continued in the Hitler Youth, Samuel strives to present a child’s view of the military detached from National Socialist institutions and ideology. Indeed, he presents a childhood exposure to soldiering in which national identity takes a back seat to professionalism. In crafting his two memoirs to link his early experiences to his later career, Samuel interweaves early encounters with Luftwaffe officers with youthful notions about the US. Having absorbed from James Fenimore Cooper and Karl May mythology of the great American West, the child, overhearing remarks of a visiting Luftwaffe colonel in 1943, also develops an early sense of the US as a military

counterweight to Germany:

The war was lost . . . when that idiot Hitler declared war on the United States of America. . . . I've been to America. . . . I know how big that land is and what it can do. For every airplane we build, they will build a hundred. They will utterly destroy Germany by the time this war is over. . . . I saw [my father] nod his head in agreement . . . , but he said nothing. Then my mother closed the door.<sup>23</sup>

Secondary only to the figure of the mother, uniforms, flyers, and the United States are three major themes shaping *German Boy* and thus the reader's view of the wartime childhood. Even before the war, the US had captured the Samuel family's attention as an industrial powerhouse. Samuel's father abandoned plans to take a factory job in Detroit when he received, on the same day as his visa, notice of acceptance into "the one-hundred-thousand-man German army." In an ascendant Germany, the choice between the two countries appeared easy: "Oma Samuel easily persuaded my father to stay. Oma convinced him he would have a prestigious and secure career in the German army" (218).

Samuel's description of growing up in a new apartment complex in "a small, unimportant town in the east of Germany" (254) underplays the military significance of his Silesian hometown, Sagan, (today "Zagan"), location of infamous German POW camps. The book's opening pages recall the "great escape" of American and English fighter pilots the previous year from Stalag Luft III, known to US audiences through the film *The Great Escape*. Samuel tells how the local Hitler Youth recruited him and his playmates to search along the river for the escapees but admits, "My friends and I didn't want to find any of those men, and we didn't" (5). This location notwithstanding, the Samuel family, with the absent philandering officer father and the party-loving mother, seems remarkably indifferent to Hitler's war effort. The veneration which the child shows the frequently visiting soldiers in the household, a compensation for his physically and emotionally distant father, does not register the extreme masculinism of Nazi militarism.

Despite the wax relief of Hitler on their wall and the blind faith in the Reich's timely evacuation of civilians from warzones, the author's mother appears, in his words, as "an apolitical woman," who "didn't want to understand what was happening around her. . . . My mother lived in her fantasy world, refusing to read the newspaper or listen to the radio. All my mother ever seemed to care about were her parties and tap dancing for the wounded soldiers." (6). This nonchalance provides the backdrop to the book's memorable opening pages, describing the 10-year-old boy's sprint homeward

across icy fields on a January night in 1945 after escorting an army lieutenant to the train station. His detailed description of the soldier, who had tried in vain to persuade Samuel's mother to leave Sagan, captures details and fit of the uniform as well as the medals and insignia, ending with the boyish admission, "I really liked the way he looked" (6).

Here the book's emphasis on military externalities detached from political reality credibly conveys the perspective of a ten-year-old boy. A similar detachment colors the child's viewing of a daytime bombing raid in Sagan. Eluding the air raid warden, young Samuel stays outside to watch US B-17s flying in formation: "I was fascinated by the sight of the spectacle. What was it like to be part of a huge formation of bombers deep over enemy territory? I wanted to fly one of those bombers one day. I wanted to be one of the unknown men high up in the sky. Forgetting that they were there to bomb my country, I felt no hatred toward them. Instead, I felt admiration and a deep sense of kinship with the unknown flyers passing above" (47).<sup>24</sup> He sees no bombs, hears no explosions, perceives only the huge plume of black smoke. "I never forgot the American bombers over Sorau, flying unchecked through the blue skies of my homeland. I knew the flyers were from the land of the Mohicans, and I was in awe of them. I wondered what the men from America looked like" (48). These remarks echo those of another fatherless German boy of the same period, Vietnam hero Dieter Dengler in Werner Herzog's 1998 film *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, who recounts watching from a high window in his house allied bombers advancing on his village; seeing one of the pilots flying very close with open cockpit, black goggles, looking in at the children at the window, he sees flashes of machine guns coming out, the left wing tip just missing his house by several feet: "like an all-mighty being" . . . "that just came out, difficult to describe" and adds, "but I knew from that moment on that I wanted to be a pilot, that I wanted to be a flier."<sup>25</sup> Whereas Herzog's Dengler claims not to realize until he is shot down over Laos in 1966 that real people suffered and died as a result of this activity, Samuel sees the reality already as a young boy, when he learns a year later of the bombing of Dresden, which has claimed the lives of Sagan evacuees; he concludes, "I knew I wanted to fly airplanes when I grew up, but I didn't want to kill children and their mothers" (49). This conundrum must have had particular relevance to the adult Samuel in his thirty year career as a US Air Force pilot, including service in Vietnam, which in the Epilogue he characterizes as "a heart-wrenching experience" (356). Like Dengler, Samuel simply wanted to fly and knew that to do this he would have to leave postwar Germany. Personally meeting GIs after the end of the war, especially the one who marries his mother and becomes a role model, helps him along the path to his goal.

Samuel persuasively describes his childhood distance from the Nazi movement. The paternal absence recounted in other German childhood wartime memoirs is compounded in Samuel's case by maternal neglect and abuse and sets him apart from his friends, whose mothers scold them when they bring him home to share meals in a time of rationing (14). After fleeing Sagan with his mother and sister to his maternal grandparents' home in the village of Strasburg, he procrastinates enrolling in the local *Jungvolk* for three months past his tenth birthday. Finally, a fanatical neighboring boy drags him to their headquarters, where the boys berate him for his delay. One of them punches him in the head for his mumbled "Heilitler," and yet another taunts him for his "Jewish" name: "Maybe you are a Jewish swine after all . . . with a name like Samuel." "He said my name slowly—SA-MU-EL—enunciating every syllable clearly, loudly, as if it were distasteful for him to even speak my name. 'Maybe we should have you taken away like the people who once had this store,' he said, laughing loudly. 'Now show us the proper *Gruß*'" (74). Although the ten-year-old does not ponder the implications of the store owners' fates, this scene detaches him from the persecution of the Jews and establishes his own position as victim of NS bullying; later he fails to get satisfactory answers when he asks his grandparents about the local Jews.

Samuel's rich memoir details the suffering of German civilians and the brutality to which women and children were subjected, especially at the hands of the Russians, to whom the child assigns the exclusive role of perpetrators, a perspective he captures in responding to the end of the war: "The war was not good, and now it was coming to an end. It seemed to me that the whole world was the enemy of my country and that they wanted to kill us all. Even us children. Why? I am a German boy. I am not bad" (7). Samuel, in his final year before leaving Germany after the war, forcibly encounters his society's crimes when, on a free day from work as a baker's apprentice in Hannover, he is approached in a black market by a thin man wanting to buy American clothes like the ones he is wearing. "'Look here,' he said, thrusting out his left arm. I saw the tattoo. A number. 'You can trust me,' he mumbled in a low voice. 'I was at Bergen-Belsen. Many of us here came from there. Come back and see me if you decide that you have something to sell. I am always here at this shack'" (344). This fleeting encounter forces Samuel to face a reality he, like his parents, had denied. "I had never seen a concentration camp. I had heard of them from many people since the war ended, but I didn't want to believe what Germans had done to other Germans simply because they were of the Jewish faith" (344). He reports "outrage and guilt . . . intense hostility toward those who had caused so much pain and suffering in people whose only crime had been that they were Jewish . . ." and expresses shame at belonging to "a people of wanton murderers." Yet he is not able to reconcile

this outrage with his knowledge of friends, family, and classmates as “regular people,” asking, “Who were the people who had done these awful things? Where were they now? How would I know them if I met them? . . . As a young boy, I felt violated by my elders. How could they have done this to us children?” (345). Again, with this last question Samuel squarely foregrounds German children as victims, though not, of course, on a level with victims of the Holocaust. The fourteen-year-old departing for the US asks, “What was it my family had done to deserve such awful punishment?” (354). He does not revisit the question of his family’s complicity—had they voted in 1933? Was his father, in the *Luftwaffe* insulated from news of German military crimes in the East? Does Hitler’s profile on his parents’ wall imply veneration for the Führer? Did his grandparents take cognizance of *Kristallnacht*, the Nürnberg Laws? In leaving these questions open Samuel makes it easy for American readers to lapse into a cold war perspective fixated on the misdeeds of the Russians rather than on the crimes of the perpetrators. The effects of his childhood experiences appear in the political attitudes he voices in the sequel to *German Boy*, where he relates African-American airmen’s fears about racial discrimination not to Nazi anti-Semitism but rather to Soviet prejudice against non-Communists in the occupation years.<sup>26</sup>

Whereas Samuel’s boyhood insulated from German political reality and his encounters with Luftwaffe officers and postwar Soviet and US army personnel guided him toward a career with the US Air Force, Jürgen Herbst’s youthful saturation with the German military heritage took him in a different direction. Herbst, whose book’s title, *Requiem for a German Past*, sounds an elegiac note, grows up in a nurturing environment as the only child of a research scholar (and World War I veteran) at the Wolffenbüttel library. The child unquestioningly adapts his parents’ Lutheran faith and Prussian values into his leadership role in the Hitler Youth, only to find himself at fifteen thrust into the bloody combat realities of the war’s final weeks and confronting the disintegration of his carefully constructed code of military honor. His “requiem” laments the demise of a general humanistic European culture, which he situates somewhat uncomfortably within the Wolfenbüttel tradition of learning and the Prussian tradition of “mehr sein als schein.”<sup>27</sup> His family’s adherence to a seamless fusion of Prussian military values and Lutheran Protestant Christianity—“Loyalty, courage, steadfastness, faithfulness, righteousness, and love of God, country, family, and friends” (19)<sup>28</sup>—jeopardizes the distance between the memoirist and the National Socialists that his subtitle, “A Boyhood among the Nazis,” implies.

The title of Herbst’s opening chapter, “In My Father’s House,” proclaims the primacy of two strands here: Christianity, in the Biblical allusion, and patriarchy. Whereas Samuel’s memoir builds up to a moving tribute to his



mother, Herbst's text postulates an unquestioning filial adulation of the father, which weakens but never fully implodes. Samuel's early acknowledgement of his father's inadequacies frees the paternal role for the American GI Colonel Ferguson, who becomes "more like a father to [him] than [his] own father" (Samuel, *German Boy*, 341). Samuel's utter disillusionment with postwar Germany opens the door for the redemptive narrative of emigration to the US. Herbst starts from an opposite pole, that of unquestioning filial devotion to his father and to the latter's absolute, infallible values: "Above all, it was the picture that I, as a child, had built up of my father that embodied for me that inheritance [of belief in Prussian virtues] and that sustained my determination to create a life in his image for myself. He was to be my model. I could not tolerate the slightest doubt in his right and righteousness. Any such doubt would have undermined my sense of selfhood and destiny" (19).

The first chapter portrays a father-son relationship suffused with military values, phenomena, and events. The first books Herbst notes in his father's bookcase are the World War I novels of nationalist (later Nazi) writers Edwin Dwinger and Werner Beumelburg. The boy marches tin soldiers across the carpet and with his father recreates famous battles. Later he thrills to his father's and his Gymnasium teacher's tales of the Great War. Living near a military training ground, the child from his window watches maneuvers and marching and tries to reenact the scenes with toy soldiers in his playroom. "I spent hours, mornings and afternoons, in my solitary war games and rarely ran out of ideas about how to arrange and vary the scenes of battle. I lived and dreamt soldiering" (10). He laconically describes walking with his father along the training ground, beating a toy drum and pretending to be a soldier, his father acting as his "military advisor." Thus the boy positions himself as heir, through his soldier-father, to an exclusive, masculine tradition defined by war and conflict, of which the Great War is only the most recent and dramatic example. To young Herbst, the father is always both the soldier *and* the scholar, a unity of roles to which the child aspires but which he will find unthinkable after the war. Only in his later life "in another country" [the US], as he listens to friends "speak of an ambivalence they harbored toward their fathers, an ambivalence that had arisen out of conflicting emotions of love and anger" (19), does Herbst begin to re-examine his past veneration of his own father.

Compared with his contemporary German counterparts, such as Wibke Bruhns, *Meines Vaters Land*, Monika Jetter's *Mein Kriegsvater* or Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*,—whose authors lived through the late 1960s West German assault on the older generation—Herbst's interrogation of the father-son relationship remains circuitous and inconclusive:

It has taken me many years to admit to myself the role played by ambivalence, doubt, resentment, and guilt in my relations with my father. In committing myself to the career of soldier I could not but protect his image as a German officer of irreproachable honesty and righteousness and thus preserve my self-image as one who wanted to follow in his footsteps. But this identification with my father also made it increasingly difficult for me to come to understand him and myself. Had he not refused to answer my questions about the dismissal of the German generals? Had he not objected strenuously to my remark that I had considered joining the Armed SS? What did he really think? Where did his sympathies lie? I could guess, but I did not know. (25)

Toward the book's end, seeing newspaper photos from the liberation of the camps, and recognizing that he, his father, his friends, and all who had volunteered for an army career, "had been participants in a monstrous conspiracy of evil," he is left with "no answer, only emptiness and nothingness" (198). The eventual knowledge of his father's service as a railroad transport officer in Poland, who thus "must have seen the trains carrying their human cargo to the concentration camps at Auschwitz and elsewhere" (22), undermines the son's belief in the integrity of the war effort and of his father's participation in it.

The family show no support for the Party, and Herbst's mother evinces sympathy for victims of *Kristallnacht* after her son tells about having seen the burnt synagogue and a shop window's broken glass and heard about a Jewish family's being dragged with their young son from their apartment building: "Do you know, Jürgen, if you had been Albert Morgenstern, you would have been torn from your bed last night; you, your father, and I would have been pushed down the staircase, and all your toys and books would have been thrown on the street. Had you been born a little Jewish boy, this would have happened to you last night" (73). Although Herbst's father encourages his son's ambitions for the *Jungvolk* and *Wehrmacht*, he rejects the boy's goals of joining the *Waffen SS* (21). Herbst witnesses persecution of local Jews when, in 1941 he encounters an old man wearing a yellow star. The dutiful *Jungvolkführer* ponders his responsibility to challenge the man, excoriate him for holding his hand over the star, spit on his feet and order him off the street. But even his attempts to look the man contemptuously in the face fail, leaving him with a feeling of shame: "What had I done? What had the little, old man done to me? How did he deserve my contempt? Was he hungry, I wondered? Was he lonely? Did he have friends, a wife, children who loved him? . . . There were no answers to any of my questions" (79). Herbst's parents do not

give the boy the intellectual or moral tools to answer these questions, nor to connect these troubling events with his own involvement in the *Jungvolk*.

The young Herbst thus must find answers elsewhere to the contradictions he begins feeling in the values around him. With few exceptions, such as his religion teacher, Pastor Wille, dismissed after refusing to teach the Nazi version of Christianity, the boy's world is populated with helpless bystanders whispering disapproval but not risking public comment. Most of them accept a compatibility between Lutheran Christianity, Prussian military virtue, and Nazi political goals. Herbst explains his blindness to inconsistencies among these value systems by the remarkably eccentric nature of his particular *Jungvolk* unit, in the leadership of which he rises rapidly. The book implies that rather than indoctrinating children with Nazi racial policy, this unit simply instills discipline, loyalty, deference to authority, and—for the narrator—the “paramount Prussian military code of *mehr sein als schein*” (99). Indeed, the overall leadership of the Wolfenbüttel NS youth groups seems exceptionally *laissez-faire*, with the squad leaders of the *Jungvolk* given latitude in setting their programs.

Herbst does not recognize the full extent of this local deviation from the mainstream until January 1944 in a conversation with his friend Etzel. In this conversation, Etzel, a charismatic *Jungvolk* leader in charge of several hundred younger boys, reveals his complete contempt for National Socialism, confessing that his family has appointed him their token fanatical Nazi in order to protect a Jewish aunt, who lives with them, and a Communist father. He points out to Herbst the non-conformism he has brought to their youth group. In their *Heimabende*, they have replaced the mandated study of *Mein Kampf* and the Führer's biography with adventurous story-telling (once reading from *Huckleberry Finn*). They stayed away from *Kristallnacht*. They have replaced paramilitary maneuvers with ski excursions and games of cops and robbers in the woods. Even during marching exercises, they supplement the repertoire of nationalistic and Nazi songs with “ribald songs of cowboys and Indians, borrowed from the Wild West tales of Karl May” (86), “songs of soldiers, pirates, medieval mercenaries, and African explorers” (95), once shocking passersby with a rendition of “Die Internationale” (93), feigning ignorance of its political import. They offend some of the townsfolk by replacing the standard banner with one on which Etzel's Jewish aunt has embroidered their unit's name in red letters. All these features have eluded Herbst, so caught up was he in the group spirit.

Etzel's revelation about the *Jungvolk* casts light on the disappointment of Herbst's group the previous summer (1943) on a project in Poland. Sent on a four-week excursion to show Polish boys in the German-occupied areas the joys of Hitler Youth, Herbst experiences a culture of brutality, bullying, and

corruption among HJ leadership and begins to see the misery inflicted by the German occupation. His father, in a brief visit during that time, recounts how his unit's initial warm reception in Poland and the Ukraine as liberators from Stalinism has been erased by subsequent German brutality. His disclaimer—"My men don't do it, and our fighting soldiers on the front line didn't do it either. We know what we are fighting for, and *it is a better world, a world without terror, without brutality, not a world of hate and murder and death* [italics mine]" (114)—reveals a disjuncture between professional military culture and Nazi policy. In Poland too Herbst sees Jewish concentration camp inmates working in an open pit mine and there learns "how to keep silent on issues such as corruption, cruelty, and steel mills with concentration camp labor, which I knew nobody wanted to hear about" (116).

Neither in this passage nor later does Herbst reflect on the implications of his *Jungvolk* experience. When he writes about his wartime activity a year later, however, especially about his determination *not* to surrender but rather to lead his young charges in a final fight in the service of "honor," the reader suspects that playing cops and robbers, marching to songs about cowboys, and forging a bond with his boys has simply cemented his belief in a fantasy world defined by Prussian military values. He speaks of "ignominious surrender," and avers, "Such action violated everything I had learned from Bodo Wacker [a favorite teacher] and from my father. Worst of all, it was treason: Treason against any concept of honor and loyalty I believed in; treason against myself. I could not possibly do that" (183). The misplaced patriotism here shows the influence of his family upbringing and the delusional world he has created as *Jungvolk* leader. It echoes his and his mother's reaction to the July assassination plot: "How was such treachery possible?" (153) Given Herbst's knowledge of *Kristallnacht*, Jewish slave labor, and mistreatment of Poles in occupied lands, it is hard to imagine a more damning judgment of Prussian military values: a commitment to virtue in defending an exterminationist racist state that has brought devastation, hunger, and destruction on civilian populations reflects the shallowness of these notions of "honor." The older German-American's later Commencement speech at his old school praises it for having given students "strength of conviction and character" to "find [their] way through one of the darkest times of German history" (233). Yet the reader wonders how this moral strength shaped the young man's determination to defend the National Socialist state to the bitter end against British and American troops rather than choose a dignified surrender like that witnessed by the young Wolfgang Samuel (*German Boy*, 118-19).

Only after the Reich's total collapse does the memoirist start questioning his and his friends' devotion to the *Jungvolk* and willingness to fight for their country, belatedly wondering "whether there had been anything true and

noble in our past at all, and whether there was anything left in which we could still believe and by which we could live” (216). Rejecting the Lutheran religion for its failure to have spoken out, he also sees any search for solace in Germany’s humanistic literary tradition as opening “the perfumed drawers of an old family wardrobe but [keeping] loosely shut all others for fear of finding out what they might contain” (217). When a Quaker relief group offers him a year of study at an American university, Herbst takes it, encouraged by his dying mother and driven by several unpleasant encounters with fellow Germans. The main narrative ends abruptly on a melancholy note of requiem, without telling any further details of its author’s later life in the US. His appended Commencement Address from 1996 at his alma mater, the Grosse Schule in Wölfenbüttel, lauds the classical humanistic values mediated by “the Graeco-Roman world, Christianity, and the German classics” on which the school’s curriculum is presumably still based (231). The reader hears the nostalgic voice of the expatriate untouched by the German 1968 and the *Hochschulreform* who clings to an essentially nineteenth century vision of German education. Herbst’s speech invites the question how the “strength of conviction and character” he cites as the school’s legacy manifested itself in the 25 out of his 31 classmates who returned from the war. Did others insist, as he did, on risking lives by defending a murderous regime to the end rather than surrendering at a decent time? Did some join the SS? Did any inform on neighbors or friends? Were there any stories of moral heroism? Following Herbst’s account of his own blindness to the regime until after the war, the praise of the school and its humanistic education sounds like a wistful but not fully credible counter-model to the chaotic and unfocused American high schools that Herbst has chronicled so carefully in his work on American education.<sup>29</sup>

Although Herbst states as his two motives in writing this book his private literary one inspired by a poet friend in the 1950s and his wish to share his past with his children, his childhood wartime memoir makes two important broader contributions to Americans’ understanding of everyday life under the Nazis: first, it details how he and his upper-middle-class friends consciously exploited the youth organizations’ leadership structure to secure their own class standing, thus completely undermining any claims of the Hitler Jugend to serve as a great equalizer; second, it shows how young Germans could fetishize values of the Prussian military tradition such as “loyalty” as ends in themselves, divorced from a socio-political context.

The Hitler Youth as training ground for adult leadership also figures prominently in Ursula Mahlendorf’s *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood*. Her Introduction presents the various dimensions of this “shame” regarding both her childhood in Silesia and her later struggles

to interpret it. Instead of Herbst's elegiac lament, one finds an energetic "working through," the result of many years teaching about the German past to US university students and viewing that period through the lenses of feminist theory and psychoanalytic practice. In her memoir Mahlendorf wrestles with her youthful devotion to the Nazi cause. From a lower middle class background in the small Silesian quarry town of Strehlen (now Strzelin) near Breslau, she registers the family's economic decline following her father's early death. Whereas Herbst takes for granted his future membership in the German academic elite, Mahlendorf recognizes early the imperative of securing a place in the bourgeoisie through university education. The class make-up of the Hitler Youth plays a decisive role in both memoirists' pursuit of career advancement. Mahlendorf confirms Herbst's portrayal of class rigidity in the NS organizations, when she notes that it is the girls from the *Gymnasium* (in her book "high school") who become *Jungmädel* leaders. Stuck in the "primary school" and excluded from the *Gymnasium*, young Mahlendorf nevertheless manages to be chosen for the leadership cadre and thus gains a middle-class foothold despite tension with her *Gymnasium* peers. The Hitler Youth slogan of "youth leading youth" proves as effective for her as for Herbst. Like Herbst's family, hers neither fanatically supports the NSDAP nor vocally criticizes it. Ursula's father joins the SS in 1932 attracted by the stylish uniform, but is too sickly to attend meetings and dies in 1935. Her widowed mother, struggling to support three children in wartime, pays little heed to political developments. Mahlendorf's assessment of her mother's deficiencies as a moral guidepost applies to many other bystander parents:

. . . her refusal to become involved continued to irk me. . . . Now, at seventy-five, I still wish she had done more than merely listen. Would I have heard her? Did she know what we were indoctrinated in and how she might have countered it? I do not know. But since she did not, at that time, have a philosophical, religious, or political position from which to counteract that indoctrination, I doubt that she could have done more than dampen my fervor.<sup>30</sup>

Discussing their involvement with the Hitler Youth later, she and her brother both agree,

. . . it would have been enormously helpful to us if even one of the adults around us had attempted to counteract this indoctrination, had told us that other values existed besides bravery, toughness, obedience, and loyalty unto death—that other nations, races and peoples, valued their way of life as much as we did and were worthy

of respect. We both envied friends we made later in life whose parents tried to keep them out of Hitler Youth, sometimes succeeding. . . . Home life during my teens provided neither intellectual stimuli nor ethical values and moral guidance. Explicit ideals and values, such as they were, existed only within the framework of the Hitler Youth. (108)

Herbst, however, shows that intellectual stimuli and a “religious” background did not necessarily counteract Nazi values of “bravery, toughness, obedience.”

Both Herbst and Mahlendorf provide their readers with informative chapter headings, Mahlendorf’s more precisely chronological than Herbst’s. Both take pains to clarify historical terms and contexts; Mahlendorf cites secondary sources and includes a brief bibliography. Whereas Wolfgang Samuel, by virtue of his age, environment and family background can present his perspective as naïve and generally ignorant of the Nazis’ most hideous crimes, Herbst and Mahlendorf tell a more disturbing tale of ordinary citizens’ stubborn blindness to the contradictions between the idealistic rhetoric of NS institutions—in this case the Youth organizations—and the goals of the Nazi leaders.

Against this blindness, though, Mahlendorf, like Herbst, recalls events not addressed by adults in their world. Both notice the gradual marginalization of the local Jewish population. Mahlendorf recounts the sudden cessation of social contacts with her parents’ Jewish skat partners, the vandalism of the dentist’s office, his daughter’s disappearance from her class, and the teacher’s explanation that the family “is going abroad” (66). Later she compares her memories of *Kristallnacht* with those of her brother and with the claim of her mother to have no memory whatsoever of the events (66).

Mahlendorf views her book as a testament for future generations, a testimonial to the NS indoctrination of young people. Her writing also continues her own therapy in later years to process the “fear, deprivation, traumatic separations, and disillusionments at the end of the war” (337). As a septuagenarian, Mahlendorf writes more introspectively than the others about her life-long struggles to make sense of her early years and to forge a stable identity in her new country. She conducts a more “multidirectional” and transnational memory work than Samuel and Herbst. As a Germanist, she has observed the postwar development of her native country, including discussions about rearmament, the student movement, Brandt’s visit to Poland, the *Wende*, and unification, while cherishing her American identity. But she has also connected her German experiences to her American political stances: “It was only during the Vietnam War that I came to understand at least my mother’s assertion that she did not remember *Kristallnacht*. If you

feel responsible and keep silent in the face of obvious crimes, it is tempting to erase the memory rather than feel the shame of having failed to protest” (289).

Like Samuel’s, Mahlendorf’s emigration to the US was influenced by the US postwar presence in Germany. Expelled with her family from Silesia and resettled outside Bremen, the young Mahlendorf, seeking a warm, quiet place to study, discovers Bremen’s *Amerikahaus*, and with it a new world of American literature and culture. Mahlendorf does not engage with recent critical scrutiny of Allied reeducation policy: “The naïve idealism that dominated America House events suited my state of mind well, and its positive messages counteracted the gloom and near despair of the world around me” (295). The writings of Thomas Wolfe—the “grandiosity of his vision of America . . . Wolfe’s evocation of long, overnight train rides with train whistles blowing through dense forests that I imagined as primeval (303)” —showed her an alternative world to her stultifying experiences in 1946-47 Germany. Mahlendorf praises US postwar re-education policies and links them to the 1968 student movement: “I see now in retrospect, that my experience, or rather the positive experience of German youth—particularly with the American occupation forces—pointed the way to how Germany could gradually become a successful democracy. The reeducation efforts laid the foundation on which the 1968 generation could build their rebellion and their later democratic reforms” (311). For the expellee organizations she expresses only contempt and praises the West German government’s integration of the transferred populations. After three semesters study at Tübingen, she gets a US State Department grant to study in the US but is chagrined to find, on her return to Germany, rearmament in full swing and sexism of a type not experienced in the US fully ensconced in German academic and political institutions. The “devastation wrought by Nazism, nationalism, and militarism” that she has seen in the final weeks of the war have made her a “pacifist and an internationalist” (292) who finds a militarized West Germany unpalatable. Thus she uses her American connections to return and complete a doctorate at Brown in German and become an American citizen. She returns to her native country only in 1969 at the height of the student movement, which elicits her full sympathy. The main narrative ends with the assertion: “But by that time I was an American” (332).

Mahlendorf’s memoir extends past her childhood to reflect on its implications for her later life. The Epilogue’s account of psychological turmoil brings home to the reader the enormous toll of a lost childhood. Its opening reference to the Mitscherlichs’ *Inability to Mourn* addresses this phenomenon as a private, psychological result of Nazism rather than a social one and delineates the memoirist’s gradual struggle to free herself from it. The narrative



concludes on an open-ended note, with the memoirist acknowledging that she can never escape the questioning of her Nazi experience. “On the contrary, with age and greater knowledge and insight, with openness to new friends of different national, ethnic, and social backgrounds, my self-questioning has become more demanding and more keenly felt” (343). Mahlendorf has written an ambitious memoir, an intellectual autobiography, or its subgenre an “academic life.”<sup>31</sup> Even more than Herbst, Mahlendorf, writing as an isolated German-American at a distance from the Berlin Republic, sees her book partly as a private work of mourning that will never free her from the dialogue with “the Nazi experience” (343) and that continues to shape her life as a citizen. In this way, her book resembles Ritter’s *Return to Dresden*.

As a four-year old in 1945 Maria Ritter could not remember much about the Third Reich. Her memoir shares Herbst’s focus on German Protestantism’s complicity with Nazism and Mahlendorf’s memory work as personal trauma therapy. As the daughter, granddaughter, and then wife of Protestant pastors, she is tormented by the questions lurking in the background of Herbst’s work, namely institutionalized religion’s accommodation with militaristic nationalism. Thus her work shares affinities with recent books to emerge in Germany, where a narrator too young to have had direct involvement with the Nazi system tries to evaluate her parents’ position in that context.<sup>32</sup> A former emigrant from the East (1949 and to the US in 1966) Ritter recalls the bombing of Dresden, in which she was badly burned, and the early years of Soviet occupation. Her work is explicitly precipitated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, which parallels a metaphoric disintegration of barriers in her own mind, a confrontation with a long suppressed reality.<sup>33</sup> Even more than Mahlendorf, who refers to Wolf’s book, *Return to Dresden* shows a debt to *Kindheitsmuster*, especially in its structure of a trip eastward with close family members—in Ritter’s case her oldest brother (living in West Germany) and her German-born husband—to revisit sites of memory. In inviting her brother to join her and her husband on their pilgrimage, she hopes to extend their memory by including his. They visit her birth city of Breslau (Wrocław), Dresden, Damsdorf (where the family had been evacuated in 1944) Leipzig (where they lived with a grandfather in the immediate postwar years) and Oschersleben (where the narrator crossed the Oder River with her mother in 1949).

Ritter feels more acutely than Herbst the conflict between her parents’ complicity with the National Socialist regime and their Protestant piety. Her brother Klaus, however, resembles many of his German contemporaries in wanting to forget the years 1933-45, often concluding his sparse comments with “Das war halt so.” It becomes clear that for their mother and presumably for their soldier-father as well, as for Herbst’s father, the threat of godless

Bolshevism outweighed the evils of Hitler and that, in defending the German nation against the Soviets, the Wehrmacht was protecting the German people against an even greater threat (17). The ideology of the Master Race and the extermination of “weaker” races and individuals seem to play no role in their evaluation. It is largely Ritter’s encounters and conversations with American Jews that push her to reconsider her parents’ views and then to counter her brother Klaus’ West German Cold War perspective and lead her husband to a more complex vision of the role of bystanders like their families.

Much of the memoir consists of attempts to untangle the various allegiances of the narrator’s family. Ritter suggests her own difficulties approaching this topic by providing three different beginnings to her narrative. On the most personal level, she recounts an emotional breakdown she suffers when her husband’s professional position threatens the family with a disruptive relocation to a new, strange environment. This event precipitates childhood memories of expulsion, relocation, and homelessness. The second beginning arises in an encounter with one of her therapy patients, a young Jewish woman who, upon learning of Ritter’s planned trip, gives her a dollar as a *mitzvah* and explains the concept. This anecdote announces German-Jewish relations as a motif in her story, a topic never addressed in her family and difficult in contemporary Germany. The third beginning is the actual departure with her brother and husband in Germany, starting from Dachau, on their trip eastward; this beginning establishes the three voices that will comment on the travel: the brother speaking for one part of the New Germany, intent on moving on; the husband starting to uncover his own family’s German legacy of silence; and the narrator now emboldened to find truths about her own family’s past.

Ritter broadens her perspective beyond that of her four-year-old self by inserting italicized passages of reflections and memories as well as passages from family letters. Conversations with her brother along the routes of their childhood fill in more details. Perhaps because of her family’s professional involvement with the church, Ritter addresses more aggressively than Herbst German Protestants’ collusion with the Nazis. With both grandfathers and father pastors in the Methodist Church, she focuses on this sect that in Germany was generally loyal to the Nazi state in exchange for concessions. This aspect of her narrative may resonate with US readers since Methodism in a 2001 survey emerged as the country’s second largest Protestant denomination, comprising 6.8% of the population, ahead of the Lutheran 4.6%.<sup>34</sup> In May of 1933 an official church document declared its gratitude that the new government had acted so decisively against “die zerstörenden Mächte unseres Volkslebens und ihren entschlossenen Kampf gegen Gottlosigkeit und Entsittlichung, die wie eine gausige Sturmflut unser Volk

und Land zu verheeren drohten.”<sup>35</sup> During World War I, Ritter’s maternal grandfather had been “convinced of the political goals of the Germany of his time. He believed in a God who would not forsake the German nation and who would eventually provide justified victory over all its enemies.” In the Weimar Republic, he worried about “signs of decadence and decay of a once strong German cultural heritage” (54). Without giving the year, she quotes a passage from her paternal grandfather’s diary saluting Hitler with wording from Psalm 118:22-23 as a “corner stone . . . a miracle before our eyes” (63). This same grandfather writes in a letter after the July 20 plot, “God sent us this man [Hitler] and therefore protected him!” (72) On the other hand, Ritter opens her book with a postwar quotation from this man, “We certainly received what we deserved” (xv), and later provides the sentence preceding it in the diary: “We have heaped great sin upon us and deserve punishment” (135).

Ritter never uncovers her parents’ political allegiances although she remains troubled that her mother, escaping from Dresden and later fleeing the DDR, took along her *Mutterkreuz*. And she learns that her mother and her brother observed prisoners from Groß-Rosen working on the railroad tracks outside Breslau. Although her mother lived until 1983, as with other memoirists from this time, she and her children never discussed the war years, leaving the daughter with unresolved questions:

Were they aware of the totalitarian state they belonged to, the loss of personal freedom? Did they know of the persecution of the Jews, undertaken in order to protect German blood and German honor? I am not sure how much they knew about the Nazi propaganda and the actual atrocities. They must have known of the *Kristallnacht*. . . . Many of those citizens had previously been their neighbors or local merchants. My parents must have known of the full-scale censoring of literature and art and the book burnings to sterilize the German soul. I don’t know what they thought about all this. (62)

The older generation’s refusal to discuss the past thwarts the French/American re-education efforts in the village of Bad Bergzabern, the family’s home after the war; a documentary about the concentration camps shown to school children prompts some parents to claim that “the movie had exaggerated the facts, and that these camps were just reeducation camps for foreigners and criminals; of course at the end of the war, they ran out of food” (176). Neither parents nor the school itself provides a counter-narrative. Ritter’s mother follows the tendency of the German Methodist Church not to utter “ein Wort der Buße für das doch offensichtliche kirchliche Versagen

und Stillschweigen gegenüber den Verbrechen der nationalsozialistischen Gewaltherrschaft.”<sup>36</sup> At an annual ecumenical prayer week, Ritter notes, “No one ever spoke of our political trauma during the last few years or our personal histories or prayed for the survivors. Politics was not mentioned. All these events were a part of God’s will” (186). Although this silence troubles the young Ritter, only later in the United States, does she begin to confront the legacy of her parents’ passivity, largely through conversations with Jewish Americans. Her journey leads her to acknowledge that her heirs need to know the family stories and face the “lingering, underlying sense of shame, the forced and self-imposed silence, and the feeling of responsibility for the acts of a dead generation” (205). Her husband likewise ends the trip knowing the questions he must now ask his elderly aunts about their community, their memories of *Kristallnacht*, and their town’s Jewish populace. He also resolves to read 600 letters his parents had written each other during the years 1939-45 in order to “uncover the past and to heal old wounds” (160). The German brother alone appears unaffected by the experience.

Ritter concludes her book with a conversation with her young Jewish therapy patient, who announces an upcoming trip to Israel. When asked to read over the first few pages of Ritter’s memoir, the patient senses the therapist’s reticence:

You know, the Holocaust happened in a different generation. . . . Only one time, when I was traveling in Germany, I took the train and felt almost sick to my stomach, thinking about the many Jews that had been transported by train to the camps. But I just see you as a person. It sounds as though it is still a problem for you. . . . But the healing happens between two persons at a time.

The book ends with the narrator giving the patient a dollar bill with the instructions “. . . here is your mitzvah. . . . Be a *schlichah mitzvah* and have a safe trip” (210).

Ritter’s conversations with American Jews gradually move away from the “Überempfindlichkeit” that Barbara Honigmann laments among Germans:

Die deutschen wissen gar nicht mehr, was Juden sind, wissen nur, daß da eine schreckliche Geschichte zwischen ihnen liegt, und jeder Jude, der auftaucht, erinnerte sie an diese Geschichte, die immer noch weh tut und auf die Nerven geht. Es ist diese Überempfindlichkeit, die mir unerträglich schien, denn beide, die Juden und die Deutschen, fühlen sich in dieser Begegnung ziemlich schlecht, sie stellen unmögliche Forderungen an den anderen, könnten sich aber

auch gegenseitig nicht in Ruhe lassen.<sup>37</sup>

Ritter, the recent immigrant, at first admits to this “Überempfindlichkeit:”

The first time Winfried and I walked on Fairfax Boulevard in Los Angeles in 1966 and I heard an old Jewish man and a woman speaking Yiddish at the street corner, I wanted to disappear from the surface of the earth. I did not want to be recognized by my accent. I thought that I would be verbally attacked and spat at. We went quietly into the famous Canter’s Deli and had matzo ball soup and a pastrami sandwich on rye bread. Nobody threw us out. (111)

But designating this experience as “the first time” implies a developing beyond such hypersensitivity. This apparently extreme reaction becomes understandable viewed against the hostility greeting Ritter and other memoirists as displaced persons in wartime and postwar Germany.<sup>38</sup> As for other German-American memoirists addressing this period, recurrent encounters with American Jews sustain Ritter’s commitment to her memory project to an extent not available to German contemporaries and help her to recognize the shifting definitions of perpetrator/bystander/victim roles in which ordinary Germans sometimes were caught.<sup>39</sup>

More than Herbst and Samuel, Ritter criticizes lingering postwar echoes of the Reich’s “heroic” fight against evil Bolshevism. She cites her own mother’s trivialization of Nazi crimes: “They said they did not know the extent of all this horror and could hardly believe it. Mother said that the Russians had been even worse, crueler and more sadistic than the Nazis. Stalin was the worst of all, Mother said, because the Communists did not even believe in a God” (Ritter, 136). Although his father seems to have leaned toward a similar view, evidenced in his letter about fighting in the Wehrmacht for “a better world” (Herbst, 114), Herbst does not address the source of this attitude. Ritter, on the other hand, recognizes how the traditional conservative Christian narrative demonizing the Jews for Jesus’ death helped Germans glorify the Reich as a bastion of Western Christian values against the Bolshevik hordes (Ritter, 63). Samuel, by contrast, refrains from couching his portrayals of Soviet brutality in ideological terms that might seem to exculpate Germans.

Although these works overlap with other German childhood memoirs about wartime, they show few traces of the “public memory” shaping West Germany in the 1950s. Untouched by the “stopped clock” trope, the numbing paralysis and truncated life trajectory prominent in German literature about the war years, they show evidence of the American taste for “tragedy with a happy ending.”<sup>40</sup> Like much other immigrant autobiography, they par-

take of the “Utopian grammar of the New World”<sup>41</sup> and articulate some of its components such as the American Dream, the self-made man, and the redemptive self. At the same time, they struggle with past silence about or suppression of the past in their own families.

Wolfgang Samuel can fulfill his childhood dream of becoming a flier only in the US, a story developed in his sequel to *German Boy*. His mother’s transformation from an irresponsible young woman into a contented, economically secure American unites the American Dream with McAdams’ “redemptive self,”<sup>42</sup> both stories colored by Cold War politics. Ursula Mahlendorf’s, like Ritter’s a more “multidirectional” memoir, reflects reciprocally on the immigrant’s growth as an American citizen, her childhood memories, and her gradually acquired knowledge—from a distance—about the country of her birth. Jürgen Herbst, who, like Mahlendorf, found in the US an academic career free from German universities’ stultifying traditions and their tumultuous overthrow in the sixties, details the imbrication of Protestant Christianity, Prussian virtue, and Nazi politics as he experienced it as a child. Yet the adult Herbst’s address to his Wölfenbüttel Gymnasium, while recalling three non-conforming faculty members from his years there, nevertheless refrains from addressing the National Socialist corruption of humanistic education and its effect on him and his classmates. His and Ritter’s unresolved interweaving of the religious, the military, and the political probes complicity between institutional religion and politics and the personal choices posed by such complicity; the preponderance of church-goers in the US and growth of politicized Christian fundamentalism make both books relevant to twenty-first century America.

These thoughtful and well-written memoirs, and others recounting difficult personal journeys in the new country, reflect the “forward and upward” movement with overtones of atonement, emancipation, upward mobility, recovery, enlightenment, and development that McAdams sees as specifically American.<sup>43</sup> Those seeking catharsis in their writing also profess a desire to show future generations “the effect . . . childhood experiences have on our current lives” and “the lingering, underlying sense of shame, the forced and self-imposed silence, and the feeling of responsibility for the acts of a dead generation . . . the deep, often unspoken grief . . . shielded by an avoidance of memories and images” (Ritter, 205). Their experience of becoming Americans has given them a language for processing their German past. The references in Ritter’s and Mahlendorf’s memoirs to discussions with American Jews, discussions that would not take place in Germany, do not suggest a counter-narrative to those Holocaust stories familiar to Americans—a competing victimology—but rather a complementary one showing how conformism in a totalitarian political system can subvert the lives of and inflict suffering on or-

dinary people. While introducing American readers to images of aerial bombing, Allied troops' behavior, the flight and expulsion of ethnic Germans from the East (tropes familiar to German readers but almost unknown to many in the United States), they do not—unlike immediate postwar West German expulsion narratives—“claim an innocence we did not possess” (Mahlendorf, 10). Instead, fusing the stories of troubled German childhood with traditions of American immigration stories, they open multi-directional perspectives in which encounters in the new homeland help shape the individuals' memory work; this memory work in turn informs the adults' grasp of the legacy of twentieth-century German history for their lives as Americans.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues Charlotte Melin of the University of Minnesota and Maria Mitchell of Franklin and Marshall College for their supportive criticisms of this piece.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Finell, *Good-bye to the Mermaids: A Childhood Lost in Hitler's Berlin* (Columbia: UP Missouri, 2006); Jürgen Herbst, *Requiem for a German Past: A Boyhood among the Nazis* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1999); Irmgard Hunt, *On Hitler's Mountain: Overcoming the Legacy of a Nazi Childhood* (NY: William Morrow, 2005); Ursula Mahlendorf, *The Shame of Survival: Working Through a Nazi Childhood* (University Park, PA: Penn State UP, 2009); Maria Ritter, *Return to Dresden* (Jackson: UP Mississippi, 2004); Frederic C. Tubach and Bernat Rosner with Sally Patterson Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship. From Opposite Sides of the Holocaust* (Berkeley: UP California, 2001); Sabina de Werth Neu, *A Long Silence: Memories of a German Refugee Child* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2011). Examples of privately published works include Gunter Nitsch, *Weeds Like Us* (Author House, 2006, translated by author as *Eine lange Flucht aus Ostpreußen*) (Hamburg: Ellert & Richter, 2011); Marga Dieter's autobiographical novel *Aamie's War: Women and Children on the German Holocaust* (iUniverse, Inc., 2007); Evelyne Tannehill, *Abandoned and Forgotten: An Orphan Girl's Tale of Survival During World War II* (Wheatmark, 2007); Gudrun Koppe Everett, *I Can't Forget: A Journey Through Nazi Germany and WWII* (BookSurge, 2006); Brigitte Schalke, *After Rain Shines the Sun* (Xlibris Corporation, 2007); and Annemarie Struwe Cronin, *Escape from East Berlin* (Vantage Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Susanne Veas-Gulani, *Trauma and Guilt: Literature of Wartime Bombing in Germany* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang W. E. Samuel, *Coming to Colorado: A Young Immigrant's Journey to Become an American Flyer* (Jackson: UP Mississippi, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath, eds., *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997). Hans-Georg Betz, “Perplexed Normalcy: German Identity After Unification,” provides an especially useful summary with comparative data on national pride from the US and the pre-Wende Federal Republic. 40-64.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: UP California 2001), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in*

*Recent Women's Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Herbst (1928), Ursula Mahlendorf, (1929), Karin Finell, (1933), Irmgard Hunt (1934), Wolfgang W. E. Samuel (1935), Maria Ritter (1941), and Sabine de Werth Neu (1941). Frederic Tubach (1930), Bernat Rosner (1928). The privately published authors have the following birthdates: Gunter Nitsch (1937) Marga Dieter (1939), Evelyne Tannehill (1936), Anne-Marie Struwe Cronin, (1928), and Brigitte Schalke (1940).

<sup>9</sup> Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: UP Chicago, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: Piper, 1968).

<sup>13</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*.

<sup>14</sup> The World Cat database for Juvenile Holocaust Fiction in English lists over 500 book titles, with several hundred used in schools. Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2006), for example, popular in schools before being filmed, by April 2014, had elicited almost 10,000 Amazon customer reviews. Considerable disagreement about Holocaust awareness exists in the US, revealed, for example in the debates unleashed by Hasia Diner's study, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, *Images of Germany in American Literature* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2007), 181.

<sup>16</sup> Luise Reddemann, "Nachwort," in Sabine Bode, *Die vergessene Generation: Die Kriegskinder brechen ihr Schweigen* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), 184.

<sup>17</sup> Volker Hage, "'Die Lebensuhr blieb stehen,' Interview with Wolf Biermann," "Alles vorherige war nur ein Umweg,' Interview with Dieter Forte," *Zeugen der Zerstörung: Die Literaten und der Luftkrieg. Essays und Gespräche* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2003), 135-150, 169. Wolfgang Borchert's "Die Küchenuhr" (1947) and Werner Steinberg's *Als die Uhren stehenblieben* (1957) reflect this theme as well.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Dan P. McAdams, *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (NY: Oxford UP, 2006); Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> McAdams, *Redemptive Self*, 291.

<sup>22</sup> Tubach, *An Uncommon Friendship*, 7-8.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel, *German Boy*, 12. Subsequent references to this work will be noted in parentheses in the text.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. The absence of hatred toward bomber pilots is in itself not unusual for German wartime children. Bode, for example, cites the following example from an interview: "Im März 1945 hatte Hildegards Mutter, von den Fliegern überrascht, mit ihren vier Kindern an der Außenmauer eines Hauses Deckung gesucht. Genau auf dieses Haus war dann eine Bombe gefallen. Die kleine Hilde hatte den Piloten gesehen, er flog sehr tief. Das heißt, er hatte es ganz gezielt auf dieses Haus und die Menschen abgesehen.' . . . Obwohl es vielleicht schwer fällt zu glauben: Hildegard Schwarz hat keinerlei Ressentiments gegenüber dem englischen Bomberpiloten. Vielleicht deshalb, weil sie ihre Lebensbilanz insgesamt positiv zu sehen vermag. . . ." *Vergessene Generation*, 271, 273.

<sup>25</sup> Werner Herzog, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, 1997. DVD Anchor Bay, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Samuel, *Coming to Colorado*, 188.



<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Herbst, *Requiem*, 99. Subsequent references to this work will be noted in parentheses in the text.

<sup>28</sup> These values closely echo those of Konrad Jarausch, père, whose letters from the Eastern front his son edited and published: *Das stille Sterben: Feldpostbriefe von Konrad Jarausch aus Polen und Russland 1939-1942*, Konrad H. Jarausch and Klaus J. Arnold, eds. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> For example, *The Once and Future School: Three Hundred and Fifty Years of American Secondary Education* (New York: Routledge, 1996); *And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture* (Madison: UP Wisconsin, 1991); as well as several later titles with specialized emphases.

<sup>30</sup> Mahlendorf, *Shame of Survival*, 115. Subsequent references to this work will be noted in parentheses in the text.

<sup>31</sup> Cynthia G. Franklin, *Academic Lives: Memoir, Cultural Theory, and the University Today* (Athens: U. Georgia Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> For example, Wibke Bruhns, *Meines Vaters Land: Geschichte einer deutschen Familie* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2004). Bruhns' father was executed as a co-conspirator in the July 20 plot. Monika Jetter, *Mein Kriegsvater*. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 2004). Jetter's father had joined the party in 1932 and remained a committed believer until the end of his life.

<sup>33</sup> Ritter, *Return to Dresden*, 7. Subsequent references to this work will be noted in parentheses in the text.

<sup>34</sup> Barry A. Kosin, Egon Mayer, and Ariela Keysar, *American Religious Identification Survey* (New York: Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Wüthrich, "Die Evangelische Gemeinschaft im deutschsprachigen Europa: Die Situation im Dritten Reich (1933-45)," in *Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche: Weg: Wesen und Auftrag des Methodismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschsprachigen Länder Europas*. Ed. Kurt Steckel and C. Ernst Sommer (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1982), 196.

<sup>36</sup> Wüthrich, "Evangelische Gemeinschaft," 203.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Honigmann, "Selbstporträt als Jüdin" (1990) *Damals, dann und danach* (München: Carl Hanser, 1999), 15-16.

<sup>38</sup> As refugees in the Erzgebirge after the firebombing, Ritter's brothers are taunted and pelted with stones by local children, 89.

<sup>39</sup> Frederic Tubach relates his discovery in 1959 that a fellow grad student's mother had died at Theresienstadt: "At that moment I woke up from the political somnolence that had enveloped most Germans since 1945 in their rush to rebuild their shattered economy and to forget the past, and for me, to build a life in America. It was a moment that defined the end of the conformist 1950s for me and had a profound effect on my political and social ethics." Tubach, *Uncommon Friendship*, 220-21. Similarly, Mahlendorf in the mid-1950s describes an encounter with a survivor, who had lost both parents: "Through Rita I was directly and personally confronted by what my countrymen had done to European Jewry, how grievously individual people and families had suffered. What had been the abstract ethical problem of collective guilt became an intensely personal issue that I still find difficult to resolve: What if I had been older? What would I have thought? Have done?" Mahlendorf, *Shame of Survival*, 328.

<sup>40</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1934), 147. Wharton is quoting William Dean Howells: "What the American public always wants is a tragedy with a happy ending."

<sup>41</sup> William Boelhower, "The Brave New World of Immigrant Autobiography," *Melus* 9.2 (Summer 1982), 6.

<sup>42</sup> McAdams, *The Redemptive Self*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

