

In the Shadow of the Family Tree:
Narrating Family History in *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2012

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ABSTRACT

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While debates over the memory and representation of the National Socialist past have dominated public discourse in Germany over the last forty years, the literary scene has been the site of experimentation with the genre of the autobiography, as authors developed new strategies for exploring their own relationship to the past through narrative. Since the late 1970s, this experimentation has yielded a series of autobiographical novels which focus not only on the authors' own lives, but on the lives and experiences of their family members, particularly those who lived during the NS era. In this dissertation, I examine the relationship between two waves of this autobiographical writing, the *Väterliteratur* novels of the late 1970s and 1980s in the BRD, and the current trend of multi-generational family narratives which began in the late 1990s.

In a prelude and three chapters, this dissertation traces the trajectory from *Väterliteratur* to the *Generationenromane* through readings of Bernward Vesper's *Die Reise* (1977), Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater* (1980), Ruth Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* (1979), Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2003), Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (1999), and Barbara Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (2004). I read these texts as examples of genealogical writing, in which protagonists seek to position themselves in relation to their family histories through the construction of family narrative. The formal similarities between the two trends – (inter)textual dialogue, hybridity of prose style, vignette or essayistic structure – cast their underlying differences into greater relief. While the author-narrators of *Väterliteratur* seek to reach a

definitive conclusion regarding the question of the father's complicity in Nazism, the authors of *Generationenromane* allow for greater nuance in categories such as victim and perpetrator. In both cases, however, the subjectivity of the individual protagonist shapes his or her engagement of the family past, as they seek to negotiate between personal family relationships and public discourses of collective memory in contemporary Germany.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mark M. Anderson for his guidance and support throughout the production of this thesis. I would also like to thank Andreas Huyssen, Harro Müller, Volker Berghahn, and Jonathan Skolnik for their helpful suggestions and for serving on my dissertation committee. I am indebted to Marianne Hirsch, Sigrid Weigel, and Ulrike Vedder for their support and encouragement in the early stages of my research, and to Kenneth Calhoon, for his committed guidance during my undergraduate years at the University of Oregon. My dissertation benefited immeasurably from the constructive feedback provided by Jana Klenhova and Hayoung Heidi Lee, as well as the members of the DFG-Graduiertenkolleg “Geschlecht als Wissenskategorie” at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

This project received financial support from the Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, and the Columbia University Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for this assistance.

I am especially thankful for the ongoing support of my family, that not-so-small army of Camerons, Lutys, Moes, Latteks, Crums, Weises, and Ilgs whose belief in me was always palpable, regardless of how many in-flight hours apart we were. And finally, I am grateful to my partner Michael Cameron-Latteck for doing his best to make my life happier and more rewarding.

Introduction

As the National Socialist period of German history retreats further into the past, it has increasingly become a matter for memory work. This work encompasses official acts of commemoration, the construction of memorials to victims of Nazi persecution, and events marking the anniversaries of key moments in the Nazi past, as well as the publication of interviews and memoirs of both prominent Nazis and Shoah survivors, and historiographic and sociological studies of patterns of memory of the German past. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, which came at a moment when the collective memory of the German past occupied an increasingly central position in public discourse, the stage was set for a new round of discussions over approaches to this memory work, and its position in a new conception of German identity. Accordingly, cultural studies scholars Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove have characterized the post-war period in German history as a time of “memory contests,” in which different views on the past constantly compete for prominence, no single way of thinking coming to dominate: the period is defined by discussion and debate, marking the absence of a single master narrative of German history.

In this climate of diverse political, cultural and social-scientific perspectives on the German twentieth century, the focus is generally on larger group categories: from victims to *Mitläufer* [tolerators of Nazism] and perpetrators, from the German nation to the specific West and East German experiences; from the SS and concentration camp guards to the Wehrmacht and the underground opposition to National Socialism; from the role of women in Nazism to conceptions of masculinity in the Third Reich. A counterweight to these broader identity categories is presented by autobiographical, biographical, and other similar texts that focus on a single

example, in which an individual experience is held up either as exemplary or as a particularly compelling problem case. When one considers family connections to the past, a new set of concepts, ideas, and problems emerges – not only the degree to which family members may have been complicit in the repression and persecution of the National Socialist and/or East German Communist regimes, but also interpersonal family relationships, the role of upbringing in subject formation, and the significance of family history for identity.

These issues are central for the two waves of autobiographical writing I examine in this dissertation: the *Väterliteratur* novels of the late 1970s and 1980s in West Germany, and the current trend of multi-generational family narratives – most commonly called “Generationenromane.” While debates over the memory and representation of the National Socialist past have dominated public discourse in Germany over the last forty years, the literary scene has been the site of experimentation with the genre of the autobiography, as authors developed new strategies for exploring their own relationship to the past through narrative. Beginning in the 1970s, with works of *Väterliteratur* such as Ruth Rehmann’s *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* (1979) and Christoph Meckel’s *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater* (1980), this experimentation has yielded a series of autobiographical novels which examine not only the authors’ own lives, but the lives and experiences of their family members, particularly those who lived during the Nazi era. While the *Väterliteratur* trend was short-lived, encompassing a dozen or so texts published from 1979 to 1981, its successor, the *Generationenromane*, began to appear in the late 1990s and have only begun to taper off in the 2010s. The latter wave, including Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* (1999), Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Stephan Wackwitz’s *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2003), and Barbara Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus*

meinem Leben (2004), continued the investigation of family history undertaken by *Väterliteratur*, but expanded its focus, tracing family roots through multiple generations.

The *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* texts are autobiographical investigations of family history that reconstruct a version of a family's past via a variety of sources, from the author-narrators' own memories to conversations with family members and friends, to letters, journals, photographs, and even historical research. In each text, the author-narrator discovers something new about his or her family past, and seeks to develop a new understanding of the family in accordance with this new information. As presentations of individual stories in the public domain, these works provide models for coming to terms with the German past on an individual basis, through the exploration of a particular family's experiences.

The two waves of this mode of autobiographical writing appear at distinct moments in postwar German memory culture – the *Väterliteratur* around 1980, and the *Generationenromane* around 2000. By exploring the questions that the texts poses and the answers they suggest, my dissertation reveals essential aspects of collective attitudes towards the past at these moments in postwar Germany. Further, comparing the narratives constructed and discourses employed by pairs of authors provides a unique look at how collective categories of thought can influence individual, particular engagements with family history and identity. As my research shows, patterns and strategies of these engagements with history have changed over the period from 1980 to the early 2000s, although the narrative styles of these autobiographical texts remain remarkably similar. Accordingly, the questions that guide my examination of the *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* include not only how they are different (and particularly, how does the shifted historical moment influence these engagements with the past), but also exactly how are they similar (i.e., what questions, assumptions, or textual strategies to they share)? As I show

in this dissertation, representative texts of the two trends demonstrate both the constructed nature of our understanding of the past, and the influence of subjective experience on an individual's reading of his or her family past. Still, the different attitudes towards these realities mark the two waves as distinct, and as the products of a particular moment in postwar German memory culture.

I. The *Väterliteratur* Trend around 1980

Väterliteratur was a short-lived yet important trend in the West German literature of the late 1970s and early 1980s, with a handful of contributions by German-language authors outside of the Federal Republic.¹ Although its time at the forefront of German-language literature was brief, *Väterliteratur* marked a turning point in post-war discourse on the Nazi past, bringing individual, personal family narratives into focus. The trend developed out of the “Neue Subjektivität” movement in earlier 1970s literature, which departed from the political engagement that characterized much writing and thinking popular in the late 1960s, in favor of a focus on individuality and subjective experience. With *Väterliteratur*, this interest in the personal sphere moves in a new direction, examining the lives of the protagonists' fathers together with those protagonists' experiences as a child of his or her father. That is, while works of “Neue Subjektivität” such as Karin Struck's *Klassenliebe* (1973), Peter Schneider's *Lenz* (1973), and Verena Stefan's *Häutungen* (1975) all explore individual subjective experience, this was

¹ Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1974) is often identified as an East German precursor to the *Väterliteratur* movement, although the text does not focus specifically on the father. The father's role in the Nazi past is central for West German and Austrian authors of *Väterliteratur*, but the one Swiss text frequently included in the trend – Heinrich Wiesner's *Der Riese am Tisch* (1979) – explores the father's position in the family exclusively, with no explicit connection to the historical context, and hence can only be understood as marginally part of the *Väterliteratur* phenomenon.

continued and expanded in *Väterliteratur*, which examines the experience of an individual family in a broader historical context.

Nearly all of the *Väterliteratur* texts appeared in the period from 1978-1980: Elisabeth Plessen's *Mitteilung an den Adel* (1976) is an early example, but the majority were published a few years later, including Paul Kersten's *Der alltägliche Tod meines Vaters* (1978), Sigfrid Gauch's *Vaterspuren* (1979), E.A. Rauter's *Brief an meine Erzieher*, Brigitte Schwaiger's *Lange Abwesenheit* (1980), Peter Härtling's *Nachgetragene Liebe* (1980), Jutta Schutting's *Der Vater* (1980), as well as the two examples I read in this dissertation: Ruth Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* (1979) and Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater* (1980). All of these texts follow a protagonist's reflection on his or her father's life and investigation of his ties to the Nazi regime, as well as that protagonist's own childhood relationship to the father. With the exception of Plessen's *Mitteilung an den Adel*, all of these texts are explicitly autobiographical; Plessen's protagonist has another name, but her biographical details correspond to the author's. The texts center on the role of so-called "Mitläufer," individuals who were not influential during the Nazi era, and who may not have identified themselves as National Socialists at the time; while they acquiesces to the regime, they were not the most powerful *Täter*.²

The *Väterliteratur* wave appeared at a transitional point in postwar German memory culture, when a moral imperative to confront the legacy of Nazism had gained wide acceptance but while this still predominantly took the form of exploring the experiences of Germans who were not victims of Nazi persecution. The reconstruction and *Wirtschaftswunder* of the late 1940s and the 1950s, over the course of which the denazification policies of the occupation forces gave way to a national concern with "democracy, stability, and integration into Europe

² The one exception here is Gauch's *Vaterspuren*. Gauch's father had been a *Reichsamtsleiter* in the SS, as well as an adjutant to Himmler, and remained unrepentant after the war.

and the West,”³ ushered in a new era of prosperity for the FRG, but did not call for critical engagement with Nazi past. The 1960s, however, brought a wave of revelations about the realities of National Socialism for the young generation just coming of age. The Eichmann trial in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials of 1963-1965, introduced this new generation to the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps, while the political controversies around the Nazi pasts of President Heinrich Lübke and Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger called attention to continuities between the National Socialist state and Adenauer’s government.

The student protests of the late 1960s, galvanized by these events, attacked the establishment from a critical, Marxist-influenced perspective, triggering a generation conflict whose after-effects stretched over decades, and which was frequently cited in responses to *Väterliteratur* texts. In the 1970s, the radical Leftist *Rote Armee Fraktion* continued to see connections to National Socialism in the FRG, linking capitalism with Nazism, and their extreme views found sympathy even with those who eschewed their violent methods. The deaths of the *RAF* leaders Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader in 1977, at the same time as the murder of *RAF* kidnap victim Hanns Martin Schleyer and the resolution of the Lufthansa Flight 181 hijacking crisis, marked the end of an era characterized by polarized political attitudes – between Marxism and capitalism, but also between attitudes towards the legacy of the Nazi period. On the one hand, a conservative older generation preferred to view National Socialism as part of an increasingly distant past whose significance for the present did not need critical examination, especially because of what they viewed as West Germany’s successful adoption of political democracy and its economic prosperity. On the other hand, the generation that reached maturity in the 1960s and 1970s called not only for a clear break in political leadership between the Nazi

³ Caroline Pearce, *Contemporary Germany and the Nazi Legacy. Remembrance, Politics and the Dialectic of Normality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 15.

state and the FRG, but also for increased engagement with the legacy of Nazism. This moral imperative to confront the past in turn becomes part of the reflective premise of the *Väterliteratur* trend.

In cultural terms, *Väterliteratur* drew upon contemporary currents of thought about representing the Nazi period. Literary scholar Keith Bullivant recognizes a shift towards the recognition of “everyday fascism” in the West German literature of the 1970s, pointing to texts like Walter Kempowski’s *Tadellöser & Wolff* (1971), Manfred Franke’s *Mordverläufe* (1973) and Peter O. Chotjewitz’s *Saumlos* (1979). Such texts raised questions about the role of the individual in National Socialism, and illustrated the pervasive presence of Nazism throughout German society at the time. Like these novels, *Väterliteratur* demonstrates curiosity the experiences of individuals in Nazi Germany and the socializing effects of upbringing and the family in this particular historical context (an important idea for major thinkers of the 1960s student movement, as well). Further, the *Väterliteratur* wave follows the tendency of the political and cultural discourse of the 1970s to engage with the Nazi past while exhibiting a persistent lack of attention to the experiences of the victims of Nazi persecution. Indeed, this pattern did not begin to change until the end of the decade, when the broadcast of the American miniseries *Holocaust* captured the attention of a broad viewing public in the FRG in 1979. The *Väterliteratur* texts, however, remain anchored in an engagement with the legacy of perpetration in the specific context of the family.

Perhaps the most important precursor of *Väterliteratur* in the literature of the 1970s is Bernward Vesper’s *Die Reise* (1977), which is frequently – though, to my mind, erroneously – also considered part of the *Väterliteratur* trend. Vesper’s text is widely read as a document of the 1968 student movement, in which he was an active participant, and as a source for insight into

the radical Leftist positions of the *RAF*, to which he was connected through his sometime girlfriend Gudrun Ensslin. The text also presents a deeply personal narrative of Nazism in the family, focusing on the author's relationship to his father Will Vesper, a poet and convinced Nazi whose extreme right-wing politics the son shared in his youth and young adulthood.

Although the *Väterliteratur* texts share the father focus of *Die Reise*, the authors of *Väterliteratur* as a rule do not identify with a political position as explicitly as Vesper does.⁴ In general, the *Väterliteratur* authors avoid political identifications in favor of a quasi-journalistic narrative voice that serves to authenticate their perspective as neutral and unbiased. The other important contrast between *Väterliteratur* and *Die Reise* stems from the figure of the father: in nearly every case, the fathers in the *Väterliteratur* texts never ascribed wholeheartedly to National Socialism, and certainly did not maintain such political beliefs after 1945, as Will Vesper did.

Stylistically, the *Väterliteratur* trend (and Vesper's *Die Reise*) also owes a debt to the *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität* of the 1960s and 1970s. The integration of primary-source material in documentary texts such as Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (1965) or Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Kurze Sommer der Anarchie* (1972) is a strategy also employed by authors of *Väterliteratur*, who frequently reproduce journal excerpts, letters, or other documents in their texts. Similarly, *Väterliteratur* follows the *Neue Subjektivität* trend in examining personal experience in writing, via the integration of reflective passages seeking to evoke an emotional state. Combining the concern with individual experience of *Neue Subjektivität* and the research

⁴ Indeed, the only text to do this is Elisabeth Plessen's *Mitteilung an den Adel* (1976), which is an outlier in several respects: it is fictionalized, it appears a few years before both Vesper's *Die Reise* and the rest of the *Väterliteratur* wave, and the father/daughter conflict depicted in the novel is politicized, the Socialist daughter struggling against her aristocratic father.

and compilation techniques of *Dokumentarliteratur*, the *Väterliteratur* movement drew on prevailing narrative strategies in its autobiographical approach to the Nazi past.

Beyond this, however, *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität* also have in common a tangible claim to authenticity in their narratives. This is another trait they share with *Väterliteratur*, and which marks the latter trend's cultural-historical standpoint. *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität* both deploy what Christoph Zeller calls the "Ästhetik des Authentischen," by explicitly marking their narrative subjectivity.⁵ In the documentary texts, which usually had a clear leftist political bent, this is realized either through statements reflecting the political views and social location of the narrator or (in works like Wallraff's) through a compilation of primary-source materials reflecting the author's political agenda. In the works of *Neue Subjektivität*, an authentic effect is achieved through the representation of deeply personal subjective states - here, the readiness to reveal intimate feelings and experiences marks the narrative perspective as honest and forthright.

Most importantly for an understanding of *Väterliteratur*, the authentic claim of all these literary movements also implies referentiality – *Dokumentarliteratur* and works of *Neue Subjektivität* are presented as reflections of a documentary or autobiographical reality. Zeller calls attention to the constructed nature of this aesthetic gesture, describing the "vermittelte Unmittelbarkeit" characteristic of this literature of the '60s and '70s. It is important to note, however, that this acknowledgement of the mediation inherent in representation is an analytical observation of the literary critic, and is not part of the narrative perspective of the relevant texts themselves. They subscribe to the notion that "das Authentische bildet den Gegenentwurf zu

⁵ Christoph Zeller, *Ästhetik des Authentischen. Literatur und Kunst um 1970* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010) 1-9.

einer medial vermittelten Wirklichkeit,”⁶ and remain in this mode of authentic reportage or testimony, deriving their interest value from that gesture of candor.

This faith in the power of language to truthfully represent a chosen referent persists in the *Väterliteratur* texts, I argue, which firmly locates this trend, together with *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität*, in the time period before a post-Structuralist critique of referentiality and master narratives took hold in the public consciousness. In general, the *Väterliteratur* texts adhere to the idea of a cohesive “master” narrative of their family history, and the authors struggle to fit their fathers into either a positive or negative model, one which is primarily derived from their own subjective experience of the man as a father. Although the reader can recognize the work of selection and interpretation through which the image of the father is constructed, the narrative perspective of the texts is positioned as authentic and authoritative, following the models of *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität*. At the same time, the two works of *Väterliteratur* I examine in this dissertation bear some markings of occupying a place on the cusp of this new critical turn, incorporating a few moments of reflection on the constructive work of their narratives that cast a periodic shadow over the otherwise authoritative pose of their narrative voices.

In terms of genre, then, the *Väterliteratur* trend borrows elements from traditional autobiography, literary fiction and reportage, forming a generic hybrid that, despite the stylistic sophistication that some examples achieve, is still very concerned with establishing a family-historical record, aiming to reveal or discover “how things were” in the family past. This distinguishes the *Väterliteratur* texts from later literary engagements with the past, such as novels by W.G. Sebald, Bernhard Schlink or Emine Sevgi Özdamar, who all draw on

⁶ Zeller 1.

biographical and historical experiences as a basis for literature, but whose texts do not represent interventions into the family archive. *Väterliteratur* must also be distinguished from the collections of interviews with the children of prominent Nazis, which saw a surge in the 1980s, following the interviews with Rolf Mengele, son of the Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele, that appeared in *Bunte Illustrierte* in 1985.⁷ While these journalistic or sociological projects examine the legacy of Nazism in the families of the most powerful perpetrators, *Väterliteratur* texts are literary works by established authors of fiction, and they focus on fathers whose potential guilt resides in supporting the Nazi regime, be it actively or passively. These are not narratives of the discovery that the father is a murderer.

This last is a key thematic characteristic of the *Väterliteratur* trend: the texts typically explore a gray area of guilt and responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism. In general, these texts focus on individuals who played only a very small role in the Nazi system and were not directly responsible for the gruesome crimes committed by Nazis – with the exception of Sigfrid Gauch’s contribution, the fathers of *Väterliteratur* are neither members of the SS nor

⁷ This two-part series, in which Rolf Mengele that his father, the famed “Angel of Death” Auschwitz doctor Josef Mengele, had lived in hiding in Brazil until his death in 1979, was followed by a series of related works by both literary authors and historians. In 1987, former ‘68er Peter Schneider published *Vati*, a fictional first-person account of a son’s relationship with his Nazi criminal father, who had hidden in a South American country after the war; Schneider based his imaginings on Rolf Mengele’s interviews. Also in 1987, Niklas Frank published *Der Vater: Eine Abrechnung* (initially serialized in the magazine *Stern*) about his father, Hans Frank, governor-general of Nazi-occupied Poland, who was executed after being tried in Nuremberg. Where Rolf Mengele had come to defend his father, Niklas Frank castigated his, mixing fantasies of his father’s execution with sexual fantasies. In the same year, two more non-fictional accounts appeared: *Schuldig geboren*, Peter Sichrovsky’s collection of interviews with the children of Nazis, and Dörte von Westernhagen’s *Die Kinder der Täter: Das Dritte Reich und die Generation danach*, an analysis of the psychological effects of the National Socialist past on the children of former Nazis with several case studies. Several similar publications followed shortly, including Israeli historian Dan Bar On’s *Legacy of Silence* (1989; German translation *Die Last des Schweigens* 1993) and American journalist Gerald Posner’s *Hitlers Children: Sons and Daughters of Leaders of the Third Reich Talk about their Fathers and Themselves* (1991).

concentration camp guards. And although many served in the Wehrmacht, these works do not contain revelations of atrocities committed by “ordinary” soldiers. Instead, most of the fathers in these texts represent the contingent of Nazi German society who adjusted their lives to Hitler’s regime, either refusing to believe in or refusing to outright oppose Nazism’s extreme ideas and measures. Some were aided in their professional lives by the political and institutional changes brought in by the Nazis while others hindered by them. Nearly all of them distanced themselves from Hitler and National Socialist ideology after the war’s end. The stories presented in *Väterliteratur* are thus familiar ones: individuals who, explicitly or tacitly, supported the Nazi system disavowed it later, leaving the next generation to discover in surprise that their family had participated in the Nazi state, and was indeed not an exception.

The fathers of the two author-narrators whose texts I examine in Chapter 1 – Christoph Meckel’s father Eberhard Meckel, a poet and literary critic, and Ruth Rehmann’s father Reinhold Rehmann, a Protestant minister – fit this model: neither subscribed explicitly to Nazi ideology, and neither officially joined the National Socialist Party, but both managed to live more or less comfortably in Nazi Germany. Still, both Christoph Meckel and Ruth Rehmann describe a moment of revelation upon learning that his or her father bore some sympathy for or acceptance of Nazism. This new knowledge, gained through discovered journals or letters, or through conversations with the father’s confidants, leads the author-narrators to re-examine their understanding of their family history and their own identity. In their texts, they attempt to incorporate this new understanding of their fathers into a new narrative of his life and their own.

II. The *Generationenromane* Trend around 2000

The trend of fictional and autobiographical multi-generation family narratives that began in the late 1990s, generally referred to as *Generationenromane* (or, occasionally, simply *Familienromane*⁸), is a much broader literary phenomenon than *Väterliteratur*. The trend includes more texts overall, a wider variety of experiences than those of the earlier father-focused works, and contains more fictional novels than is the case with father literature, although a slight majority of *Generationenromane* are indeed autobiographical. Beginning in the late 1990s and continuing through today, the boom of generation texts comes after years of public discussion of German collective responsibility for both perpetrating and remembering the Holocaust, as well as substantial investment in local and national memorials to the victims of the Nazi regime. Like the *Väterliteratur* texts, these works turn their attention inward, toward the experiences of individual families before, during, and after the Nazi era. While the earlier trend focused solely on the role of fathers, however, the *Generationenromane* cast a wider view, asking what connections they can make across multiple generations and what implications the actions and experiences of familial predecessors can have for the identity and self-understanding of their children and grandchildren.

I paint this characterization of *Generationenromane* in broad strokes in order to reflect the myriad intergenerational constellations and thematic focuses of works in this trend. Because this

⁸ One of the few monographs on this trend, Friedricke Eigler's *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende*, favors the previous term, and I follow her model in my study. The term is preferable in two ways: it distinguishes this group of texts from the classical realist family novels of the 19th and early 20th century, and it underscores the importance of the connection between multiple generations in the texts. Further, unlike the term "family novel," *Generationenroman* points to the importance of the collective socio-cultural context for this trend, as the term "generation" signifies both a collection of similar-aged individuals within a society *and* a succession of members of a family. As I seek to show, both aspects of the term are key for understanding this trend. It is unfortunate that the term that has become most accepted – *Generationenroman* – characterizes the trend as "novels," as this suggests a greater degree of fictionality in the genre than is actually present.

diversity is so crucial for understanding the trend of *Generationenromane*, I will briefly sketch the variety of family constellations and narrative approaches it contains. In the first place, many of the texts correspond to cultural critic Sigrid Weigel's description of the trend as marked by the "Hinwendung zur Generation der Großeltern," but *which* generation the grandparents belong to varies greatly from text to text.⁹ A grandfather or grandmother is a central figure, for example, in Zafer Senocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998), Kathrin Schmidt's *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition* (1998), Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* (1999), Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (2002), Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* (2003), Tanja Dückers's *Himmelskörper* (2003), Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* (2003), Sophie Dannenberg's *Das bleiche Herz der Revolution* (2004), Thomas Medicus's *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (2004), John von Düffel's *Houwelandt* (2004), Arno Geiger's *Es geht uns gut* (2005), Katrin Himmler's *Die Brüder Himmler* (2005), and Christina von Braun's *Stille Post* (2007). Although grandparents figure prominently in all of these texts, the generations and experiences those grandparents represent are quite different. Some authors examine – at least in part – grandparents' activities during the Nazi period: Wackwitz, Dannenberg, Medicus, Geiger, and Himmler all present stories of grandparents who to varying degrees supported Hitler and Nazism, while Senocak and Maron present Jewish experiences and von Braun's grandmother, the focus of her autobiographical account, participated in the resistance. Further, several of these texts are concerned with the East German past to an equal or greater extent as they are with the Nazi past; this is true of Kathrin Schmidt's and Monika Maron's texts, as well as that of Reinhard Jirgl.

While many generation texts examine the lives of grandparents, a significant number focus on a closer family member: Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* (2003), Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den*

⁹ Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik. Generation, Tradition, und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006) 89.

Kriegen (2004), and Wibke Bruhns's *Meines Vaters Land* (2004) all focus primarily on fathers, while Barbara Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (2004) examines the life of the author's mother, as does Maron's *Pawels Briefe* to a significant degree. A handful of texts in the *Generationenromane* wave are even devoted to siblings: Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Der Verlorene* (1998) and Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003) both showcase authors' efforts to come to terms with the shadowy memory of an older brother, lost during the war. In this group of *Generationenromane*, a variety of perspectives appear once again: Hahn's and Leupold's fathers were Wehrmacht soldiers, Timm's brother was in the SS, Bruhns's father was Hans Georg Klamroth, part of the July 20, 1944 assassination plot against Hitler, Honigmann's mother was a Austrian-Jewish Communist, and Treichel's brother was lost as an infant while their parents fled their now-Polish East Prussian homes. The diversity of the *Generationenromane* hence includes many iterations of inter-generational relationships: many of the texts that examine the lives of the protagonists' grandparents also include some consideration of their parents. This is the case for Maron, Dückers, Dannenberg, Geiger, Schmidt, Jirgl, and von Düffel.

As I noted above, although the majority of the *Generationenromane* are autobiographical, this is not uniformly the case. While many authors explicitly make Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" of matching the author's name with the narrator-protagonist's name, including Wackwitz, Timm, Maron, Honigmann, Leupold, Medicus, Himmler, Bruhns and von Braun, others contain elements of both autobiography and fiction (Senocak, Dückers, Dannenberg, Hahn) and still others are entirely fictional (Schmidt, Jirgl, von Düffel, Geiger). Considering all of these texts together, we can identify the *Generationenromane* as a hybrid form, containing (to different degrees in any particular text) elements of the realist family novel, the traditional autobiography, and even biography. The works typically lack the omniscient

narrator and a flowing, continuous narrative style of the traditional family novel (best represented by Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*), adopting instead an "investigative" narrative strategy in which a younger member of the family reconstructs the life stories of earlier generations through a montage of memories, conversations, documents, and photographs. The majority of *Generationenromane* that have some autobiographical element contrast with the traditional form of the genre (in the model of Augustine and Rousseau) in their multi-generational focus and non-linear structure, although they share autobiography's discursive self-creation. Such texts, including the four I examine in this dissertation, share the traditional family novel's concern with inheritance, origins, and inter-generational dynamics while also taking advantage of the possibility of narrative self-invention offered by traditional autobiography.

With this degree of variation among the texts of the *Generationenroman* wave, it is important to ask what binds the works together as a discernible trend. In addition to the protagonist who researches his or her family history through a variety of media (a feature even of the fictional generation novels), these texts share a sense of restoration, and a new openness towards possibilities of connecting with the past. The protagonists display a willingness to acknowledge their family past, to try to understand its significance for their own present identity, and this is not subsumed by the gesture of rejection of the more sinister moments of the German past. At the same time, the *Generationenromane* contain a strong measure of ambivalence and unease, as they seek to negotiate murky moral ground while constructing narratives that introduce elements of continuity despite the ruptures that also define their family histories. This remains the case regardless of which political upheavals –the Nazi era, the division of Germany, the East German Communist regime, or the student revolts of the late 1960s and 1970s – play the most central role for the particular text.

For this project, I have chosen examples of the *Generationenroman* trend that reflect its variety of themes and generational perspectives. In Chapter 2, I examine two works for which the Nazi past is a central concern: Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land*. Chapter 3 explores two texts that focus on the GDR Communist past – Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe* and Barbara Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* – and for which the Nazi period plays a less dominant role. These four texts also illustrate the variety of generational identities in the genre: Timm, whose text examines his father and brother, belongs to the so-called “'68 generation,” while Wackwitz is ten years Timm's junior and is primarily interested in linking his own and his grandfather's lives. Maron and Honigmann are of similar age – both born in the 1940s – and both focus on their mothers' experiences in the GDR, but while Maron also reconstructs her grandfather's life, that generation makes only marginal appearances in Honigmann's text. These four texts are all explicitly autobiographical investigations of family history, and this reflects the fact that the autobiographical mode is still the most prototypical for the *Generationenromane*. Accordingly, the texts most commonly discussed as representative of this literary trend – those by Maron, Wackwitz, and Timm, as well as Treichel – do claim autobiographical status.¹⁰

The *Generationenromane* appear at a strikingly different moment in postwar German history than the *Väterliteratur*. The period around 2000 finds West and East Germany reunified under a coalition government of the Socialists and the Green Party, another generation distant from the Nazi era, and now confronted with the legacy of two repressive governments: the National Socialists and the GDR Communist regime. Holocaust experiences came to dominate

¹⁰ The autobiographical pose is more complicated in Senocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft*, as his text moves through different narrative modes, not all of which explicitly mark the narrator as identical to the author.

the historical narrative in the 1980s and after, as *Alltagsgeschichte* came in vogue in popular history, and museums and memorials to the victims of National Socialism were constructed by the local and national governments. Indeed, the 1980s and 1990s were punctuated by a series of incidents that triggered public discussion of how best to engage with the legacy of Nazism. Kohl's remark about the Gnade der späten Geburt and the visit to Bitburg gave occasion for exchanges about who has responsibility for the legacy of Nazism and honoring its victims, and what symbolic acts are acceptable. Also in the 80s, the *Historikerstreit*, centered on the exchange of articles between Ernst Nolte and Jürgen Habermas, asked the German public to choose between competing narratives about the Holocaust and its singularity. This debate was especially significant because it brought competing master narratives about the Nazi era to public attention, moving a dispute among historians into the public sphere, and initiating a much broader conversation about the relationship to the past and what is at stake in the narratives we develop to understand that relationship.

The reunification of Germany in 1990 also brought together competing narratives about the National Socialist past, as the anti-Fascist discourse through which the GDR had distanced itself from Nazism and the legacy of persecution clashed with the FRG's gradual acknowledgment of collective responsibility for the Nazi past. In this respect, as in many other aspects of reunification, the West German narrative of shared responsibility took the dominant role after 1990. Public debates over how that collective duty towards the past should be honored persisted in the 1990s however, in the controversy over the design and construction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (designed in 1997, erected in Berlin 2003-2004), the debates over the portrayal of "average Germans" in both Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996) and the *Wehrmachtausstellung* (first exhibited 1995-1999). With so many different

players in Nazi Germany who had now had time in the public eye – from the high-level perpetrators to the “average German” and the *Wehrmacht* soldier to the Jewish, Communist, Catholic, homosexual, Sinti and Roma victims of Nazi persecution – and a diverse understandings of that past (as a singular, exceptional moment in history, or as a response to the perceived threat of Communism, or as a strictly Fascist, dictatorial phenomenon), that no singular master narrative about that past can hold sway universally. In this context, the diversity of perspectives and narratives within the *Generationenromane* trend reflects the variety of discourses circulating in the public sphere around 2000.

Of course, the retreat of a singular discourse about the German past after 1980 is also linked to the spread of post-Structuralist criticisms of master narratives and notions of objective truth into the public consciousness. As Michel Foucault asserts in his “Archaeology of Knowledge,” for example, “historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge,”¹¹ a phenomenon that was actively visible in the public discourse on interpreting the Nazi past in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. This aspect of the cultural context around 2000 also influences the narrative perspective in the *Generationenromane*. Not only does one encounter texts with a variety of historical experiences, but the narrators’ explorations of their own family history in the larger German context lack the presumption of referentiality that is visible in *Väterliteratur*. Rather than seeking to establish “how things were” in Ranke’s quasi-objective sense, as the *Väterliteratur* protagonists did, the narrators of *Generationenromane* exhibit an awareness that their understanding of their family history reflects their own needs and perceptions more than any historical “truth.”

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972) 5.

III. Reading *Väterliteratur* with the *Generationenromane*

Since the early 2000s, interest in the *Generationenromane* phenomenon has grown among scholars of German literature and culture, from individual essays on individual works to monographs such as Friedrike Eigler's *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (2005), Caroline Schaumann's *Memory Matters. Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature* (2008), and Ariane Eichenberg's *Familie – Ich – Nation. Narrative Analysen zeitgenössischer Generationenromane* (2009). In this scholarship, it has become commonplace for discussions the *Generationenromane* to treat *Väterliteratur* only cursorily, briefly noting it as a predecessor of the later trend's focus on narratives of personal family history. My project seeks to correct what I view as a common misrepresentation of the relationship between *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*, which holds the earlier trend to be a kind of immature foil to the later texts, and which also misunderstands the historical context of *Väterliteratur*, tying it much too closely with the 1968 student movement.

The tendency to mark *Väterliteratur* as a precursor to the *Generationenromane* rightly reflects the many similarities between the narrative and discursive strategies of the two trends. Both trace a (usually autobiographical) protagonist's investigation of his or her family history and both share a thematic focus on the individual's role in the oppressive regimes of the German twentieth century. Further, the texts of both trends present protagonists who engage with a variety of media in order to understand their family histories: protagonists examine evidence from their own familial archives (including photos, letters, and journals), from conversations with family members, friends, and authorities, and also from publicly-available sources, including historical texts, museum exhibits, documentary films, and news media. In both trends,

the texts are equally devoted to the individual's construction of his or own subjectivity within the context of family history and to that individual's narrative investigation of his or her family's past.

Although most critics who discuss the *Generationenromane* phenomenon mark its connection to the father texts, they tend to do so by asserting a sharp contrast between the two. In such readings, *Väterliteratur* appears as a caricature; the trend is erroneously cast as portraying rupture between generations of the family, while narratives of intergenerational continuity characterize the current trend. This is stated succinctly by Aleida Assmann, in her *Wiener Vorlesungen* (2006) on the topic of "Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilstrukturen": "während die *Väterliteratur* im Zeichen der Individuierung und des *Bruchs* stand – ihr thematisches Zentrum war die Konfrontation, die Auseinandersetzung, die Abrechnung mit dem Vater –, steht der Familienroman eher im Zeichen der *Kontinuität*."¹² In the previous year, Friederike Eigler had made a similar observation in her *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende*: in contrast to the generation texts, she claims, "sind viele Texte der Väterliteratur aus einer Position moralischer Überlegenheit konzipiert; indem sich die Erzähler als Opfer der patriarchal strukturierten Kleinfamilie und autoritärer Verhaltensweisen der Vätergeneration darstellen, drohen aber die eigentlichen Opfer von Krieg und Holocaust verdrängt zu werden."¹³ Following the trend, Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner take this position in the introduction to their edited volume *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933-1945. (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture* (2006), asserting that "the bipolar generational constellation of

¹² Aleida Assmann, *Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilsstrukturen in der neuen deutschen Erinnerungsliteratur. Wiener Vorlesungen im Rathaus*, ed. Hubert Christian Ehalt, vol. 117, (Wien: Picus 2006) 26.

¹³ Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2005) 25.

earlier *Väterliteratur* [...] - marked by the younger generation's accusation and moral condemnation of its father's generation and, hence, a breach between the generations - cedes to the idea of continuity and connections via family relationships in the "family novel."¹⁴ More examples could be cited here,¹⁵ but the pattern of these characterizations is already clear: *Väterliteratur* author/protagonists seek to assign guilt to their fathers, using accusations of Nazi sympathies to justify a personal break with the father, which is symbolically represents the author/protagonist's own disavowal of Germany's Nazi past. While these authors rightly recognize *Väterliteratur* as a precursor to the *Generationenromane*, they misread the relationship between the two movements, overstating their differences and neglecting their similarities.¹⁶

A different picture of *Väterliteratur* emerges, however, in studies that focus solely on the 1980 trend, especially studies that closely analyze individual works. Where the critics cited

¹⁴ Eigler 12.

¹⁵ Caroline Schaumann views the *Väterliteratur* trend similarly in her 2008 study of the Nazi past in literature by women, where she describes the works as "identifying the father as either perpetrator or bystander. Narrators generally accused their fathers of abusing authority and power, and lacking parental love." Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters. Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 140. See also Sigrid Weigel on the *Väterliteratur* trend: "Dadurch daß in dieser Literatur sich die Rhetorik von Angriff und Anklage der Söhne (und Töchter) gegen die Eltern richtet, führte diese Konstellation zu einem in historischer Hinsicht prekären Effekt: Insofern die Kinder sich darin selbst als Opfer der »Täter-Väter« begreifen, sind sie an die Stelle der realen Opfer der NS-Geschichte getreten und haben auf diese Weise zur wiederholten Verdrängung der historischen Opfer beigetragen." Weigel, *Genea-Logik*, 101.

¹⁶ The majority of these mis-characterizations of *Väterliteratur* are rooted in the notion that Bernhard Versper's *Die Reise* is paradigmatic for the trend. As I have noted above, Versper's text not only predates *Väterliteratur* by several years (written between 1969 and his death in 1971), but is also much more closely linked to the political movements of the late 1960s. In *Die Reise*, Versper projects his extreme Marxist political views onto a narrative of his childhood; here, the father is indeed angrily attacked as a representative of the "Nazi generation." While Versper's text shares with *Väterliteratur* a deep sense of emotional ambivalence – he wrestles with persistent feelings of identification with his father – the vitriolic tone of his attack is unique and not to be found among central texts of the *Väterliteratur* trend.

above see antagonism and rupture in the father texts, this other group sees mourning and ambivalence. In her 1994 essay on Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, Barbara Kosta observes that the *Väterliteratur* texts display "an elegiac tenor of loss," arguing that "a sense of loss and emotional impoverishment feeds these narratives."¹⁷ Similarly, in her 2006 study, Anne Fuchs argues that the works demonstrate a "longing for tradition, [...] a need for tradition and heritage."¹⁸ Both Kosta and Fuchs argue that a sense of loss pervades the father texts despite or in addition to the elements of confrontation and critical examination that also characterize them. Jochen Vogt is also interested in this ambivalent quality in his 1998 reading of Meckel's *Suchbild*: Vogt stresses the "Einführung hinter dem Zorn" of Meckel's engagement with his father, observing that "Vorwurf und Anklage bleiben durchsetzt von Liebe, von Trauer um nicht erfahrene Liebe, auch vom Schuldgefühl, das Gespräch mit dem lebenden Vater versäumt zu haben."¹⁹ Even Tilman Moser, who devotes the majority of his 1985 essay on Meckel's *Suchbild* to an analysis of the Oedipal confrontation it presents, is struck by the amount of affection he finds in the text on another reading – the text exhibits "nachgeholte Trauer" as much as it does "nachgeholte Wut."²⁰

¹⁷ Barbara Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography. Women's Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 92, 93.

¹⁸ Anne Fuchs, "The Tinderbox of Memory: Generation and Masculinity in *Väterliteratur* by Christoph Meckel, Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Dagmar Leupold," *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006) 44.

¹⁹ Jochen Vogt, "Er fehlt, er fehlte, er hat gefehlt... Ein Rückblick auf die sogenannte *Väterbücher*," *Deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur und der Holocaust*, ed. Stephan Braese, et. al. (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998) 393.

²⁰ Tilman Moser, *Romane als Krankengeschichten: Über Handke, Meckel und Martin Walser* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 49.

My own readings of *Väterliteratur* follow the example of Kosta, Fuchs, Vogt, and Moser, recognizing the emotional ambivalence of the texts' engagement with family history. Critics who focus primarily on the newer *Generationenromane* seek to differentiate that trend from the earlier *Väterliteratur*, and this leads them to over-emphasize the role of intergenerational break in the father texts. The shift toward narratives of continuity in family history that critics identify in the generation texts seems more visible and significant when projected against the background of an earlier insistence on familial disconnection. However, such descriptions oversimplify the complex exploration of individual responsibility for Nazism and its role in family memory that takes place in *Väterliteratur* texts.

The critical literature on the *Generationenromane* has focused on several aspects of the trend, but the common mode is a celebratory tone that revels in the diversity of perspectives and the creative staging of memory work that emerges in the texts. In some respects, scholars are right to do so: through these texts, a multiplicity of experiences are given voice in the public sphere and can function as a counterweight to collective modes of remembering – such as memorials and museums – that tend to recognize larger groups rather than individuals. On the other hand, however, many of these scholarly responses display a reluctance to critically engage with the representative and narrative choices made by the author-narrators.

For example, in her study of memory and history in the generation texts, Friederike Eigler examines “die literarischen Erinnerungsdiskurse in den Generationenromanen [...] in Hinblick auf ihr Verhältnis zu dominanten Erinnerungspraktiken im öffentlichen und familiären Bereich.”²¹ Focusing in particular on the media of memory employed in texts representative of the trend, Eigler observes that they “zeichnen sich [...] durch eine erweiterte historische

²¹ Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende*, 13.

Perspektive aus sowie durch literarische Darstellungsweisen, die zum einen von einem hohen Grad an Distanz und Reflexion zeugen, zum anderen von einer Bereitschaft zur Empathie und zur affektiven Annäherung an die eigenen Vorfahren.”²² There is implicit praise evident in Eigler’s tone – and of course, broadened perspectives, increased reflection and empathy are generally considered positive traits. But, in the *Generationenromane*, “Distanz und Reflexion” can – and do – appear in the form of rationalization of an ancestor’s Nazi sympathies, while a “Bereitschaft zur Empathie” can have more selfish, personal motivations. Eigler’s summary of the significance of this literary trend leaves little space for a critical engagement with the representative and narrative choices made by the author-narrators.

While I appreciate Eigler’s framing of her project, in her effort to present a thoroughly detailed portrait of the memory work undertaken in the *Generationenromane*, her treatment of individual works also suffers from a reluctance to examine how the elements she observes interact in the narratives overall. For example, Eigler provides a near-exhaustive catalogue of Stephan Wackwitz’s references to the uncanny, but she stops short of providing a reading of the function of these uncanny moments in Wackwitz’s *Ein unsichtbares Land*. As I show in Chapter 3, however, understanding the role of uncanny motifs in Wackwitz’s text is essential for understanding the author’s confrontation of his family’s past. His work demonstrates some of the problematic possibilities of the distance from master narratives and the emphasis on personal experiences and personal interpretations that Eigler appreciates. In my view, the *Generationenromane* offer as many troubling approaches to the past as they do model ones.

Like Eigler’s study, Ariane Eichenberg’s *Familie – Ich – Nation* provides a broad picture of the *Generationenromane* phenomenon through a near-encyclopedic review of themes, motifs,

²² Eigler 25.

discourses, perspectives, and narrative structures in the trend. In contrast to many other researchers, Eichenberg devotes a full chapter of her monograph to a discussion of *Väterliteratur* in relation to the generation texts. She rightly rejects the simple opposition of the father texts as marked by “Bruch und Abrechnung” while the newer multi-generational narratives exhibit an interest in “Kontinuität und Verstehen-Wollen.”²³ For Eichenberg, the similarities between the two trends are overwhelming: she sees “erstaunlich viele gemeinsame Merkmale” in them, including the focus on a protagonist coming to terms with his or her own subjectivity as well as the motivation to better understand what she terms “das große deutsche Schweigen” and the link between personal moral actions and system-contingent forces and necessities.²⁴ Eichenberg is especially struck by the discursive similarities in the two trends, pointing in particular to “das Erzählen auf zwei Zeitebenen, die Verschränkung derselben durch verschiedene Techniken, die Selbstreferenzialität, das heißt, die Thematisierung der Suche, die Arbeit mit Dokumenten und Materialmontage...”²⁵ On the one hand, I welcome Eichenberg’s acknowledgment of the substantial continuities between the *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* trends, which make a compelling argument for examining the two movements together. On the other hand, however, I think it is just as important to maintain the distinction between the father texts and the generation texts: the late 1970s in the FRG were a very different moment in public discourse about the past than the turn of the 21st century in reunified Germany. As my own research shows, this difference shapes authors’ approach to the past tangibly.

²³ Ariane Eichenberg, *Familie - Ich - Nation: Narrative Analysen zeitgenössischer Generationenromane* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2009) 18.

²⁴ Eichenberg 34.

²⁵ *ibid.*

In investigating the generation texts, Eichenberg seeks to detail the variety of strategies and the diversity of perspectives that appear in the texts' engagement with family and collective history. As is the case in Eigler's study, however, the format Eichenberg chooses for her research – organizing chapters thematically – captures the broader scope of the *Generationenroman* trend while her view of the texts themselves remains somewhat out of focus. Because she treats elements of the texts separately – discussing the media of memory in one chapter and German-Jewish perspectives in another, for example – she does not give herself an opportunity to investigate how they interact within a particular text. This tendency leads Eichenberg to celebrate the nuance and range of attitudes she locates in the generation texts without reflecting critically on the selective construction of an image of the past – emphases and omissions – of any one text. This missed opportunity for critical reflection results in some strange conclusions about the significance of the *Generationenroman* trend. Pointing to the texts' suggestions of general and typical aspects of their individual stories, Eichenberg argues that “auf der Ebene der Erzählung bedeutet das, dass die Vielfalt der Dokumente, der Situationen, Zeiten, Räume und Figuren ein idealiter [*sic*] tableauartiges Bild der Ereignisse erzeugt, dass gerade in seiner Widersprüchlichkeit Objektivität mit sich bringt.”²⁶ In my own comparisons of generation texts, I find that it is not objectivity that these texts present, but rather the intersection of subjective experiences (or subjectivity-shaping experiences) and broader collective categories of experience. A consideration of this insistence on the validity of subjective meanings for the engagement with the past – even when this occurs in the public sphere – is key, to my mind, for understanding the *Generationenroman* trend.

²⁶ Eichenberg 174.

While the scholarship on *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* thus far has tended to misrepresent the relationship between the two trends, whether *Väterliteratur* is caricatured as an angry diatribe or the difference between the two trends is elided, my project seeks to shed more light on this connection. I view the two trends as inextricably tied to their historical and discursive context, and the similarities of their narrative strategies – first-person narration, combining personal reflection and engagement with memory media, often integrating documents or photos into the text – facilitate a comparison of their intervention in their contexts. By investigating pairs of representative works of *Väterliteratur* (in Chapter 1) and the *Generationenromane* (in Chapters 2 and 3), I seek to identify the nature of each trend's contribution to cultural memory and its significance.

As my readings show, the *Väterliteratur* texts are concerned with establishing a definitive picture of who the father was, asserting the authority of their image of the father even as their narratives attest to the subjective nature of their own investigations. The *Generationenromane*, on the other hand, are more openly subjective in this respect: I recognize in their nuance and complexity an ethical assertion that the individual has a right to his or her own understanding of the past, the right to construct a narrative (or multiple narratives) of family history that best suits their subjective needs. Exploring how the *Väterliteratur* author-narrators attempt to reconcile different images of the father and how the *Generationenromane* author-narrators weigh the utility and significance of different understandings of family history, this dissertation illuminates a shift in thinking about the German past, from a rigid conception of complicity to a more differentiated view of victim and perpetrator identities.

Further, my analyses of representative texts highlights the hazards and challenges unique to each moment in the post-war memory culture: while *Väterliteratur* authors struggle to fit their

emotional ties into an image of the father as a tacit supporter of the Nazi regime, the *Generationenromane* attest to the limits of an embrace of subjectivity as an approach to the past, showing how this can lead to the exclusion or appropriation of victim experiences. As a whole, my study calls attention to what is at stake in individual engagements with history, and the importance of critical reflections on the responsibility to remember the past.

IV. *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* as Acts of Memory

In sections II and III of this introduction, I have positioned *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* within postwar German memory culture around 1980 and 2000, respectively. But the texts in these trends must themselves also be understood as performing acts of memory in the public sphere. Maurice Halbwachs, distinguishing collective memory from history in his foundational study, published in 1950, underscores that remembering is always an engagement with the past that is tied to the specific needs of the present, and that the past is only available to the present in mediated form.²⁷ This neatly describes the basic premise of *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*. The reconstruction of the past undertaken in these texts always remains fully anchored in the present perspective and is viewed through the lens of the experiences of the author-narrator, while also being accessed through media, from personal recollections and conversations with “witnesses” to documents and photographs.

Following from Halbwachs, Jan Assmann subdivides collective memory into communicative and cultural memory, and it is in regards to these two categories that the *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* trends are especially interesting. Communicative memory takes place through verbal exchange among individuals, and is thus reliant on everyday

²⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980) 59, 68.

communication and individual agents to transfer memories. Cultural memory, on the other hand, relies upon objects – including texts, images and documents – to transfer memories that have been established and defined through cultural formations and institutional communication. Cultural memory grounds large group identity, as that identity is formed through a common image of the past.²⁸ In the *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane*, the authors stage interventions into their family’s communicative memory: they sift through their private family memories (including documents and objects from the “family archive,” as Marianne Hirsch terms familial collections of memory media) in order to construct a narrative of family history that will become a new communicative memory.

Although the work that takes place within the narrative of these texts negotiates communicative memory, the texts themselves – as published literary works – also make an intervention into German memory culture. They function as models for interpreting the role of the past in family history, and for the confrontation of collective history on an individual level. Calling attention to the dynamic character of memory within the family over generations, *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* give a glimpse of the processural nature of communicative memory construction. Further, comparing *Väterliteratur* texts with *Generationenromane* provides insight into the patterns of formation of cultural memory in postwar Germany at the historical moments in which they emerge.²⁹

²⁸ Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 127.

²⁹ On the link between historical processes and memory work, see especially Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt, eds., *Memory and Political Change*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). In the Introduction, the editors argue that memory is not only shaped by historical circumstance, but that memory itself can be an agent of change. 4

In addition to staging acts of memory, the works of *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane* I examine in this dissertation also constitute a singular hybrid of the autobiography and biography genres. Although each author has entered into what Philip Lejeune calls the “autobiographical pact,” i.e., each has explicitly identified him or herself as the first-person narrator of the text, the narrative focus on the parents or grandparents distinguishes these texts from typical autobiographies. And yet, what Paul de Man claims about the nature of autobiography – that its essence is “de-facement,” that it constructs a rhetorical portrait where it would profess to give access to a referent in the real world – holds for these texts in an illuminating way.³⁰ In *Väterliteratur*, the authors seem to cleave to the notion that a referent (here, the father’s complicity with Nazism or his innocence) is attainable through reflection and investigation. For the authors of *Generationenromane*, however, de Man’s point is presumed: their family’s relationship to the past is theirs to mold and define, through the media of the family archive, into the meaningful arrangement best suited to their present needs. It may well be that the German family literature of the 1990s and 2000s has taken the premises of post-structuralism to heart.

Altogether, my examinations of *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* shed light on the relationship between the two trends. My readings show that the *Väterliteratur* author-narrators struggle to reconcile competing images of the father, drawn from different knowledge sources, into a single coherent narrative in which the father is either a positive or a negative figure. The protagonists of *Generationenromane*, however, see themselves under no obligation to establish such an objective “truth” about their family history, and embrace the subjectivity of

³⁰ de Man asks, “can we not suggest [...] that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer *does* is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture and thus determined, in all its aspects, by the resources of his medium?” Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” *MLN* 94 5 (1979): 920.

their memory narratives. And yet my analysis of the later trend also indicates how narratives that represent the specificity of individual experience can also incorporate troubling perspectives on the German past: the permissiveness of the *Generationenromane* allows for more and less critical explorations of family history.

Prelude: Bernward Vesper's *Die Reise*

In the Introduction, I asserted that studies of the *Generationenromane* frequently characterize the *Väterliteratur* trend as a vitriolic confrontation of the father, fueled by the radical leftist politics of the late-1960s student movement. In the next chapter, I will show that this is a misrepresentation of *Väterliteratur*, but first I would like to briefly discuss a text that does fit this description: Bernward Vesper's "Romanessay" *Die Reise*, an important forerunner of the *Väterliteratur* trend. Vesper's text, completed in 1971 and published in 1977, is often categorized as *Väterliteratur*, because it anticipates that trend's autobiographical examination of the father. Although *Die Reise*, like *Väterliteratur*, shares similarities with *Dokumentarliteratur* and the *Neue Subjektivität*, the text's politics and many of its main themes and stylistic traits clearly separate it from *Väterliteratur*.

Bernward Vesper was born in 1938 to "Blut und Boden" poet Will Vesper and his second wife, Rose, and was raised on his father's estate in a household governed by Prussian ideals of order, discipline and obedience. Early on, Vesper's political ideas were influenced by his familial connections. As a teenager, he developed a German nationalist political sensibility reflecting that of his father, and he maintained a close personal relationship with all of his family throughout his life, even when his political perspective shifted radically to the left. This occurred during his university studies in the late 1960s, as he embraced the anti-authoritarian socialist views of the *SDS* and the emerging *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (together with his girlfriend, future *Rote Armee Fraktion* co-founder Gudrun Ensslin), as well as the recreational drug use iconic of the international late-1960s youth culture. These sharply contrasting aspects of Vesper's life are the main themes of his autobiographical "Romanessay" *Die Reise*. This sprawling collection of

alternating narrative and analytical, reflective passages – hence the neologistic genre designation – was left unfinished when Vesper committed suicide in a sanatorium in Hamburg in 1971. Vesper’s manuscript and notes came to his editor Jörg Schröder, with whose März Verlag Vesper was under contract to publish the completed work. März closed soon after Vesper’s death, however, and it was several years before Schröder could find a publisher for the incomplete manuscript.

By the time *Die Reise* first appeared in 1977, the protest movement of the late 1960s had dissipated, the revolutionary group fragmenting into those who entered the working world, those who continued political work in other contexts, and those who, in the most extreme cases, formed the leftist radical-terrorist *RAF*. Further, the radical activities of the *RAF* were just coming to a climax – 1977 was the year of the “Deutscher Herbst,” when the leaders of the group committed suicide in the Stammheim prison. Vesper’s book was thus particularly relevant when it arrived; it enjoyed immediate success and quickly went into multiple printings. Vesper’s descriptions of his LSD trips and car journeys through Europe, his reflections on his childhood, his romantic and sexual relationships, his analyses of world politics around 1970, and his anecdotes from the student movement (occasionally including familiar figures such as Ensslin) clearly resonated with a large number of readers in late-1970s West Germany. Political essayist and author Michael Schneider attributes this success both to the passage of time since 1968-1970, when *Die Reise* was written – making the era just long enough past for a kind of nostalgia to begin – and to some readers’ identification with Vesper’s struggles.³¹ Thomas Krüger, in his dissertation on utopia and nostalgia in 1970s German literature, similarly sees the popularity of

³¹ Michael Schneider, *Den Kopf verkehrt aufgesetzt. Oder die melancholische Linke. Aspekte des Kulturzerfalls in den siebziger Jahren* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981) 67.

Die Reise as rooted in leftist readers' sense of loss of the idealism and utopian thinking of the late 1960s, notions that fill the pages of Vesper's text.³²

In reviews of the initial publication of *Die Reise*, the work was deemed a representative narrative of the '68 generation, hailed as a "Kultbuch der Linken" (*Der Spiegel*), the "Nachlaß einer ganzen Generation" (*Die Weltwoche*), and as an attempt to describe the "Kampf, Verzweiflung, Ohnmacht und Allmacht (der Apo-Generation)" (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*). Two years later, however, a supplement to the original version was released, comprising writing from the last weeks before Vesper's death, which complicated this impression. In his last reflections, Vesper changes his tone in passages regarding his childhood: rather than representing himself as the victim of a strict upbringing, he more directly admits his admiration for his father, acknowledging that he (together with Gudrun Ensslin) had sought to publish his father's collected poems after the latter's death in 1963. For some, such as Christian Schultz-Gerstein, culture editor for *Der Spiegel* from 1979-1987, the revelations of the 1979 supplement to *Die Reise* give the lie to Vesper's earlier tale of persecution. In a lengthy *Spiegel* article titled "Die Zerstörung einer Legende," Schultz-Gerstein reads the new chapters as Vesper's "Stück um Stück betriebene Entmythologisierung seiner selbst," in which the author confesses "im Grunde nie ein oppositioneller Kopf gewesen zu sein, sondern einfach ein kluger Opportunist."³³

Other readers, such as Michael Schneider, view Vesper's final work differently. For Schneider, the 1979 supplement neither contradicts nor invalidates Vesper's earlier self-

³² Thomas Krüger, "From the 'Death of Literature' to the 'New Subjectivity': Examining the Interaction of Utopia and Nostalgia in Peter Schneider's *Lenz*, Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *Der kurze Sommer der Anarchie*, and Bernward Vesper's *Die Reise*," (Montreal: McGill University, 2009) 187.

³³ Christian Schultz-Gerstein, "Die Zerstörung einer Legende. Spiegel-Redakteur Christian Schultz-Gerstein über den Nachlaß Bernward Vespers," *Der Spiegel* 52 (1979): 147.

presentation, but rather reveals “die eigentümliche Ambivalenz und Zerrissenheit der Vesperschen Existenz.”³⁴ This represents a subtle but important difference from Schultz-Gerstein’s view: although both recognize an element of fictionality in Vesper’s autobiography (Schultz-Gerstein speaks of mythology, Schneider of a “Lebenslüge”³⁵), Schneider sees Vesper as fundamentally torn in his last days rather than finally aware of his true self. My own reading of *Die Reise* favors Schneider’s position, recognizing the ambivalence of Vesper’s autobiographical alter ego throughout the text and his struggle to reconcile his positive emotions about his father with the imperatives of his political convictions.

I. The Aesthetics of Authenticity: *Die Reise* and *Neue Subjektivität*

Stylistically, Vesper’s *Die Reise* is a typical example of the *Neue Subjektivität* movement, of which *Väterliteratur* represents a later stage. In a 1981 essay on West German literature of the 1970s, Hans-Gerhard Winter offers the following summary of the main traits of the trend: the texts construct their world “aus einer personalen Perspektive”; and in them “Innen- und Außenwelt [fließen] ineinander.”³⁶ In *Die Reise*, Vesper’s narration frequently seeks to express the writer’s immediate subjective experiences, as well as representing states of consciousness, particularly during his use of hallucinogenic drugs. In the passages of *Die Reise* in which the narrator recalls episodes from his childhood, the narration of emotional states and individual perspective is once again the author’s preferred mode. Beyond this, at several points in the text

³⁴ Schneider 68.

³⁵ Schneider 78.

³⁶ Hans-Gerhard Winter, “Von der Dokumentarliteratur zur ‘neuen Subjektivität’: Anmerkungen zur westdeutschen Literatur der siebziger Jahre,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 17 (1981): 108-110.

Vesper's narrator makes direct programmatic statements about the nature of autobiographical writing and its role in contemporary literature that aptly sum up the attitudes towards authenticity in writing characteristic of *Neue Subjektivität*.

Vesper's *Die Reise* consists of a variety of narrative elements arranged together in a seemingly extemporaneous manner. The narrator "reports" impressions and conversations from his travels from southern Germany to Italy and Croatia, including passages (printed in italics) ostensibly composed while the writer was under the influence of LSD. Vesper also frequently integrates glimpses into his immediate circumstances as he writes. The narration jumps between topics and time periods in an associative manner, both within and between sections set off from one another by empty lines. For example, a typical section early in the text begins conventionally: "Es war Sonntag und auf der Gegenfahrbahn stauten sich die Autos. Wir fahren Venedig an, die Landschaft hatte sich verändert."³⁷ As the passage continues, conversations between the narrator and his American travelling companion, Burton, are integrated: "'Diese stinkenden, vergammelten Orte!' sagte Burton. 'Ich glaube nicht, daß es irgend etwas gibt, was uns in Venedig interessieren könnte,' sagte ich."³⁸ Later in the same passage, however, the topic shifts from the Italian journey to an unspecified moment in Vesper's past, which is not marked by any narrative or stylistic shift. Only the subject matter – Vesper's life with his former girlfriend Gudrun Ensslin – indicates that the context has changed:

Ich rasierte mich in unserer 'Wohnung', das Haus gehörte der protestantischen Kirche, die Vermieterin starb wenige Monate später. Ich hatte nicht gehört, daß

³⁷ Bernward Vesper, *Die Reise : Romanessay* (Jossa: März bei Zweitausendeins, 1979) 32.

³⁸ *ibid.*

Gudrun hereinkam, sah sie plötzlich hinter mir im Spiegel, drehte mich um und schlug ihr ins Gesicht, sie *sagte nichts*, weinte kaum (ihr Weinen war so trocken wie ihr Orgasmus), ‘Lache! Du sollst lachen!’ ‘Ich will es ja, o bitte, schlag mich nicht mehr, ich werde lachen!’³⁹

This strange anecdote is followed directly by a return to the topic of the trip to Italy, with no mention of the connection, if any, between that journey and his memories of Ensslin. In the early part of the passage, Vesper’s narrator uses conventional storytelling methods to establish the scene – entering a new city, the changed landscape suggesting anticipation – and the use of dialogue bringing the reader more closely into the scene while demonstrating Vesper’s and Burton’s feelings of superiority and distance from their surroundings. The interjection of the memory of Ensslin comes as a surprise, but contains similar themes. In the remembered scene, the author-narrator portrays himself exerting power over his girlfriend through unprovoked violence, and his parenthetical commentary on the grotesque scene, representing his narrative perspective at the time of writing, adds an ugly, scornful tone to the memory. Of course, the depiction of the girlfriend as quiet and (satirically?) submissive clashes with the public image of Gudrun Ensslin as a violent terrorist, and the resentful anger palpable in the narration of this scene is present in the handful of other references to Ensslin, who had left Vesper for Andreas Baader shortly before Vesper began writing *Die Reise*. In this section, the author-narrator’s subjectivity is represented through both dialogue and the insertion of past episodes and thoughts into the flow of the narrative, suggestive of a mental state in which the past is consistently intruding on the present.

³⁹ Vesper 34.

Something similar happens in Vesper's occasional references to happenings in his immediate surroundings as he writes. These moments are often devoted to the author's son Felix, then a toddler who lives with his father periodically. A typical passage appears early in the narrative, while the author and his son are visiting Vesper's mother at the estate in Triangel where he grew up. He notes: "Während ich tippe, versucht Felix meine Aufmerksamkeit dadurch zu erwecken, daß er dutzendmal in einem Trippellaufschritt um den Tisch läuft, an dem ich sitze, kurz pausiert, sich umdreht, weiterläuft, den Kopf mal links, mal rechts neigt."⁴⁰ In this passage, the author-narrator inhabits a different role than in the previous excerpts – here, he narrates as an observer, describing a situation he witnesses without reference to his own emotional experience. Still, the broader context of the passage, which appears between a sentence fragment concerning an idea about writing and a reflection on visiting his childhood home, does create the impression of a wandering mind, and is thus consistent with the narration generally.

As these variations in Vesper's narration already demonstrate, the strategies that can be adopted to represent subjectivity and personal perspective can take many forms. The excerpts I have discussed here fit the characterization of the *Neue Subjektivität* movement in 1970s literature cited above – they seek to portray subjective emotional states and blend impressions of the individual's inner and outer worlds. Beyond this, Vesper's narrator also makes frequent programmatic statements about autobiographical writing that illustrate literary scholar Christoph Zeller's conclusions about the desire for "authentic" representation in the *Neue Subjektivität*, following from Zeller's 2010 study *Ästhetik des Authentischen. Literatur und Kunst um 1970*. Zeller argues that works of both *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität* from the 1970s perceive a moral imperative to honestly and truthfully document their experiences, stemming

⁴⁰ Vesper 35.

from a perception of deceitfulness in the public discourse of the time, most significantly regarding the Nazi period and the Shoah.⁴¹ Zeller notes that these authors “genügen dem moralischen Axiom der Aufrichtigkeit, indem sie ihr Scheinhaftes und ihr Produziert-sein ‘ehrlich’ und ‘direkt’ zur Schau stellen.”⁴² The terms “ehrlich” and “direkt” are placed in quotation marks to underscore the fact that these qualities are created through certain aesthetic strategies: as Zeller affirms, “in Dokumenten, Aktionen und subjektiven Schreibweisen wahren [die Werke dieser Zeit] den Schein des Direkten und Unvermittelten.”⁴³

The programmatic statements about literature that Vesper’s narrator makes in *Die Reise* show that he holds the beliefs Zeller views as typical for *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität*, but also that Vesper is reluctant to acknowledge his own work of mediation as he represents his experiences. For example, Vesper’s narrator declares, “das Tagebuch ist gegenüber dem Roman ein ungeheurer Fortschritt, weil der Mensch sich weigert, seine Bedürfnisse zugunsten einer ‘Form’ hintenanzustellen. Es ist die materialistische Auflösung der Kunst, die Aufhebung des Dualismus von Form und Inhalt. Die Form erscheint in ihm, überhaupt im kreativen Schreiben, nurmehr als ‘Grenze der momentanen Wahrnehmung.’”⁴⁴ For Vesper, the relative formlessness of the diary in contrast to the novel is better suited to present a writer’s “needs” in language, and formal aesthetic traits appear only as secondary phenomena, in the background of the momentary perceptions of the writer. The ideal Vesper describes here also

⁴¹ Zeller, *Ästhetik des Authentischen*, 2.

⁴² Zeller 9.

⁴³ Zeller 8.

⁴⁴ Vesper 47.

has a political aspect, evident in his reference to materialism: for him, diary writing does not permit the separation of literary text from the material conditions of its production.

In a later statement, Vesper's narrator revisits this topic, asserting that this mode of writing is not only more politically desirable, but also more truthful: "es ist sinnlos, die Wahrheit in einen Kampf mit Stil, Metapher usw. eintreten zu lassen. Es sei denn, man hörte auf, nachzuforschen und finge an, sich einer Aesthetik zu unterwerfen, wie sie Tausende von literarischen Produkten bestimmt."⁴⁵ Here, Vesper gives an anti-authoritarian flavor to his aesthetic choices: his writing process is designed to free the author from the "subordination" of his ideas to the demands of traditional rhetorical tropes. In his writing, he suggests, anything is allowed, and this permissiveness is reflected in the passages I have discussed above (representing a train of thought, even as those thoughts leap in time and topic), and it is also realized in Vesper's integration of non-textual artifacts into his book. In the style of some *Dokumentarliteratur*, facsimiles of hotel receipts and drawings appear in *Die Reise*, as well as commentary on current events from local automobile accidents to Klaus-Rainer Röhl's reporting on his ex-wife Ulrike Meinhof's left-wing terrorism in *konkret* to an article on narcotics in *Der Spiegel*.⁴⁶ Combining techniques from *Dokumentarliteratur* and *Neue Subjektivität*, Vesper creates an "authentic" aesthetic style that distances his writing from conventional narrative forms. The chaotic style he adopts seeks to provide a snapshot of the author's moods, thoughts, and impressions without recourse to traditional literary tools.

II. Family Politics

⁴⁵ Vesper 69.

⁴⁶ Vesper 71, 199, 294.

The two main thematic centers of Vesper's *Die Reise* are the author's political life and his family relationships, particularly his childhood and his relationship to his parents. Further, family and childhood are consistently intertwined with politics in Vesper's text. *Die Reise* contains a multitude of sections titled "Einfacher Bericht," in which the narrator recounts episodes from his youth. Although Vesper often does not directly reference politics in the "Einfacher Bericht" sections, the political positions he espouses in the other sections – and the direct connections he makes there between his politics and his family – inform the reading experience of his recollections. The narrative focus on the relationship with the father and the father's connection to Nazism anticipates the main themes of *Väterliteratur*, but Vesper's biographical situation and formal choices are unlike what is typical for the *Väterliteratur* trend.

In *Die Reise*, the author-narrator and his father, Will Vesper, are both explicitly associated with their political positions, which are diametrically opposed at the time of writing. While Will Vesper supported Nazism until 1945 and the right-wing nationalist *Deutsche Reichspartei* after the end of the war, his son became a central figure in the extreme leftist student movement in the late 1960s. During the Nazi era, the elder Vesper wrote poetry celebrating the rise of National Socialism and found favor among the top Party officials, including Hitler himself. His son Bernward, together with his girlfriend Ensslin, joined the leftist-Communist student movement while at university, eventually giving up his studies of German literature to focus on organizing political demonstrations. Together, Vesper and Ensslin also founded a small publishing house to print texts supporting their political positions, the most successful of which was a 1964 volume entitled *Gegen den Tod*, a collection of essays arguing against the atom bomb.

In *Die Reise*, Vesper identifies himself with Communist political positions, and underscores his political differences from his parents in angry outbursts. The narrator voices opinions extremely critical of capitalism, as in the following diatribe:

Die Wahrheit sieht so aus: Mit Gewalt werden Hunderttausende in Gefängnissen, Zuchthäusern, Jugend- und Kinderheimen kaputtgemacht, auch Diebstahl, individuelle Verletzung ‘des Rechts’ auf Privateigentum, ist ein politisches Delikt. Gewalt, aus der Arbeitswelt abgeleitete Aggression, fordert allein in Deutschland hundert Todesopfer im Jahr unter Kindern, die von ihren Eltern geprügelt werden; gesellschaftliche Aggressionen und unzulängliche, technische Voraussetzungen sind die Ursache für weit über zehntausend Verkehrstote; Verzweiflung und Chancenlosigkeit treiben Tausende in den *Freitod*, weil der Tod das einzige ist, was ihnen wirklich ‘frei’ steht; die Skrupellosigkeit des Gewinnstrebens des Kapitals zeitigt Hunderte, wenn nicht Tausende von Toten und Krüppeln an nicht unfallgeschützten Arbeitsplätzen.⁴⁷

Particularly striking in this passage is the variety of contexts in which the narrator locates the evils of capitalism: in prisons and youth homes, in unsafe workplaces, in the family, and on the streets. Further, Vesper identifies not only injustice and suffering in these circumstances (for which, incidentally, the author identifies no sources of information), but also death and suicide. The capitalist world is portrayed in the grimmest terms here, and the association between capitalism and death is echoed in a later passage, in which the author-narrator closes a discussion

⁴⁷ Vesper 249.

of “bourgeois” attitudes towards drug use with the exclamation “Ihr seid die Mörder! Ihr seid die Mörder! Every capitalist *WANTED!*”⁴⁸

The anger tangible in Vesper’s writing about the effects of the political economy is carried over into his depictions of his family and their political differences. Reflecting on the circumstances of his own birth in 1936, Vesper’s narrator underlines the National Socialist context, which would have been the key frame of reference for his parents. He characterizes his own birth as “utilitaristisch. [...] Man gebar kein Kind, mit allen Konsequenzen, die sich daraus ergeben, sondern man brachte es ein, ‘schenkte es dem Führer’.”⁴⁹ In a similar passage, Vesper situates his own youth within the chronology of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany. In a lightly ironic tone, his narrator points to the political sympathies of his family: “Und während meine Mutter mich noch stillte, kehrte Österreich heim ins Reich, und ich erhielt als Geschenk [...] ein mährisches Glas mit der deutschen Schreibinschrift: Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer! Ich war ein Jahr und einen Monat alt, als der Krieg begann und war sechs Jahre, neun Monate und acht Tage alt, als das REICH kapitulierte.”⁵⁰ The controlled tone of passages like these, here using National Socialist language to establish the historical context of his childhood, allows Vesper to distance himself from the politics of his parents, satirized in this case through an exaggerated emphasis on the Nazi perspective.

Although Vesper associates himself with a political movement that demonstrates against the FRG government, institutions, and social organization, his narrator uses the vocabulary of

⁴⁸ Vesper 296.

⁴⁹ Vesper 53-4.

⁵⁰ Vesper 56.

uprising and rebellion in more personal ways, directing his criticism towards his parents. For example, the narrator proclaims that:

Der Aufstand geschieht gegen diejenigen, die mich zur Sau gemacht haben, es ist kein blinder Haß, kein Drang, zurück ins Nirwana, vor die Geburt. Aber die Rebellion gegen die zwanzig Jahre im Elternhaus, gegen den Vater, die Manipulation, die Verführung, die Vergeudung der Jugend, der Begeisterung, des Elans, der Hoffnung – da ich begriffen habe, daß es einmalig, nicht wiederholbar ist. Ich weiß nicht, wann es dämmerte, aber ich weiß, daß es jetzt Tag ist und die Zeit der Klarstellung.⁵¹

In passages like this, Vesper positions himself as a victim of his family and his upbringing, holding them accountable for his feelings of self-loathing. The narrator does not make explicit what it means that he was “zur Sau gemacht,” but the characterization here of what he feels he has lost – his youth, his enthusiasm, his hope and happiness – points to a sense of restriction and suppression, as a result of his father’s purported manipulation.

The author provides glimpses of his “manipulation” and “seduction” through the portrayal of his father as an imposing figure in the scenes from his childhood he recounts in *Die Reise*. Throughout the sections marked “Einfacher Bericht,” Vesper paints his father as an authoritarian force whom the son must contort himself to please. In one passage, the narrator lists all the aspects of family life over which his father has exclusive control, from where and how the

⁵¹ Vesper 55.

children played to the servants' habits and the management of the garden.⁵² In another passage, Vesper details his own childish agony at being made to eat porridge, following the fatherly dictum that a child must eat what he is served. This latter section is particularly illuminating, as it showcases both the author-narrator's substantial capacity for retrospective self-pity and his conflicted emotions vis-à-vis his father.

In this scene, Vesper uses visceral imagery to describe his attempts to eat his porridge, insisting that the experience was torment for the young boy: he sat at the table with a full mouth, unable to swallow, so "daß [der Brei] sich einen Weg suchte in die Nase, in den Kopf, meinen Schädel füllte, sich mit dem Blut, das mir zu Kopf stieg, mischte, eine fürchterliche Angst mich packt, mein Kopf könne unter dem Druck platzen."⁵³ That evening, when the young Vesper faces his uneaten dish a second time, it is as if he were nearing death: he felt "wie [sein Körper] abkühlte, wie er steif und gefühllos wurde," and, staring at his plate, he knew he "würde eher sterben, als auch nur einen Bissen davon zu essen."⁵⁴ Using these images of acute bodily suffering to portray his childhood experience of choking down his food, Vesper embraces the child's outsized perspective, evidently unwilling to re-frame that experience from his adult point of view. Indeed, there is an earnestness to how Vesper dwells on his own suffering: he relives and yet almost relishes his experience as a victim.

In this episode, Vesper's father is depicted as controlling and terrifying, but the author also emphasizes his own desire to please his father. The narrator reflects, "ich wußte, daß niemand mir helfen würde, daß jeder Angst hatte vor der krachenden Stimme meines Vaters, vor

⁵² Vesper 322-324.

⁵³ Vesper 330.

⁵⁴ Vesper 332.

den geschwellenen Adern an seiner Stirn, vor den donnernden Beleidigungen.”⁵⁵ Here, the father appears as an angry tyrant, tightly governing all actions and interactions within his home. Still, the child does not hate and reject his father, but wishes desperately that he could please him. The narrator recalls that, “es half mir nichts, daß ich beteuerte, ich wäre bereit alles, aber auch wirklich alles sonst zu essen.”⁵⁶ Even when Vesper describes being beaten for having secretly thrown his uneaten porridge out of the window, he still refrains from demonizing his father, insisting that the latter “schlug zögernd, fast mißmutig, als ob er sich einer Verpflichtung entledigte...”⁵⁷ In this passage, then, Vesper appears reluctant to place himself solely in the victim role: the emotional experiences he depicts are more complex, reflecting a persistent attachment to his father and a desire to please.

The attachment displayed in this episode begins to shed light on Vesper’s sense of betrayal by his father, as suggested in the previously cited passage, where Vesper claims to rebel against the “Manipulation” and “Verführung” of his youth. The nature of his “seduction” takes shape late in *Die Reise*, as Vesper reveals that his first political activity was on the opposite side of the political spectrum from his 1968 protests, supporting the German nationalist party that his father favored. As a youth, Vesper read his father’s nationalist “Reichsruf” and “Soldaten-Zeitung” newspapers, and the author recalls his father’s declaration, “wir müssen das ganze Lügengebäude, unter dem wir beerdigt sind, aus den Fundamenten heben, dann müssen wir die Wahrheit über die ungeheuren Verbrechen am deutschen Volk hinausschreien in die Welt.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Vesper 332.

⁵⁶ Vesper 330.

⁵⁷ Vesper 334.

⁵⁸ Vesper 470.

The teenage son takes this notion to heart, writing “letters to the editor” against poet Erich Kästner, whom Vesper accuses of having betrayed “Millionen kämpfender deutscher Soldaten.”⁵⁹ Moreover, when the *Reichspartei* campaigns for the federal parliament, the 15-year-old Vesper jumps at the chance to work for the cause, distributing literature and appealing to any voters he encounters; he is even charged by his parents to have a word about the upcoming election with his grandmother.

These passages depict a rare period in which Vesper’s own perspective was successfully aligned with that of his father, but the author’s description of his energy, enthusiasm, and conviction also shows the roots of his later political activism. Here, the young Vesper develops strategies for political persuasion that will become useful later on, including letter writing, flyer campaigns, and engaging in political discussions. Although *Die Reise* contains no examination of the author’s political conversion from the extreme right wing to leftist radicalism, the familial significance of this shift for Vesper fuels his narrator’s angry outbursts. In the passage cited above, Vesper’s narrator defiantly proclaims his rebellion against his upbringing, but at another moment he casts this break in less liberating terms, claiming that joining the left meant sacrifice: he insists, “ich habe alles geopfert, [...] Meine Kindheitshölle; meine Freunde-Schweine; meine Eltern-Nazis.”⁶⁰ Similarly, when Vesper’s narrator recalls a conversation with a close friend during his teenage years, who encouraged him to break away from his father’s influence, he recalls feelings of loss and hopelessness: “Ich weiß nicht mehr weiter, ich weiß, daß ich das, was ich war, nicht mehr sein will; ich weiß, daß ich es nicht einfach aufgeben kann, ohne mich

⁵⁹ Vesper 473.

⁶⁰ Vesper 114.

aufzugeben, ich will mich nicht verlieren.”⁶¹ Here, Vesper points to the significance of his father’s example for his own self-understanding: as a child, he had sought to please his father, and following a different path represents a loss of self.⁶²

For Vesper, then, political convictions are not a simple matter: the leftist in him can reject what he views as Fascism, or rail against the ostensible evils of capitalism, but his attachment to individuals who supported those systems and his own socialization within National Socialism remain a challenge. His narrator expresses this conflict succinctly in a reflection on Quebecois activist Pierre Vallières, who dedicated his own autobiography to his father. Vesper admits to envying Vallières his proletariat roots, which keep political conflict from becoming family conflict or identity conflict for Vallières. In contrast, Vesper muses, “wir Kinder der Bourgeoisie allerdings können es dahin nicht bringen, haben gar keine andre Wahl als unsre Klasse zu verurteilen, und wenn wir uns weigern, sie zu bemitleiden, dann nicht, weil wir – wie Vallières am franco-kanadischen Proletariat – Unterwürfigkeit und Lethargie kritisieren, sondern weil wir ihre Existenz total negieren müssen, dies so lange unsre eigne Existenz gewesen ist.”⁶³ For Vesper, the rejection of the father’s politics always signifies a rejection of the father, and this has destabilizing implications for the son who long tried to conform to that father’s expectations. As

⁶¹ Vesper 530.

⁶² For a comprehensive reading of the notion of masculinity in *Die Reise*, see Sven Glawion, *Heterogenesis. Männlichkeit in deutschen Erzähltexten 1968-2000* (Darmstadt: BÜchner Verlag, 2012) 197-221.

⁶³ Vesper 445.

Thomas Andre rightly observes in his discussion of *Vesper*, the author's "Aufbegehren gegen den Vater suspendierte sich letztlich selbst: in einem nach innen gewandten Selbsthass."⁶⁴

III. Conclusion: *Die Reise* as a Precursor to *Väterliteratur*

In *Die Reise*, *Vesper*'s political ideas are constantly in tension with his personal experience, and this reflects both the rigidity of his political thinking and a natural disjuncture between categorical maxims and the variety of individual cases. *Vesper*'s text demonstrates the relevance of the subjective experience for individuals within a political movement, and his text thus exemplifies the personal focus of the *Neue Subjektivität* literary trend. Indeed, some works of *Neue Subjektivität*, such as Schneider's *Lenz* (1973) and Uwe Timm's *Heißer Sommer* (1974), are vehicles through which the authors, themselves formerly active in the student movement, explore the personal, subjective side of the late 1960s, not unlike *Vesper*'s project in *Die Reise* (which was written earlier and appeared later). Because the *Neue Subjektivität* largely contrasted individual experience with the collective context, these works resemble *Die Reise* in its diary-like passages, but not in the memory work reflecting upon childhood and the family.

Only in the late 1970s, with the beginning of the *Väterliteratur* wave, does this aspect of *Vesper*'s text find resonance with a new literary trend. *Vesper*'s text exhibits themes and stylistic principles that both reflect and challenge political and literary ideas held by the "68er" student movement – and thus is oriented toward its very particular historical moment – but it also anticipates the *Väterliteratur*. Similarities between *Vesper*'s text and the later works include the autobiographical reflections on childhood during the Nazi era, the investigation of the role of National Socialism in the family (particularly with regard to the father), a fragmented narrative

⁶⁴ Thomas Andre, *Kriegskinder und Wohlstandskinder. Die Gegenwartsliteratur als Antwort auf die Literatur der 68er* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011) 137.

style and the use of indirect speech to represent National Socialist language heard in the home, and a rigidity of thinking about the categories of victim and perpetrator in the NS context.

At the same time, *Die Reise* is atypical of the later texts in the author-narrator's persistent attachment to and respect for the father, that father's uninterrupted presence in the family home throughout the war years, the fact that Will Vesper was a well-known and unrepentant Nazi, and the text's exclusive focus on the author's own subjective experience during his upbringing. In contrast, *Väterliteratur* authors usually repudiate (or struggle to repudiate) the father, who was a soldier and thus absent during and following the war, but usually not a convinced National Socialist. Most importantly, perhaps, the *Väterliteratur* works take the father's biography as their primary concern, and reflect only secondarily on the authors' own childhoods. They mark a departure, then, from both Vesper's model and the personal focus of the *Neue Subjektivität*. As we will see in the next chapter, however, modes of thinking about the Nazi era coined during the 1960s student movement have a lasting influence on literary engagements with the past, and we find some of Vesper's struggle to reconcile personal experience with social imperative also plaguing the authors of *Väterliteratur*.

Chapter 1:

Perspectives on the Father: Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild*, Ruth Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, and the *Väterliteratur* Trend in West German Literature

I. Introduction

The central issue for authors of the *Väterliteratur* trend is summed up by Christoph Meckel in an essay reflecting on his motivation for writing *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater* (1980). He describes his shock at discovering evidence of his late father's Nazi sympathies while reading the latter's journals, and asserts that this new information called his own identity into question, writing: "Die alte Frage: wer bin ich, wo komme ich her, mußte nochmal gestellt und beantwortet werden, folgerichtig und radikal."⁶⁵ These questions are at the heart of *Suchbild*, which traces Meckel's father's biography and the author's own childhood, and they also constitute the central problem for Ruth Rehmann's 1979 autobiographical father portrait *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*. In each text, the author constructs a biographical narrative of his or her father's life in response to newly discovered evidence that the father had more significant ties to Nazism than the author had previously believed. Although the stories told in these autobiographical texts are by definition individual and personal, they touch upon many of the common themes in the research in and representations of the post-war German family, including authoritarian parenting practices, the soldier-father returning from war estranged from his children, as well as children who defend their fathers from suggestions of Nazi complicity, and the question of individual and collective responsibility for Nazi crimes. As one critic observes, works such as Meckel's and Rehmann's – works in the *Väterliteratur* trend around 1980 – reveal

⁶⁵ Christoph Meckel, "Bericht zu dem Buch *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater*," *Suchbild. Über meinen Vater* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1980) 179.

something about the “psychopathology” of the post-war German family while also providing insight into the “realization in the subject of what is general in society.”⁶⁶

Väterliteratur authors such as Meckel and Rehmann present intimate portraits of close family members and personal reflections on family relationships, and so their work invites critical readings of the psychological underpinnings revealed through their reflections on their fathers. But the attempt to untangle these webs of interpersonal family relationships and conflicting motivations has often distracted scholars from considering the mediated nature of the texts. Because the narrators’ journeys through complex emotional terrain are a large part of what makes the texts compelling, many critics of the *Väterliteratur* trend have focused their studies on what appears to be personally at stake for the self-conception of author-narrators. Other critics have looked past questions of identity to view the texts as (positive or negative) models for confronting Germany’s Nazi past on an individual level, some even questioning the authors’ right to comment on the morality of the father’s choices. Both types of readings have yielded important insights into our understanding of *Väterliteratur*, but their disinterest in the discursive and constructed aspects of the texts leaves important layers of meaning unexplored: they accept the narrator’s perspective as authentic, although autobiographical narratives in particular demand critical examination of the authors’ construction of a candid narrative persona.

In this chapter, I look beyond these psychological and ethical concerns to consider the conceptual foundations of the texts and the discursive aspects of the authors’ engagement with their family history. As the authors try to imagine a new narrative of their fathers’ lives in response to the suggestion that their fathers – directly or tacitly – supported Nazism, they demonstrate marked rigidity of thinking in their conceptions of complicity with National

⁶⁶ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence. West German Literature and the Holocaust* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999) 85, 87.

Socialism. Meckel's narrator attempts to cast his father in a negative light, rhetorically distancing himself from his father in a classic Oedipal struggle centered on their shared profession as poets. Rehmman's text takes an opposite approach, devoting the bulk of her text to defending her father's character, on the implied premise that a generous and loving follower of Christ (Reinhold Rehmman was a Protestant minister) could in no way be complicit in Nazism. When we look closely at the moral presumptions and varied discourses in the texts, however, we find indications of unease with these dominant narratives. Both Meckel and Rehmman primarily narrate in a self-assured tone, using formal and structural cues that indicate the authenticity of their accounts, from incorporating documentary "evidence" to narrating in the third-person voice. But each author-narrator also occasionally adopts a different narrative perspective in the text, and these moments suggest that the primary narrative, constructed to fit the authors' perceived moral imperative, is ultimately insufficient, leaving important elements of the authors' story and experience unrepresented.

Christoph Meckel and Ruth Rehmman: Generational Differences, Narrative Similarities

On the surface, Meckel and Rehmman may seem an unlikely pairing. For example, the difference in gender constellation of their family narratives means that Meckel confronts the Oedipal challenge of rejecting or accepting his father, while Rehmman must contend with the fact that her father's great affection for her carried with it the disappointment that his favorite child was not a boy. These experiences are not comparable, but their difference is representative of the *Väterliteratur* trend as a whole – sons and daughters authored these texts to equal degrees. As the former struggle with the problem of identifying with the father's model of masculinity, the latter often confront their desire for recognition from him. Both groups of authors explore these issues

with similar narrative strategies, combining biographical and autobiographical elements to reflect upon their relationships and their knowledge of their fathers.

The difference in age between Meckel (born 1935) and Rehmann (born 1922) is also a reflection of the diversity of authors of *Väterliteratur*. Rehmann is among the oldest of the group, and the youngest were born more than twenty years later – Sigfrid Gauch in 1945, the Austrian author Brigitte Schwaiger in 1949 – and most years in between are represented among *Väterliteratur* authors. As I have observed in the Introduction, this means that the authors do not form a single generational group: the oldest among them were young adults during the war and knew their fathers well before the Nazi period, while the youngest were born after the war and their earliest impressions are of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. This indicates that the wave of *Väterliteratur* around 1980 cannot be understood only as a generational response to the increasing historical distance from the Nazi period or to a certain generation entering a new life phase (e.g., entering maturity, having children, or losing their parents). Instead, I suggest that the *Väterliteratur* trend reflects a certain moment in post-war Germany's public discourse on the Nazi past, a period following the revelations and accusations of the '68 era and the RAF terrorists, but before the "Historikerstreit" in the later 1980s over the interpretation and representation of the Holocaust, and before the officially-supported collective move to honor the victims of the Nazis through memorials in the 1990s. In Meckel's and Rehmann's texts, we can see the interest in average individuals' responses to Nazism – the examination of one's own family's involvement – as a precursor to the wider acceptance of collective responsibility for the Nazi crimes.

These two texts also contain some of the most sophisticated writing in the *Väterliteratur* trend, and their strength emerges in the tension between the emotional ties to the father that they

display and the resilience of the idea that acknowledging the father's support of Nazism, minimal and contingent though it may have been, would necessitate a complete disavowal of him. The texts are ambivalent and multi-faceted, as the author-narrators test out different voices and attitudes from which to consider their old memories in light of their new knowledge. Indeed, the titles of the texts reflect the ultimately uncertain nature of these literary projects: Meckel's *Suchbild*, literally "search-image" (a type of puzzle where one searches for hidden items in a picture), points to his own search for the best narrative in which to position his father, while the subtitle of Rehmann's text, *Fragen an einen Vater*, seem to acknowledge not only the open-ended nature of her inquiry (it is questions, not answers), but also its futility – as she writes, her father has long since passed away. Because these two authors spend a significant amount of their texts reconstructing their father's biographies (as opposed to primarily presenting their own subjective experiences, as many authors of *Väterliteratur* do), they are especially well situated to capture the struggle to understand the complexity of individual experiences through general categories that animates the *Väterliteratur* project.

In both *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, the bulk of the text is devoted to the narrative portrait of the author's father. Meckel presents a biography of his father, Eberhard Meckel, which spans from the latter's own childhood in Freiburg, through his adulthood as a poet and a soldier, and on to the head injury which ended his wartime career. After Eberhard Meckel rejoined his family in Freiburg, following his release from a POW camp, he supported his family by writing culture articles for local newspapers. This biographical portrait is interspersed with excerpts from Eberhard Meckel's journals, and augmented with the author's own memories of his childhood with his father. Early on, we learn that the author's examination

of his father's life is sparked by his discovery of his father's journals, which suggest that his father had a greater role in supporting Nazism than the author-narrator had previously thought.

Rehmann structures her narrative differently: while Meckel's narrator makes no reference to the circumstances of his writing, Rehmann frames her presentation of her father's life with scenes from her own return to her hometown as an adult. She stops in Auel while driving through the country with her adult children, and there she encounters her old schoolteacher Limbach, who had been a member of her father's congregation and his close personal friend. It is Limbach who suggests to Rehmann that her father had insistently ignored the Nazi realities around him, and that this willful ignorance led him to support them at a crucial moment in the town's history. Rehmann narrates her father's life story, from his childhood as a pastor's youngest son through his marriage to a young woman in his mother's bible group and eventually to the whole family's move to the village of Auel, where she, herself the youngest in the family, was born. The author-narrator particularly focuses on her father's lack of political acumen and his naïve, idealistic faith in individuals.

To my mind, *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* best demonstrate the tension at the heart of the *Väterliteratur* movement. Their personal, individual stories demonstrate the variety of experiences and motivations that led otherwise unremarkable and generally moral people to tolerate or even support a system which committed some of the most horrendous atrocities of world history. Furthermore, although these father portraits respond to an assumption that any revelation of tolerance or tacit support of Nazism means that those individuals must be cast off, relegated to the deepest recesses of family history, countercurrents to this attitude are also in evidence. The author-narrators seem caught between a position that sees individuals who lived

during the Nazi era as either supporters or resisters, on the one hand, and the nuanced portraits of complex motivations and uncertain circumstances that their father biographies also present.

II. Identity Formation and the Role of the Father

As I noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, the variety of family stories that form the basis of *Väterliteratur* texts makes it difficult to identify common denominators which characterize the trend as a whole. In their most general statements, critics identify the works as exploring Germany's National Socialist past within the private sphere. In their *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' in Deutschland* (2007), for example, Lorenz and Fischer characterize *Väterliteratur* according to its engagement with the Nazi legacy within family history: "erstmal wurde die NS-Täterschaft nicht abstrakt gefasst oder externalisiert, sondern an konkreten und persönlich schmerzhaften Beispielen aus dem eigenen familiären Umfeld aufgearbeitet."⁶⁷ Michael Schneider and Helmut Peitsch make similar observations, the former arguing that *Väterliteratur* seeks to show "wie sie [i.e., the fathers] zu Mitläufern oder aktiven Vertretern des Nationalsozialismus werden konnten," while the latter views the texts as explorations of "die faschistische Vergangenheit, [...] in Gestalt der Väter."⁶⁸ As general descriptions, these characterizations point to the animating idea behind the *Väterliteratur* trend: a movement away from the abstract categorical disavowals of the "'68 era" – with proclamations

⁶⁷ Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz, *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' in Deutschland. Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007) 193.

⁶⁸ Schneider, *Den Kopf verkehrt aufgesetzt*, 9; Helmut Peitsch, *Vom Faschismus zum Kalten Krieg - Auch eine deutsche Literaturgeschichte. Literaturverhältnisse, Genres, Themen* (Berlin: Ed. Sigma, 1996) 387.

such as Gudrun Ensslin's "das ist die Generation von Auschwitz!" – and towards an examination of individual, personal cases.

This focus on the specific example results in a variety of texts as dissimilar as the fathers they profile, but each author constructs a narrative that seeks to understand the relationship between personal, familial and collective experiences. This means that the individual author's own subjective experience of the father plays a role in the presentation of the father's biography. In Meckel's *Suchbild* and Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, such questioning takes the form of investigations of the father's exemplary status vis-à-vis his social-historical context, and how the author-narrators' own experiences of their fathers relate to the latter's role in the Nazi era. In this section, I show how the author-narrators' own identification with (or in contrast to) the father shapes the subjective positions from which they narrate their fathers' lives.

Setting the Stage: Opening Vignettes in Suchbild and Der Mann auf der Kanzel

The emotional portrait of the relationship between father and child presented in *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* is complex from the first pages of the texts. Both works begin with a vignette devoted to an early childhood memory of time spent with the father. These are positive memories, but the scenes are clouded by other feelings – an overwhelmed disorientation in Meckel's case and a nostalgic longing for childish naiveté in Rehmann's. This conflict of emotions sets the stage for the narratives which follow, which are marked by ambivalence and conflicting motivations. In contrast to these opening scenes, however, the main narratives of *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* rarely focus so intently on the protagonists' love for their fathers.

Meckel opens *Suchbild* with a memory of driving in an open car with his father, cruising along tree-lined avenues in the countryside. As the scenery flies by, the father represents a fixed point for the child in the speeding car. The car is a convertible, and he looks up at the tree branches as they drive; the view is “schwindelerregend, ein Schwirren von Schatten und Licht,” but his father “lenkte,” guiding the car along its path.⁶⁹ They race along “schnurgerade Chausseen,” and the narrator recalls a “Gefühl von Sicherheit und blindem Vertrauen, eine wunderbare Gewißheit in seiner [i.e., his father’s] Nähe.”⁷⁰ Here, the father’s role is that of guide and anchor – because of him, the experience of riding the speeding car is exciting for the child, not frightening. The father represents security, trust, and certainty, as well as movement along a straight path, and yet the image of the father-child relationship created in this passage is also the fragmented, myopic vision of a child who – with his *blind* trust – does not see the father outside of his family role.

Meckel’s language in this passage poetically mirrors the scene he describes: the paragraph consists of a list of impressions from the child’s perspective, from “das Wagendach geöffnet, ein heller Tag,” to “helle und dunkle Chausseen, Fahren in der Nacht,” interspersed with indications of Meckel’s adult perspective, including the place names “Schöneicher Chaussee, hinter Friedrichshagen, im Osten Berlins” and “Mark Brandenburg,” as well as the phrase “wiederholte Erinnerung,” implying that these drives were frequent occurrences and the father his constant companion.⁷¹ On the one hand, this mix of perspectives disorients the reader, so that the reading becomes its own dizzying experience, while on the other hand the presence of

⁶⁹ Christoph Meckel. *Suchbild : Über Meinen Vater*. (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1980) 7.

⁷⁰ Meckel 7.

⁷¹ Meckel 7.

the adult perspective reminds us that this is a memory – rather than transporting himself back into that childhood experience completely, the narrator preserves an element of distance.

The opening passage of Rehmans's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* also follows father and child on an oft recurring outing together in which the father's role is one of leadership and security, but the father-child relationship Rehmann presents is slightly different. In Rehmann's scene, language and imagery emphasize togetherness, the close bond between child and father. The passage is littered with collective pronouns: "wenn *wir* zusammengingen ... sagten *wir* ... setzten *wir* ... wenn *wir* links angefangen hatten ... so zogen *wir*..."⁷² The two walk through their small Rhineland village of Auel, hand in hand and with synchronized steps; as they walk, they chant "Wir zwei beide," stepping with each syllable and accenting the final "-de." This phrase, the narrator points out, "drückte aus, daß wir zusammengehörten, der Älteste und die Jüngste der Familie, und daß nichts auf der Welt uns dazwischenkommen könnte."⁷³ In this explication, Rehmann's narrative voice remains in the sentimental mood of the memory, insisting upon the completeness of her bond with her father. In contrast to Meckel's opening passage, which presents a positive view of the father tempered by a distanced, adult perspective, this interpretive moment shows the tight hold Rehmann maintains on the memory of her childhood relationship with her father.

Rather than weaving together present and past, adult and child perspectives, as Meckel does, Rehmann's introduction intertwines her memory with her father's memory of his childhood walks with his father. This takes place over the course of a long sentence, with repetitions reminiscent of Biblical passages that list genealogies: "So zogen wir flüsternd und

⁷² Ruth Rehmann, *Der Mann auf der Kanzel: Fragen an eine Vater* (München: Hanser, 1979) 8, emphasis added.

⁷³ Rehmann 8.

stampfend durch die Straßen von Auel, wo mein Vater Pfarrer war, und genauso, sagte er, sei sein Vater, der auch Pfarrer war, mit ihm, der auch der Jüngste war, durch die Straßen von St. Goar gegangen, grüßend, winkend die Rheinpromenade entlang...⁷⁴ This passage constructs a parallel between the narrator and her father that inscribes the narrator into a genealogical chain, and the content of the sentence is reinforced by mirrored language: as she and her father trundled along, “flüsternd und stampfend durch die Straßen von Auel” so did her father and his father walk “durch die Straßen von St. Goar [...], grüßend, winkend.”⁷⁵ Not only does the father guide her through and connect her to the community, but he also anchors his daughter within family history, via special, privileged ties between the oldest and youngest. Further, the detail with which the narrator presents her father’s memory suggests a close identification with him. He and his father walked along the bank of the Rhine, we learn, engaging with members of their village at every step: talking with ships’ captains, receiving fresh rolls from the baker, while “alle Kinder, auch die katholischen, seien gelaufen gekommen, um über seines Vaters, meines Großvaters, Spazierstock zu springen.”⁷⁶

Each of these introductory passages foreshadows complications to come as the texts develop. For Meckel, the father represented a point of security amid a disorienting superfluity of impressions in the opening scene. But what will happen when his position as an anchor for the family within the context of the shadows of recent German history is discredited? The distanced perspective Meckel weaves into his first passage is one indication: when the father’s moral integrity is called into question, the son pulls away. For Rehmann, the fundamental message of

⁷⁴ Rehmann 8.

⁷⁵ Rehmann 8.

⁷⁶ Rehmann 8.

the text's introduction is the author-narrator's close identification with her father and the positioning of the two of them within a specific genealogical chain. But what are the implications for this self-understanding when she discovers that her father may have supported local Nazis in their village? As is evident in this opening vignette, Rehmman's narrative alter ego is extremely reluctant to separate herself from her father, and hence, in the remainder of the text, she explores other possibilities for coming to terms with new information about her father's past. The opening vignettes function as a kind of "establishing shot" of the father-child relationships depicted in Meckel's and Rehmman's texts, the intimacy they imply giving a sense of what is at stake for the author-narrator when the father's character is called into question later on.

Painting the Family Portrait: Meckel's Suchbild

As I have already noted, the *Väterliteratur* trend encompasses works that depict a variety of different family experiences. This diversity is evident in the differences between the emotional, psychological portraits presented in *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*. Not only do the authors differ in gender and generation, but also, as is clear from the opening vignettes, in their relationships with their fathers. For Meckel, the father represents the intrusion of Nazism into the private sphere; the father is an outsider to be rejected, together with the value system he supports. For Rehmman, the father is an object of admiration, a family leader characterized by his generosity and faith. Both of these portrayals are complicated by contrary elements, however. As a successful poet, Meckel follows in his father's footsteps, and writes with understanding about the challenges his father faced, while also allowing affection to register in his narrative voice. Rehmman, on the other hand, contrasts her childhood closeness to her father with her adult persona, one that departs from the traditional values and Christian faith her father stood for.

The father-son relationship that Meckel depicts is one defined by its transformation: from a playful, loving father into a disciplinarian, from a friendly confidant into an officer. When the child was very young, as we saw in Meckel's opening vignette, he trusted and idolized his father. Later, the father became strict and ill-tempered, a fierce disciplinarian at ease with corporal punishment. As the narrator summarizes: "Solange das Kind noch unschuldig war, bevor die Erziehungsmaßnahmen einsetzten (Vorschrift, Belehrung und was er ZÜCHTIGUNG⁷⁷ nannte), war er ein Vater ohne Vergleich, Spielmeister, großer Bruder, Vertrauter und Freund."⁷⁸ In a somewhat melodramatic rhetorical gesture, Meckel characterizes his own experience of this transition as a fall from grace. His four-year-old self is caught stealing a gold ring, and the resulting punishment – seven lashes on the hand each day for ten days – is a paradigm-shifting shock comparable to being cast out of Eden. Meckel's narrator proclaims: "Was immer im Paradies geschah, mit Adam, Eva, Lilith, Schlange und Apfel, ... das Gebrüll des Allmächtigen und sein ausweisender Finger - ich weiß davon nichts. Es war mein Vater, der mich von dort vertrieb."⁷⁹ Here, Meckel depicts his father as becoming an authoritarian figure vis-à-vis his young son as soon as the latter was old enough to misbehave. When his father returns from the war, however, this authoritarian tendency has reached a new level.

Reflecting on his post-war childhood, Meckel presents himself as victim of his strict upbringing and hence, because he sees his father's controlling behavior as being linked to his war experience, as a secondary victim of Nazism. Narrating from his childhood perspective, Meckel recalls the beginning of the war as a sudden, dramatic attack: he was four years old when

⁷⁷ Meckel uses small capital letters throughout his text to mark terms from others' speech, usually, as in this example, his father's.

⁷⁸ Meckel 45.

⁷⁹ Meckel 54.

“eines Morgens fiel [der Krieg] ins Haus.”⁸⁰ His father entered the war in 1941, and did not return until 1946, having suffered a head injury and spent the end of the war and the following year in a French POW camp. His wartime experience as an officer reinforced his authoritarian parenting style, and the lingering effects of his injury left him moody, depressive and irritable. The poetry he wrote no longer found the acclaim it had in the decade before, and the respect and responsibility afforded him as an officer in the *Wehrmacht* were no more. He became emotionally demanding on his family, as if requiring them to make up for the loss of his self-esteem. The narrator describes his childhood home after the war (a very small apartment was all they could afford) as a “Familiengefängnis,” in which his father “überschaute das Geschehen” and rifled through his children’s belongings when they were out.⁸¹ Strictness and corporal punishments were not his only tactics, however – he also sought love through what Meckel depicts as manipulative benevolence: “Er stellte [seinen Kindern] Auto, Bibliothek und Weinkeller zur Verfügung. Er half im Haushalt und machte es allen recht. Durch tausend trickreich geöffnete Hintertüren verschaffte er sich Zugang zu ihrem Leben. Er warb um sie, [...] der entthronte, hilflos gewordene Despot.”⁸²

This claustrophobic family scene, ruled by a suffering tyrant, is key for Meckel’s portrayal of the beginnings of his own career as a writer. Although one might expect that a shared love of writing poetry would function as a common ground for father and son, Meckel’s narrator is adamant that this is not the case. Instead, the author presents another transformation in his relationship with his father. To illustrate the idyllic period of his earliest years, Meckel recalls

⁸⁰ Meckel 46.

⁸¹ Meckel 106, 109.

⁸² Meckel 122-3.

his father reading poetry by Goethe and Eichendorff aloud to him, describing his own overwhelmed emotional response as rooted not only in the poetry itself, but in the event of his father reading to him: “Dem Singsang gesprochenen Verse verfiel das Kind.”⁸³ Rather than coding this scene positively as the seed of his future development, Meckel inscribes it within his narrative of betrayal. The verb “verfallen” here already implies that the child has been tricked, and Meckel continues to use vocabulary of duplicity for his feelings of enchantment: “Kopflösende Verführung durch Sprache. Hypnose und Erschütterung waren so stark, daß das Kind sich in Tränen auflöste. [...] Weinend wollte das Kind sich retten – und klammerte sich heftiger noch an den Urheber der Vergiftung.”⁸⁴ Here, Meckel foreshadows his later sense of betrayal and loss of his friend-father by depicting a moment of closeness and shared love of verse in the language of disloyalty and bad faith.

Accordingly, when Meckel considers his own decision to begin writing poetry, he insists that his and his father’s attitudes towards writing only further illustrate their differences. The son writes for himself, he asserts, to escape from his unhappy home life: when he wrote poetry, “die familiäre Enge verlor ihre Schrecken. Zeichnend und schreibend ließ ich sie hinter mir.”⁸⁵ In contrast, he recalls his father as desperate for public recognition of his poetic skill, leading the son to wonder, “Was war mit ihm los, daß er die öffentliche Bestrahlung seines Namens als etwas Hauptsächliches ansah?”⁸⁶ This part of the narrative follows an Oedipal arc: as the younger Meckel builds his career as a poet, his success eclipses that of his father, and he

⁸³ Meckel 45-6.

⁸⁴ Meckel 46.

⁸⁵ Meckel 141.

⁸⁶ Meckel 148.

describes himself as a monster crowding his father out: “das Untier in seinem Gehege dehnte sich aus. Mit grausamer Unschuld nahm es den ganzen Platz und drückte den Vorbesitzer an die Wand.”⁸⁷ Even as Meckel insists upon the Oedipal dynamic, however, this passage points to some ambivalence – he does not characterize himself as valiantly overcoming his father’s opposition and negative model, but rather as something cruel and inhuman. Using such rhetorically rich language and surprising images – also present in the characterization of the father as the “Urheber der Vergiftung” when he introduces his son to poetry– is a strategy Meckel uses to integrate complex and contradictory emotions into his narrative, and I will discuss such narrative shifts in detail in the final section.

Painting the Family Portrait: Rehmann’s Der Mann auf der Kanzel

While the primary narrative of Meckel’s text depicts his own suffering under an authoritarian father and his escape into writing, Rehmann’s primary narrative follows a different track. As was evident in the opening vignette of her text, her memories of her father are predominantly positive, and the bulk of her text is devoted to depicting him as a virtuous man who has a special bond with his daughter. As a child, she had special status in the family as the youngest, and had a closeness to her father that she did not share with any other family members. She was allowed to spend time in her father’s room while he worked, and even rest quietly at the edge of his couch while he napped in the afternoon. Although Rehmann’s father, like Meckel’s, was an authority figure, Rehmann’s memories are ones of comfort and security – she was guided by his “warme, trockene Hand, die von oben kommt.”⁸⁸ This image of the benevolent father

⁸⁷ Meckel 142.

⁸⁸ Rehmann 10.

above reflects the child's perspective while also pointing to her father's position as a spiritual leader. As the Protestant minister of their small village, Rehmann's father is a representative of their Christian God for the community, and Rehmann depicts him as a fatherly guide for his congregation – it is recognized in the community that “im Stich läßt er keinen.”⁸⁹

While Reinhold Rehmann is portrayed as an admirable figure, the daughter is something different: as a child she finds favor with her father, but things change when she enters adolescence. She begins to mature sexually, and this leads to feelings of guilt and betrayal. These negative feelings originate in her father's attitude: the narrator detects that there is something in her growing up that displeases him, but “das wurde nicht genannt, nicht mal Andeutungen, Umschreibungen, nur dieser kühle Strahl des Nichtgefallens immer auf den gleichen verschwiegenen Fleck, der offenbar nicht geliebt werden kann...”⁹⁰ Following her father's lead, the author-narrator does not name the changes in her that are so unspeakable, which are presumably the bodily changes that mark her as female. Instead, she utilizes the biblical image of the snake, representing sexual temptation, to underscore her feeling of unintentional betrayal of both her father and God. She characterizes the forbidden thoughts within her as wet and slimy, as a “Schlangennest” that she cannot quite get a hold of. These snakes remind the narrator that she used to imagine there were snakes in the family's cellar, and that as a child she would sing loudly whenever she had to go down in the dark alone. Her parents reassured her that she had no reason to fear, because God was with her, “aber das Kind weiß: da unten im Dunklen, Feuchten, Schleimigen ist Gott nicht!”⁹¹ Metaphorically, this snake pit is overtly sexual, connecting the

⁸⁹ Rehmann 43, 99.

⁹⁰ Rehmann 168.

⁹¹ Rehmann 168.

young girl's developing gender identity to her undesirable sexual thoughts. This passage devoted to Rehmman's adolescent maturation, whose language is unusually rhetorical for her text, culminates in her religious rite of passage – confirmation in the Protestant church. At the ceremony, blessed by her father for the purity of soul which will allow her to see God, the daughter (referred to here with the grammatically neuter “das Kind”) cries in despair, “weil sein Herz nicht rein ist, weil es den Vater betrügt, weil es nie im Leben und Sterben Gott schauen wird.”⁹²

In contrast to the father-child relationship in Meckel's text, which is also colored by a sense of betrayal, Rehmman portrays herself as at fault, even if her narrator alter ego does not quite understand what she has done wrong. In these passages reflecting on her adolescence, Rehmman suggests but does not explicitly state that, as she grew older, she no longer shared her father's faith. In other sections of her text, however, when she narrates episodes from her adult life, it is clear that she has strayed from her father's path in this respect also. When Rehmman discusses her father with her own children, in the opening pages of the text, we learn that religion is something exotic for the next generation, for whom the idea of “ein Vater, der glaubt” is a novelty.⁹³ The author-narrator's own position is marked more clearly when she visits her older brother, Gerhard, the oldest son of the family and a pastor like his father. When Rehmman comes to her brother with questions about theology during the Nazi period, he refuses to engage with her on such matters, “da [sie] das, was diesen Schriften zugrunde liegt, nicht teil[t].”⁹⁴ His sister

⁹² Rehmman 173.

⁹³ Rehmman 11.

⁹⁴ Rehmman 74.

should not argue with theologians, the brother believes, because she does not share “die unerläßliche Voraussetzung ihrer Wissenschaft: daß Gott ist!”⁹⁵

The dichotomy that emerges through these episodes – the father’s virtuous nature contrasted by the daughter’s guilty feeling of having betrayed his faith in her (and their Christian faith) – persists throughout the text. Even when confronted with evidence of his apparent support of the Nazis over the communists in their village, as I will discuss in the next section, Rehmann places responsibility with those around her father, including herself. The author-narrator points to her father’s isolation within the community and the family, a kind of “Einsamkeit, in der einer trotz täglicher minuziöser Kontrolle an Gottes Wort und Gebot in Schuld geraten könnte, ohne Schuld zu bemerken, weil die Wahrnehmung gewisser Sünden ein Wissen voraussetzt, das durch Sehen, Hören, Verstehen zustande kommt...”⁹⁶

The author-narrator blames her family and their community for shielding the father from what he should have seen, heard, and understood. She attributes his behavior to his naiveté, an effect of his protected position with a community who wanted a spiritual leader untroubled by worldly concerns.⁹⁷ Similarly, the family is unable to acknowledge the father’s illness and coming death, tiptoeing around the topic rather than engaging with his suffering. Even the daughter is complicit in her father’s isolation: in her last outing with her father before his death, the author-narrator recalls not giving him her full attention, distracted by the rendezvous she is missing that evening. The triviality of her worry is contrasted with the gravity of her father’s experience: her younger self “hört zu und hört doch nicht, daß der Vater im Begriff ist, das

⁹⁵ Rehmann 74.

⁹⁶ Rehmann 222.

⁹⁷ Rehmann 221.

Fürchten zu lernen und nach jemandem ruft, der mitgeht ins Dunkle, ist mit ihren Gedanken schon weggelaufen...”⁹⁸ At this late stage in the text, the motif of the daughter’s betrayal of her father returns.

For Rehmann, then, there is a close association between the family’s ostensible neglect of the father’s needs at the end of his life, the father’s own neglected responsibility for being aware of what was happening around him during the Nazi era, and the community’s failure to challenge their leaders in troubling times. And, of course, the reference to guilt reminds us of the daughter’s own feelings of guilt and betrayal surrounding her adolescent sexuality and gender identity. On the one hand, focusing on her father’s social context points to a collective responsibility for the persistence of social structures supporting a willful ignorance about the true nature of Nazism. As commendable as such an acknowledgment may be, in Rehmann’s text it has the function of mitigating the father’s responsibility, reproducing the dichotomy between the good father and the guilty daughter, inasmuch as she is one of those shielding him. Thus, the end of Rehmann’s examination of her father’s life finds her protecting him once more, apparently still held fast in the psychodynamics of family and community that her narrator alter ego criticizes.

The family portraits presented in Meckel’s *Suchbild* and Rehmann’s *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* thus show that both authors identify with a feeling of betrayal. In Meckel’s text, the son is the victim of this betrayal, having lost the beloved father portrayed in his idyllic opening vignette when the latter transformed into a strict disciplinarian and, after the war, a despotic family tyrant. For Rehmann, it is the daughter herself who is portrayed as a disappointment, failing to follow in her father’s virtuous footsteps, as he faithfully followed his own father’s path,

⁹⁸ Rehmann 212.

as intimated in Rehmann's opening scene. The ambivalence we have seen here – in Meckel's depiction of himself as an Oedipal monster and Rehmann's feelings of guilt at becoming a young woman – illustrate the ambivalence in *Väterliteratur* texts several critics observe, as I discussed in the Introduction. As I will show in the following section, the author-narrators' examination of the father's role in Nazism is complicated by the degree to which their own identities are tied to a particular image of the father. Their subjective positions influence the authors' adult views of their fathers' lives, as narrated in their texts, especially his activities during the Nazi era, as they try to fit that picture together with adult knowledge about his past attitudes, and cues from public discourse.

III. Narrating Complicity

Both Meckel and Rehmann construct their biographical narratives of their fathers in response to new knowledge about the father's role during the Nazi era. For Meckel, this information is drawn from his father's journals, especially those focused on his wartime experiences. The narrative of the father's life that Meckel presents depicts his father's progression from an unwillingness to recognize the Nazi oppressions taking place around him to increasing moral callousness as he becomes an instrument of the Nazis as a soldier. In Rehmann's text, the suggestion that her father tacitly supported Nazism in his village and in fact embodied the Protestant church's support of the Nazi government (which presented itself, especially in the early years, as a Christian political system) comes from conversations with her son Thomas, and, also, especially from her discussions with the old teacher Limbach. While Meckel's narrative serves to illustrate how his father could come to accept the Nazi regime, Rehmann constructs a narrative that rejects the accusation that her father supported the Nazis in

any way. Her biographical portrait of her father stresses his virtuous, if naïve, nature, and his consistent purity of intentions, implying that her father is somehow exempt from being viewed in his social-historical context. Her reluctance to revise her childhood image of her father as a positive model results in an apologetic tone that pervades her portrait of him. In this section, my discussion of Meckel's and Rehmann's engagements with the question of the father's complicity with the Nazi system focuses on what I consider the primary narrative of each text, in line with my thesis that the works communicate different elements through different narrative modes. In the subsequent section I will outline the countercurrents that emerge in the texts' secondary narrative discourses.

Constructing Complicity in Meckel's Suchbild: "Die Verrohung des Offiziers"

As Tilman Moser observes in his reading of Meckel's *Suchbild*, the author-narrator assesses his father's actions "in einem Klima der Scheidung von Gut und Böse,"⁹⁹ in which the author's father is consistently placed on the "wrong" side. Indeed, the biographical narrative that Meckel constructs for his father traces the roots of the latter's moral compromise from his own early childhood through his prewar literary career to his time as a soldier and, especially, as a father. Over and over, Eberhard Meckel is compared to the highest moral standard, against individuals with the most unambiguous opposition to Nazism. Examining this trajectory, we can see that Meckel positions his father as a representative of sociological and cultural trends that, while not explicitly in support of Nazi ideology, was instrumental in the National Socialists' rise to power. Rather than presenting his explanatory narrative of his father's life as a model for

⁹⁹ Tilman Moser, *Romane als Krankengeschichten: Über Handke, Meckel und Martin Walser* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 58.

better comprehension of the how Nazism was able to succeed, the author-narrator views his father's representative status as condemning evidence of the latter's mistakes.

Rather than begin with his own discovery of his father's journals, which reveal to him his father's support of Nazism and inspire him to write his text, Meckel structures *Suchbild* around his father's lifetime, beginning the biographical narrative with Eberhard Meckel's childhood. Here Meckel paints a picture of his father's psychological development. Unloved by his harsh, authoritarian father, young Eberhard was "ein ausgespucktes Kind" who found comfort in his mother and in the natural world, becoming deeply attached to his *Heimat*, the Black Forest region around Freiburg.¹⁰⁰ In Meckel's portrayal, his father's childhood affected him in primarily negative ways: Eberhard Meckel developed "eine demütige, fast unterwürfige Anhänglichkeit an Familie und Kindheit, ihre Gestalten und Orte [...], sein Verfallensein an Heimat," as well as "den Sinn für Prinzip und Strafe und den unbedingten Glauben an Autorität."¹⁰¹ These aspects of Eberhard Meckel's adult character reappear in various constellations in Christoph Meckel's depictions of his father as a parent, an author, and a *Wehrmacht* soldier. When the author-narrator reflects on his father's childhood, he also underscores its unremarkable nature, characterizing it as "die Jugend eines Begabten aus der Provinz."¹⁰² The language of this passage, referring to the father in general terms, already begins to mark him as representative of his social-historical cohort. As the narrative continues, the innocence implied in this passage fades away.

¹⁰⁰ Meckel 19, 21.

¹⁰¹ Meckel 20-21.

¹⁰² Meckel 21.

As he gets older, Eberhard Meckel's devotion to his *Heimat* develops into a sentimental nationalism, a precursor, in his son's mind, to an acceptance of Nazism. This is realized especially in Eberhard Meckel's celebration of German culture. He sees himself as "Erbe und NACHFAHR des deutschen Geistes," embracing traditional conservative values in the 1930s: "ERBE, KLASSIK, VOLK, SCHRIFTTUM ALS GEISTIGER RAUM DER NATION."¹⁰³ Here, Eberhard Meckel's nationalism and his literary values are intertwined: "Erbe" and "Volk" reflect this nationalism and the celebration of an ethnic German community held together by blood and through inheritance, and who participate in something greater than their individual selves, while "Klassik" and the reference to "Schrifttum" point to a German artistic tradition which seeks to connect German culture to the great classical civilizations and positions the author as a servant of the nation, essential to its intellectual development. Although this passage does not refer directly to militarism or the *Kaiserreich*, we can recognize in Eberhard Meckel's glorification of the German "Volk" and "Nation" the inter-war rhetoric valorising Germany in response to the perceived injustice of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

While passages such as these indicate the importance of a German national tradition to Eberhard Meckel's self-conception, such ideas are especially crucial for the author's portrayal of his father during the Nazi era. Reflecting on the elder Meckel's writing, the author-narrator places his father within the group of writers comprising the "Innere Emigration" – those who remained in Germany during National Socialism though they did not directly support the regime. Although he does use the term, asserting that the writing of the era created "die Atmosphäre einer Inneren Emigration,"¹⁰⁴ Meckel's narrator does not make direct reference to the debates of

¹⁰³ Meckel 39.

¹⁰⁴ Meckel 29.

the immediate post-war period between writers who had remained in Nazi Germany (represented in these debates by Frank Thiess) and those who had emigrated (represented primarily by Thomas Mann). Still, the author-narrator speaks from a perspective critical of writers who claimed to have been apolitical, uninvolved, and thus not responsible for the success of the Nazi regime.

When exploring his father's actions during the Nazi period, Meckel holds his father up to a strict standard, comparing him and his cohort to authors who had made different choices. Eberhard Meckel's devotion to his home region and its landscape is manifested in his penchant for nature poetry, and, as he pursued a career as an author, he joined a group of like-minded writers in Berlin, described by the narrator as "unprogrammatisch, poetisch-intuitiv."¹⁰⁵ The poets shared inward-looking tendency, "fort von Epoche und Zivilisation, fort von Politik und Psychologie."¹⁰⁶ This disinterest in the social and political climate of the 1930s, we are told, extended to their aesthetic preferences, which Meckel's narrator outlines in detail: this moment in literary history comes "nach dem Ende der expressionistischen Ära, nach Arbeiterdichtung und kosmischer Poesie, nach Welt- und Asphaltliteratur."¹⁰⁷ In contrast to these styles, which maintain a close link to political and material circumstances, Meckel's narrator describes his own father's work as "naturromantische Anarchie," secluded in "Landschaftsmotiven und ihrer sprachlichen Stille."¹⁰⁸ In these passages, Meckel narrates from a markedly unsympathetic perspective, not only comparing his father's aesthetic mode with other, more socially engaged

¹⁰⁵ Meckel 29.

¹⁰⁶ Meckel 30.

¹⁰⁷ Meckel 30.

¹⁰⁸ Meckel 30.

and historically significant, literary trends, but also displaying his, the author-narrator's, own superior knowledge and awareness of literary history.

The group of writers to which his father belonged viewed the apolitical quality of their work as an essential distinction between their own writing and the literature supported by the state, Meckel emphasizes. Taking issue with this attitude, Meckel primarily uses the example of Günter Eich, who succinctly articulates the intentionality behind the writers' withdrawal, stating “‘Verantwortung vor der Zeit? Nicht im Geringsten. Nur vor mir selber.’”¹⁰⁹ Eich goes beyond merely defending a concern with engaging with the timeless natural world in poetry, rejecting outright the “‘Antwort des Dichters auf Fragen der Politik.’”¹¹⁰ Eich disapproved of current events playing any role in literature, Meckel summarizes, quoting a longer passage from Eich in which the latter reflects upon the individual's inability to see his or her own historical context clearly, or to recognize which will be the enduring “‘Denk- und Lebenssysteme’” of the time.¹¹¹ Meckel's narrator summarizes this attitude, emphasizing the position of nature poetry, and hence his father's position, within this way of thinking: “‘Man setzte sich ab, unter Freunden, privat und passiv, und schien mit Naturpoesie eine Atmosphäre geschaffen zu haben, in der man sich von

¹⁰⁹ Meckel 31. Meckel does not provide citations for Eich's comments; they are from the latter's 1932 essay “‘Bemerkungen über Lyrik.’” Although the statements Meckel cites here stress the independence of literature from the political context, and it is this thinking that he presents as representative for the group, Eich's own support of National Socialism (he attempted to join the party in 1933) suggests that writer himself need not withdraw from political movements altogether. Meckel does not discuss Eich's early support of Nazism and later reversal of his position, presumably in order to restrict the parallel between Eich and Eberhard Meckel to their thoughts on the role of literature in society.

¹¹⁰ Meckel 31.

¹¹¹ Meckel 32.

der offiziellen Literatur des Dritten Reichs unterschied.”¹¹² As he goes on, Meckel objects to the claim that these writers were able to isolate themselves from the National Socialist world around them, asserting that, when the war began, it broke in upon their idyll and “zerfetzte die **Illusion** von der unabhängigen Kunst.”¹¹³

Of course, Meckel is primarily concerned with his father’s role in this period, and he underscores the compatibility he sees between the aesthetic attitudes of Eberhard Meckel and his group, on the one hand, and the *Zeitgeist* of Nazi Germany, on the other. For example, his narrator notes that his father and the other poets in his circle lived comfortably under the National Socialist government, and that a reason for emigrating from Germany “schien nicht vorhanden.”¹¹⁴ During the 1930s, he observes, his father and his friends “konnten leben, hatten Familie und Haus, wurden beruflich kaum in Frage gestellt noch aus Gründen der Herkunft oder Gesinnung verfolgt.”¹¹⁵ It was not only the fact that Eberhard Meckel and his friends were not the targets of National Socialist persecution, however, but also the fact that their work did not conflict with the regime’s ideology that allowed them to live in their insulated retreat. The narrator points out that his father’s fascination with regional culture is in harmony with the National Socialist celebration of the Germans as a race: “Mein Vater und [Martin] Raschke stellten ihre Provinz auf den deutsch-nationalen Boden,” he states, and their writing “entsprach der vertieften Innerlichkeit der dreißiger Jahre und war für BLUT UND BODEN prädestiniert.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Meckel 32.

¹¹³ Meckel 32, emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Meckel 26.

¹¹⁵ Meckel 26-27.

¹¹⁶ Meckel 30.

The suggestion here is that, regardless of how Eberhard Meckel himself understood his relationship to the Nazi regime, from the son's retrospective point of view, the former represented a constitutive part of Nazi society, a variation on its way of thinking, perhaps, but essentially one which was compatible with Nazism.

The author-narrator's own conception of morally responsible behavior during the Nazi era is evident in his juxtaposition of his father's life in Hitler's Germany and the lives of other artists and entire social groups:

Während Brecht, Döblin und Heinrich Mann emigrierten, Loerke und Barlach in Deutschland zu Tode erstickten, während Dix und Schlemmer in süddeutschen Dörfern untertauchten, Musiker, Wissenschaftler und Regisseure verschwanden, Kollegen diffamiert, verfolgt, verboten, Bücher verbrannt und Bilder beschlagnahmt wurden, schrieb er ruhige Verse in traditioneller Manier und baute ein Haus, in dem er alt werden wollte. Der Exodus von Juden, Kommunisten und Intellektuellen, das plötzliche oder allmähliche Verschwinden der gesamten Avantgarde schien von ihm kaum zur Kenntnis genommen zu werden.¹¹⁷

In this passage, Meckel contrasts his father's actions, which suggest contentment and confidence in a secure future, with the dramatic upheavals taking place around him. Moreover, the changes that the narrator references are specifically changes in the cultural landscape of Germany in the 1930s, of which Eberhard Meckel was himself a part. Here the author-narrator expresses exasperated amazement that his poet-father could take so little notice of such vast

¹¹⁷ Meckel 25.

transformations in the artistic milieu. This apparent lack of interest or awareness suggests a position of willful ignorance that, for the author-narrator, is characteristic of his father's increasing moral compromise during the Nazi era. As Tilman Moser notes, even when Meckel acknowledges that his father had secretly listened to foreign radio reports on Hitler's maneuvers, he refuses to mark this as a moment of resistance. Instead, Moser observes, "wo der Vater widersteht, ist es nicht Verdienst, sondern eine Art von amoralisch-ästhetischer Immunität."¹¹⁸

Meckel's insistent refusal to acknowledge any gray area in his depiction of his father's moral complicity in Nazism is best illustrated in the author-narrator's consideration of his father's military career. Reviewing this period of his father's life, the narrator adopts a tone by turns mocking, unsympathetic, and harsh. He makes a direct connection between his father's nationalist feeling and his susceptibility to National Socialist ideology: "Die ideologische Schulung paßte auf ihn. Er war, als geistesgläubiger deutscher Mensch, prädestiniert für die großdeutsche Progression."¹¹⁹ Moreover, while the elder Meckel made a distinction between the German nation he supported and the Nazi leaders he disliked, the narrator's attitude is derisive when he describes his father's ability to adapt to his *Wehrmacht* context, as we see in the following passages:

Es war ihm möglich, sich einzugewöhnen, weil Autorität ein Fixpunkt war, den er niemals in Frage stellte. Autorität war eine Gegebenheit, die er auf eine sehr subtile, kaum wahrnehmbare Art der Unterwerfung bestätigte. Er hatte – durch Verhalten und Wesenart – schon immer alles mögliche bestätigt. Er hatte seinen

¹¹⁸ Moser 61.

¹¹⁹ Meckel 61.

Vater bestätigt, danach sein Vaterland... Er hätte sich in alles eingelebt, und selbst in eine blutige Diktatur; er hätte sich, erbittert, unterworfen und allenfalls die Methode des Blutvergießens, nicht aber das Blutvergießen selbst, kritisiert; wo Blut vergossen wurde, war auch ein Sinn; der Sinn des Blutvergießens war vor ihm da.¹²⁰

Der Glaube an die Rechtmäßigkeit des Kriegs, das unbedingte Vertrauen in Autorität, das auf Prinzipien reduzierte Denken schmolz jede ambivalente Empfindung ein. Ihm fehlte in allem das elementare Entsetzen, weil ihm die Einsicht in den Zusammenhang fehlte.¹²¹

Er sang und marschierte konform mit dem Deutschen Reich (durchaus nicht mit Hitler, SS und NS-Partei), er bejahte die gewaltsame Expansion.¹²²

In these passages, the author-narrator explicitly draws a connection between his father's childhood and his adult tendency towards nationalist feeling and trust in authority – the values and habits of thinking he learned growing up lead him to accept the Nazi leadership, regardless of his opposition to Nazi ideology itself. His life experience supporting and endorsing forms of authority, from his father to the German cultural figures he admired, remains consistent even in the Nazi regime. Going further, the author-narrator acknowledges that his father did and would

¹²⁰ Meckel 64-65.

¹²¹ Meckel 64.

¹²² Meckel 66.

not ideologically support a “bloody dictatorship,” but this is overshadowed by his assertion that his father would ultimately accept the authoritative, timeless logic of bloodshed. Moreover, the author-narrator rejects his father’s distinction between the abstract concept of the German nation he stands for and its National Socialist incarnation. For the son, it is his father’s actions and ideological self-manipulations that are more significant than his stated dislike of Nazism – the father’s attitudes and mindset allowed him to fight with conviction under Nazi leadership, and for the author-narrator, his father’s rationalizations amount to little more than splitting of hairs. Lastly, in addition to the implication that the father’s childhood and upbringing contributed substantially to his development of political attitudes compatible with Nazism, Meckel also suggests that his father’s abstract and unworldly aesthetic tastes enabled him to disconnect his military activities from their purpose and consequences. Considering his father’s training exercises, the narrator muses that “die Bedeutung des Trainings (Tötung, Vernichtung des Feindes) schien dem Romantiker nicht bewußt zu sein.”¹²³

When Meckel turns to reflect upon his father’s life after the war, he continues to trace the progression of his father’s love for discipline and authority, born in his childhood and honed during the Nazi era. In addition to the strict and cold aspects of the father-son relationship I discussed in the previous section, Meckel also describes his father as “eine Sorte Offizier” within the household, characterizing his parenting style as an extension of his military experience.¹²⁴ Not only does Eberhard Meckel become harsh and cruel like his own father – the author-narrator notes that his grandfather’s refrain of “du bist nichts, du kannst nichts, mach deine

¹²³ Meckel 61.

¹²⁴ Meckel 51.

Hausaufgaben” recurred in his father’s treatment of the author himself – but he also, in this depiction, allows his military experience as a bearer of authority to inform his parenting style.¹²⁵

In *Suchbild*, then, we see Meckel drawing connections between all aspects of his father’s life, from his childhood and family to his literary and cultural leanings and, ultimately, to his military career fighting for Nazi Germany. This means that the biographical narrative he constructs for his father explains the circumstances of the latter’s seduction by the nationalist, militaristic rhetoric of the Third Reich, despite his distaste for its genocidal bent. As the passages quoted above indicate, this explanatory narrative does not inspire sympathy in the author-narrator. Rather, such examples from the father’s life are mustered to indicate the extent of his moral compromise and detachment from his surroundings, to the degree that he was willing to support the German nationalist cause in whatever guise it might take. Although the author-narrator describes his father’s conflicted mindset as “gespenstische Ambivalenz einer Generation,” the typicality of his father’s example does not mitigate his father’s culpability. Instead, it proves it, reinforcing the image of a man who exemplifies the complicity of German society as a whole in the crimes of the Third Reich.

Questioning Complicity in Rehmans Der Mann auf der Kanzel: “Mein Vater war anders”

In contrast to Meckel’s portrayal of his father as subscribing to ways of thinking that are ultimately compatible with Nazi ideology, leaving Eberhard Meckel susceptible to becoming an instrument of the Nazi regime, Ruth Rehmans presents a biography of her father which aims to show that such complicity is inconsistent with his character. Where Meckel seeks to cast his father as hopelessly morally compromised, that is, Rehmans attempts to do the opposite,

¹²⁵ Meckel 20.

presenting her father as definitively virtuous to the degree that his culpability is unthinkable. The narrative of the father's life that Rehmann constructs, and indeed her engagement with the past at all, is situated first and foremost as a response to questions raised by her son, Thomas, a history student and Marxist. In the opening chapter of the text, Thomas asks his mother how her father responded to Nazism, remarking that "die Pfaffen hätten eine höchst fragwürdige Rolle gespielt."¹²⁶ The answers she gives initially – "er war ein unpolitischer Mensch, [...] er folgte seinem Gewissen" – are not satisfactory to her son.¹²⁷ He "begreift nicht, wie so ein Supergewissen die braune Zeit überdauern könnte, ohne im KZ zu landen."¹²⁸ It is this lapse in intergenerational understanding that Rehmann's text seeks to remedy. As I will show in this section, the text falls short in this endeavor: as the author-narrator revisits her father's life, she is ultimately unable to reconcile her childhood image of him with the idea that her father's political conservatism was representative of Christian-nationalist sentiments that buoyed Hitler's regime and that, when faced to choose between supporting communists or Nazis, he chose the latter.

To indicate that her father was an exceptionally good person, Rehmann peppers her narrative of his life with a variety of observations about his positive traits from those who knew him. When her father was young, he was considered "'helle', 'brillant'," he was also sensitive: "kränkend wird er nie, hat ein weiches Herz. Die Tränen kommen ihm leicht."¹²⁹ When he passed through the village, he was met with "Respekt und Wohlwollen," and he gained the

¹²⁶ Rehmann 11.

¹²⁷ Rehmann 12.

¹²⁸ Rehmann 12.

¹²⁹ Rehmann 36.

admiration of his fellow students “durch Witze und Kapriolen.”¹³⁰ His charm and sensitivity as a youth transform into compassion and dedication in adulthood. As an army chaplain in World War One, Reinhold Rehmann risks life and limb to reach soldiers on the front, riding “zu meinen Leuten in der vordersten Linie’.”¹³¹ Later, when he becomes pastor of his own church, he insists upon knowing each member of his congregation personally, and seeks to ease suffering and mediate conflicts throughout his community, encouraging them “ihm nicht nur geistliche, sondern auch leibliche Sorgen vorzutragen.”¹³² In scenes such as these, Rehmann depicts her father as a caring and empathetic person in all phases of his life, demonstrating these qualities in such a variety of anecdotes to reiterate that this compassionate quality defined Reinhold Rehmann.

Like Meckel’s father, Reinhold Rehmann is presented as steadfastly *kaisertreu* throughout his life, but in the latter case this largely a positive trait. While Meckel intimates that his father’s allegiance to the ideals and social mores of the *Kaiserreich* prepare him to ultimately support the Nazi government, Rehmann presents her father’s loyalty to the Kaiser, whom he served in the First World War, as a virtue, safeguarding him against the enticements of the Third Reich’s genocidal nationalism. In the Rehmann family, honoring both God and the Kaiser were important traditions. In her father’s room, for example, hung portraits of his own father (the author’s grandfather), Martin Luther, and “Kaiser Wilhelm der Zweite, Adlerhelm auf dem Kopf, die Brust voller Orden.”¹³³ This similarity of position is also reflected in the narrator’s

¹³⁰ Rehmann 37.

¹³¹ Rehmann 87.

¹³² Rehmann 95.

¹³³ Rehmann 22.

recollection of the understanding of the Kaiser that she gained from listening to her parents: he was “fast so fern wie der Liebe Gott und auf ähnliche Weise geliebt und verehrt.”¹³⁴ As is evident in these passages, Reinhold Rehmann’s support of the Kaiser represents an adherence to tradition and a patriarchal social and familial structure, which reflects his religious beliefs, rather than a considered engagement with political ideas.

The role of the Kaiser for Reinhold Rehmann is especially important for the text because his conception of the Kaiser is mirrored by the author’s conception of her father: both err only because they are so virtuous, trusting and high-minded that they could be led astray by their pernicious subordinates. As Reinhold Rehmann uses such rationalizations to rescue his image of the Kaiser from being tarnished by the young man on the boat, the author Rehmann uses a similar logic to rationalize her father’s unsavory social attitudes, allowing a noble-naïve image of him to stand. This is particularly evident in a story Rehmann recounts in which her father confronts a young critic of the Kaiser years after the end of the First World War. In the 1920s, while Reinhold Rehmann gives a memorial speech in remembrance of the 1916 Battle of Jutland during a yacht cruise in Norway, he is disrupted by some younger Germans, who carry on a loud conversation as he is talking. At first the young people’s disrespect is merely an annoyance, but when one of the younger party tells stories during dinnertime mocking Kaiser Wilhelm II’s lifestyle and education (purportedly told to the young man by his uncle, who was close to the Kaiser), Reinhold Rehmann feels he must intervene. He rises to his feet, walks behind the young man, puts his hand on his shoulder, says “Schämen Sie sich!” and leaves the room.¹³⁵ As he

¹³⁴ Rehmann 53.

¹³⁵ Rehmann 66.

exits, the young man calls after him, asking if he had ever asked himself whether “das Volk nicht allzu teuer bezahlt hat für dieses kaiserliche Spielzeug, die Flotte, die zum richtigen Zeitpunkt nicht kämpfen durfte und zum falschen Zeitpunkt gegen den Feind geschickt und mitten im Kampf zurückgepiffen wurde[...]?”¹³⁶ The young man’s suggestion that the Kaiser had erred haunts Reinhold Rehmann into the night, as he wrestles with the possibility that there could be some truth in the young man’s criticism. Tormented by the idea, he writes a letter to the Kaiser, lamenting how lonely and difficult it is to be one of the faithful after the *Kaiserreich* has ended; gripped by a realization of his own insignificance, he tears up his letter.

This act functions as a release for Reinhold Rehmann, however, and he suddenly hits upon a new way of relating to his exiled Kaiser. The pastor decides that he himself represents “der letzte Getreue, der alle Anfechtung auf sich nahm und verschwieg, damit sein Fürst ruhig schlafen konnte.”¹³⁷ This newfound role as one who sacrifices for his patriarch comes as a revelation to Reinhold Rehmann, who, as he notes in his diary, quickly develops a narrative which allows for the Kaiser’s fallibility without challenging his authority – the Kaiser was “allzu vielseitig begabt, deshalb sprunghaft, schwankend, oft mißdeutet und irregeleitet, [...] allzu groß denkend für das niedrige Geschäft der Politik, allzu leichtgläubig, vertrauensvoll, freimütig für die böse Welt, die ihm den hohen Flug mißgönnt.”¹³⁸ In this rationalization of the suggestion that the Kaiser was fallible, Reinhold Rehmann exalts the monarch, placing his intellect above worldly concerns – which remain indistinct in this passage, and yet include politics, which the pastor intimates is above the Kaiser’s purview. This reflects Reinhold Rehmann’s belief that the

¹³⁶ Rehmann 67.

¹³⁷ Rehmann 69.

¹³⁸ Rehmann 69.

Kaiser was a ruler, not a politician, placed in his position by his Christian God, in contrast to the elected leaders of the Weimar Republic.

The views of the Kaiser that Reinhold Rehmman expresses here mirror statements he makes elsewhere about God: both are concerned with what is beyond the mundane and the worldly, in contrast to the common man, or, in the Kaiser's case, "die böse Welt."¹³⁹ Early in the text, the narrator recalls her father explaining to that "für Gott andere Dinge wesentlich sind als für die Menschen und daß es darauf ankäme, dieses für Gott Große und Wesentlich herauszufinden und danach zu streben, statt sich mit Äußerlichkeit aufzuhalten."¹⁴⁰ As we saw in his rationalization of the Kaiser's missteps during the First World War, this distinction between what is "essential" and what is "external" is crucial for the pastor. In the author's own depiction of her father, especially her consideration of his political and social attitudes, we find the same dichotomy at work. Not only does Rehmman characterize her father as lacking "Geiz, Gewinnstreben, Erbstreit, Nachbarhaß," but also as, like his Kaiser, blind to the evil in the world: echoing her father's description of the Kaiser, the author-narrator notes of her father that "**die böse Welt** ist ihm fremd."¹⁴¹

These statements about Reinhold Rehmman's character are rallied to contradict some sympathies with Nazism that the pastor displays, themselves cast as springing from his monarchism and loyalty to Kaiser Wilhelm II. On the one hand, Rehmman makes it clear that her father had no particular fondness for Hitler. When the young man who had criticized the Kaiser on the Norwegian cruise in the 1920s reappears as a major during the Second World War,

¹³⁹ Rehmman 69.

¹⁴⁰ Rehmman 23.

¹⁴¹ Rehmman 78, emphasis added.

proclaiming an about-face in his patriotic feeling, Reinhold Rehmann resists the idea of Hitler as the Kaiser's successor.¹⁴² When a member of the congregation brings a bust of Hitler into the pastor's office, he insists that he "hat 'dieses Ding' nie richtig bemerkt'," and thus does not notice when his wife removes and destroys it.¹⁴³ Hearing Hitler's speeches on the radio during the campaign before the 1933 elections, the pastor objects that Hitler "kann nicht mal richtig deutsch. Ein Österreicher! Das hat uns grade noch gefehlt."¹⁴⁴ Like Meckel's father, Rehmann's father displays a strong anti-populist streak, complaining about the lack of decorum in the Weimar Republic: if only these people were "ein bißchen unauffälliger," he complains, "nicht so laut, geschwätzig, aufdringlich, massenhaft, ordinär. [...] Die Vielen sind die Dummen."¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, once the Nazis have gained control of the country, Rehmann's father displays disinterest and antipathy: his daughter is not allowed to join the *Bund deutscher Mädel*, and he himself refuses to join the Nazi party, despite the urgings of his sister.¹⁴⁶

These expressions of dislike for Hitler and the Nazis do not reflect strong conviction on the part of Reinhold Rehmann, however, as the author-narrator also includes a number of instances of her father agreeing with certain tenants of Nazism. Her father displays a matter-of-fact anti-Semitism, expressing surprise that his new friend Herr Jacobi is a Jew – "natürlich getauft" – in addition to castigating "die Roten," "die Schwarzen," and "die Jidden."¹⁴⁷ When

¹⁴² Rehmann 72.

¹⁴³ Rehmann 22.

¹⁴⁴ Rehmann 122.

¹⁴⁵ Rehmann 121.

¹⁴⁶ Rehmann 173-4.

¹⁴⁷ Rehmann 117-121.

reminded of the Nazis' anti-Jewish measures, the pastor remarks that of course he is against persecutions, but he can at least understand "die ablehnende Haltung der deutschen Regierung gegen die Übermacht der Juden in Presse, Börse, Theater."¹⁴⁸ This prejudice is rooted in Reinhold Rehmann's support of Kaiser Wilhelm II: the pastor proclaims that he "ist, wie alle wissen, ein alter Deutschnationaler, daraus macht er keinen Hehl. Wie sollte er vergessen können, was diese jüdische Presse in den Kriegs- und Nachkriegsjahren dem Kaiser angetan hat."¹⁴⁹

The co-existence of Reinhold Rehmann's dislike for the Nazis and his sympathy with their nationalist racism is not only evidence of his conservatism, however, but also of his unwillingness to take a stand on his political context, which he links to his faith. He views the Nazi *Machtergreifung* as God's will, insisting that, in handing over power to Hitler, Hindenburg "wird schon wissen, ..., was er tut, und wenn er's nicht weiß, so weiß es der 'Herr der Geschichte,' der es 'über all unser Wissen und Verstehen recht machen wird,' ein kleiner Gemeindepfarrer braucht es jedenfalls nicht zu wissen!"¹⁵⁰ This one minor pastor is not only comfortable with his ignorance of politics, but he ties it to his obligations as a faithful Christian, whose place is not to judge who his God sets in power. The teacher Limbach recalls this aspect of Rehmann's father's personality, returning to a familiar theme: the pastor separated individuals "in Wesentliches und Äußerliches. 'Wesentlich' ist er als Gotteskind... 'äußerlich' ist er Bürger,

¹⁴⁸ Rehmann 153.

¹⁴⁹ Rehmann 153.

¹⁵⁰ Rehmann 125.

Angehöriger von Nationen, [...] . Diesen Teil schaltet er ab.”¹⁵¹ That is, the pastor may be regrettably naïve, but evoking the language of what is “essential” about an individual in the context of his failure to recognize the social and political conflicts happening around him has the effect of qualifying his willful disengagement.

Rehmann’s narrator takes up this idea, re-phrasing it as she summarizes her father’s reticence to link his own political prejudices to the individuals with whom he is acquainted:

In der Praxis sieht das so aus: Er hat was gegen ‚die Schwarzen‘, aber der kohlschwarze Dechant von St. Servatius ist ein ‚idealer Kollege‘ und ‚feiner Kopf.‘ Die Juden vergiften das Volk, aber der Rabbi Selig von der Aueler Synagoge ist ‚eine Seele von einem Menschen.‘ Er fürchtet die Roten, aber der rote Schmitz Gustav von der Zange ist ‚ein grundbraver Kerl, schuldlos ins Unglück geraten, man muß ihm unter die Arme greifen.‘ Als ‚33 ein SA-Mann Bürgermeister von Auel wurde, hat der Lehrer gewarnt: ‚vor dem müssen Sie sich in acht nehmen, Herr Pfarrer.‘ Da hat er ihn ganz erstaunt angeschaut: ‚Wieso denn, den kenne ich doch persönlich, kein übler Kerl, ein bisschen beschränkt, tut keiner Fliege was zuleide‘...¹⁵²

When Rehmann points out these contradictions in her father’s treatment of individual representatives of cultural groups he dislikes, her father appears slightly ridiculous, hopelessly out of touch with his social context, but because the author has at this point so closely linked her

¹⁵¹ Rehmann 126.

¹⁵² Rehmann 126.

father's naiveté with his Christ-like nature, her narrator's criticism lacks an edge. Instead, the tone is resigned, perhaps even exasperated – the narrator is annoyed at her father's blindness, but this does not seem to represent complicity for her. For Rehmann, it is not the case that her father's faith blinds him (which would potentially demonize the German Protestant church), but rather that his fatal flaw is successfully modeling himself on Christ and the Kaiser – like them his mind and attention are occupied with nobler, more essential things. The fact that this leads him to tragically overlook traces of evil around him is tempered by the allegiance to lofty ideals from which it results.

Against this background, further indications of Reinhold Rehmann's openness towards the Nazi regime seems to further confirm his naiveté, but not necessarily mark him as exemplary of, for example, the Protestant church's support of the Nazi government. Even when Rehmann does broach the subject of her father's clash with his congregation over the position of the Protestant church in Nazi Germany, evidence of his lack of awareness of the realities of the Nazi regime seem quaint and disappointing rather than more deeply troubling. In 1934, when Limbach insists the pastor comment on the "Arierparagraph, Judenvertrag, Maulkorbverordnung, Verhaftungen" in Nazi Germany, the latter shows that he is poorly informed (he was not aware that the race laws were currently in effect), and even offers excuses for the young government.¹⁵³ Noting that the country had had leaders from a variety of political parties during the Weimar Republic, the pastor asks "wollen wir nun dieser Regierung, die sich als erste ausdrücklich auf den Boden eines positiven Christentums stellt, wegen einiger Anfangsschwierigkeiten in den Rücken fallen?"¹⁵⁴ In his enthusiasm for a government that at least presents itself as Christian, in

¹⁵³ Rehmann 153.

¹⁵⁴ Rehmann 154.

contrast to the secular Democratic government of the Weimar republic, Reinhold Rehmman appears willing to look beyond its racism, anti-Semitism and its repressive treatment of its political opponents. Unfortunately for him, a large part of his congregation does not agree with him, and his church splits. While this disappoints him greatly, it is not enough to change his political position – he refuses to do anything “gegen die Obrigkeit,” and cannot take the supposed Nazi threat to the freedom of the church seriously because no one has attempted to stop him personally from doing anything.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, he is unwilling to accept reports of the Nazi concentration camps, rejecting them as “Latrinenparolen, ... die aus der gleichen Hexenküche kommen, in der die Lügen über deutsche Verbrechen beim Einmarsch in Belgien gebraut wurden. Diese Leute hören nicht auf, unser armes Vaterland mit Schmutz zu bewerfen. Ehe ich nicht mit eigenen Augen eines dieser [...] KZ's gesehen habe, glaube ich kein Wort davon.”¹⁵⁶

Even when his Jewish friend Jacobi visits on his way out of the country, fleeing the threat of Nazi persecutions, Reinhold Rehmman insists “nein, ich kann das nicht glauben. Das wäre doch...”¹⁵⁷ In this text, at least, the pastor is unable to even articulate what it would mean for the rumored atrocities to be true – for him, such a vicious abuse of power is, if not literally unthinkable, evidently unspeakable. The persecutions of the Nazi period thus remain unreal for him, through a combination of ignorance supported by an insistence on individual person-to-person interactions and a desire to follow the lead of a God and idealized (dethroned) Kaiser whose purvey is beyond the mundane world of “politics.” Furthermore, because Reinhold

¹⁵⁵ Rehmman 156, 159.

¹⁵⁶ Rehmman 160.

¹⁵⁷ Rehmman 185.

Rehmann succumbed to heart failure in early 1941, he would not live to experience the horrible revelation that rumors of atrocities were all too true.

For the reader, Reinhold Rehmann's conservative attitudes and support for the National Socialists' claim to seek the establishment of a Christian state mark him clearly as a case study in how nationalist and Christian groups – even if they did not support the genocidal and imperialist aspects of the Nazi program – helped the Nazis gain and consolidate power. The author-narrator herself, however, resists this reading of her father's biography. As my reading has demonstrated, Rehmann depicts her father as blinded by his own efforts to see the best in individuals and to trust in his God. Even his refusal to believe early reports about concentration camps is presented as another (albeit lamentable) indication of his stubborn trust in the benevolence of the state, not as evidence of a systemic problem of "Wegschauen" in Nazi German society. Despite the evidence that the author-narrator herself collects, she refuses to view her father as a responsible agent who could have made different choices at this time in his life and in history. Instead, she places primary responsibility on those around her father, lashing out, for example, at the old schoolteacher Limbach, asking why he had not tried harder to make the pastor see the Nazi regime for what it was, why he had not said to the pastor: "Sie wissen nichts, Herr Pfarrer! Ihr Nichtwissen fängt an kriminell zu werden!"¹⁵⁸ Only in this indirect manner does the author-narrator voice criticism of her father's refusal to reexamine his political and social ideas. Limbach rightly turns the question around, asking Rehmann why she herself never questioned her father's position, but to this she offers no answer. The narrative she presents of her father's life contains part of the answer, however: on a fundamental level, the author-narrator herself

¹⁵⁸ Rehmann 161.

refuses to let go of her image of her father as a virtuous innocent who cannot be held to the same standard as others.

IV. Complicating the Picture: Countercurrents to the Primary Narratives of *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*

Exploring the psychological framework of Meckel's and Rehmann's texts has shown the degree to which their own subjectivities shape their portrayals of their fathers' lives, as the authors construct narratives of the father's complicity or naïve innocence, respectively. It is therefore all the more intriguing that the narrators present their stories not as subjective reflections, but as quasi-objective reports. In constructing narratives of their fathers' biographies, both Meckel and Rehmann employ techniques that suggest historical authenticity in order to assert the validity of the perspectives they present. We can see this especially in their engagement with the documentary "evidence" of their fathers' complicity in Nazism and their use of the third-person narrative voice – the former points to a uncritical conception of the unassailable truth of their knowledge, while the latter suggests that the perspective represented is authoritative and accepted. Both of these are attitudes that the authors share with the documentary movement in the literature, theatre, and television of the 1960s and 1970s, and to a degree also with the "Neue Subjektivität" trend in literature of the 1970s.

Journals as Evidence: Suchbild

Both Meckel and Rehmann give an indication in their text of their sources of information about their fathers' lives, but this knowledge production is itself not submitted to critical reflection. It is not only the case that the author-narrators do not critically address the veracity or

accuracy of their sources, however, but that they fail to acknowledge the degree of interpretation that is evident in the conclusions they draw from this information and the presentation of the “knowledge” they gain from these sources. In Meckel’s case, the primary source of information – aside from the author’s own memories – is his father’s journals. Meckel includes three sections of selected passages from the journals – marked “Auszüge aus den Notizen meines Vaters” – and these sections are separated from the rest of the text by empty lines and printed in italics to mark the change in narrative voice.

This visual separation of the father’s journals from the son’s narration is reinforced discursively: at no point does Meckel’s narrator directly refer to or discuss the journal passages, never offering an opinion or responding to a specific comment found there. On the one hand, this allows the author-narrator to keep the journals, and, symbolically, this aspect of his father’s identity, at arms length. On the other hand, however, the technique also implies that the significance of that material in the journals is self-evident, not in need of discussion. Of course, Meckel’s entire narrative is itself a response to what he finds in his father’s writings, but, as I have shown, Meckel creates a narrative of complicity out of his father’s biography, reflecting his subjective need to distance his own identity from his father’s. When he refrains from representing the process of interpretation of the journals, he implies that such work has not taken place, that his own conclusions are thus unquestionable. However, the author’s intervention as redactor of the father’s journals is evident to the reader, and we can distill the subjective intention from the author’s narrative gesture towards presenting a forthright, frank report.

Each of the three sections of journal excerpts in *Suchbild* has a clear theme, and the journal entries mirror the primary narrative of the text, showing Eberhard Meckel’s transformation from an idealistic poet nostalgic for the days of the Kaiser to the embodiment of

Nazi military ideals as a *Wehrmacht* officer. The first segment is primarily devoted to Eberhard Meckel's self-conception during the early years of the Nazi era: he views himself as superior to the "masses," who support the saber-rattling Hitler, and longs for the "*hohe geistige Erfassung des Krieges*" put forth in the work of Ernst Jünger – the two authors share their idealization of the German nation.¹⁵⁹ Despite the militarism and the surge in populist nationalism around him, the diarist continues to consider himself a poet independent of these new transformations. As the war begins, Eberhard Meckel remains opposed, avowing, "*nichts, kein Wort, keine Zeile zu schreiben, was aus diesem Krieg nutzen zieht oder ihm dient. (26.10.39).*"¹⁶⁰ In selecting these passages from his father's journals, the author suggests that his father's self-conception in relation to the political developments around him is still firmly rooted in the artistic mode – he insists he will not write anything that supports the war, but does not yet consider that he may be called upon to take a more active role.

This section of journal excerpts also tells another story, however, which does not fit so neatly with the narrative that Meckel seeks to construct around the journals. In addition to showing Eberhard Meckel's self-understanding as a member of the cultural elite, these journal entries also chart his awareness of major developments in the pre-war Nazi period. In the first entry, he listens to a Hitler speech (musing "*So ein Mensch steht an der Spitze Deutschlands*") in 1933, notes the burning of the Reichstag and the resulting "*düstere Revolutionsstimmung und Spannung in der Luft*" and even records witnessing a "*Mob gegen jüdische Geschäfte*" in June 1938.¹⁶¹ Far from the figure of the sentimental poet withdrawing to his garden to compose verses

¹⁵⁹ Meckel 37.

¹⁶⁰ Meckel 37-8.

¹⁶¹ Meckel 36.

in celebration of natural wonders while the artistic community disappears around him, the image of Eberhard Meckel we find in these journal excerpts suggest an individual aware of what was developing in his country but unsure how to respond. On the one hand, he refuses to join the Nazi party (*“Ein Mann von der Partei da, der Auskunft über mich will und mich in die Partei holen möchte. Abgelehnt. (9.9.38)”*), but on the other hand he finds a 1939 speech of Hitler’s *“gut, vielseitig und kraftvoll.”*¹⁶²

The second section of journal entries Meckel includes clearly shows the transformation the father undergoes, and how he understands his own position in Nazi Germany and the *Wehrmacht*. Here, the selections illustrate the author’s overall narrative of his father’s development into a despotic authoritarian during the war years, but a careful reading shows that there is even more to the picture than Meckel acknowledges. In regards to this first aspect, these journal entries are selected to illustrate both Eberhard Meckel’s rationalization of his self-conception and a juxtaposition of that earlier self-understanding with his wartime role. Ernst Jünger’s model, which combines artistic representation with a traditionalist, nationalist idea of Germany, and a celebration of the soldier, is crucial for Eberhard Meckel’s identity as a *Wehrmacht* officer. Although he enters the army only reluctantly, identifying with the ideal of the honorable soldier – familiar through Jünger’s writing on the First World War – enables Eberhard Meckel to once again draw a line between himself and the “civilian garbage” who exploit, oppress, and murder. The first excerpt in this section finds the diarist resolute, insisting, *“Ich werde nie ein Soldat werden. (27.1.41),”* but this statement is juxtaposed with the diarist’s proclamations about the honor of the German soldier. In the most striking example, when

¹⁶² Meckel 36-7.

confronted with reports of the misdeeds of Germans in Poland – from racketeering and price gauging to the “KZ in Auschwitz usw.”¹⁶³ – the diarist asserts:

*Als Soldat ist man doch so fern all dieser Dinge, die einen im Grunde auch gar nicht interessieren; man steht für ein ganz anderes Deutschland draußen und will später im Kriege sich nicht bereichert haben, sondern ein sauberes Empfinden besitzen. Ich habe nur Verachtung für diesen zivilen Unrat. Man ist vielleicht dumm, aber Soldaten sind ja stets die Dummen, die es bezahlen müssen. Dafür haben wir aber eine Ehre, die uns keiner raubt. (24.1.44)*¹⁶⁴

Here, the idea of the unimpeachable honor of the soldier places him above the “civilian” exploitations and atrocities of the Nazi world, allowing him to see the terrible things going on around him without feeling any sense of moral responsibility to intervene, and without recognizing how the presence and actions of his cherished army contribute to the oppression of the local population. Despite the evidence around him that the most terrible crimes are being committed in the name of Germany, Eberhard Meckel seems to believe that he will make it through the war with “*ein sauberes Empfinden*,” untouched by what he has seen and done.

The journal entries compiled in this section also illustrate the darker flipside of the soldier’s claim to honor, however: in redacting his father’s journals here, the author juxtaposes the abstract concept of soldierly honor with the very tangible suffering of those around him. For example, the diarist complains of the unreliability and impertinence of his Polish maids, without

¹⁶³ Meckel 57.

¹⁶⁴ Meckel 57-8.

acknowledging that these women were engaged in forced labor. Even witnessing the mass shooting of Polish civilians, who had attacked and killed two German soldiers and a German civilian, fails to arouse critical reflection in him – it leaves him “*äußerst kalt*,” but it is unclear whether this signifies shock or the soldier’s disinterest he mentioned earlier.¹⁶⁵ Ultimately, he concludes that this is all a sign of the times, the “*Muster eines Volksschauspiels der neuen Zeit*.”¹⁶⁶ In these entries, then Eberhard Meckel seems to not be blind to the persecutions around him, and he does find them contemptible, but he also appears callous, his ideals keeping him from responding to what he witnessed in a moral way.

The journal excerpts also show Eberhard Meckel playing his own small role in the cruelties of the war when a train of Italian officers, supporters of Badoglio, the Fascist Prime Minister of Italy after Mussolini, who made peace with the Allies and declared war on Nazi Germany, come into his camp. When an Italian colonel approaches him to say “*daß es nicht gut sei, sie fünf Tage fast ohne Brot zu lassen*,” he replies curtly that it is not good to be a supporter of Badoglio.¹⁶⁷ This proves to be more than just rude behavior, however: in the next lines, other officers approach him with similar requests, and he is more polite, ordering their train car to be heated.¹⁶⁸ The contrast between Eberhard Meckel’s treatment of the two groups of Italian officers demonstrates not only his caprice, but also the control he has, as an officer, over the conditions in which the prisoners are kept. Leaving the first group to starve, he displays a cruelty not so different from the “civilian garbage” he disparages.

¹⁶⁵ Meckel 58.

¹⁶⁶ Meckel 58.

¹⁶⁷ Meckel 57.

¹⁶⁸ Meckel 57.

It is significant that the author-narrator does not comment on this episode in his father's journals. In the passages between the segments of journal excerpts, the narrator summarizes his father's activities, and gives the reader a sense of how the author-narrator himself understands the material presented in the journals. For example, he muses that, "im Augenblick, als ihm Autorität zu Gebrauch oder Mißbrauch zur Verfügung stand, erschien die Veränderung auf erstaunliche Weise. ... Die Teilhaberschaft an der Macht war ziemlich begrenzt – sie genügte, seine Empfindlichkeit auszulöschen."¹⁶⁹ Although he never directly references specific journal entries, the narrator makes a handful of similar comments to this, always emphasizing the transformations in his father's character and self-understanding. This is of course consistent with the portrait of his father that Meckel constructs in his primary narrative, as I have outlined in the previous section. The episode with the Italian prisoners, however, suggests a different picture, one in which the elder Meckel did indeed have some power at his disposal as an officer and at times wielded it with caprice and cruelty. Because the author-narrator does not provide a critical discussion of his father's journals, however, we cannot know how he understands this particular passage. It remains a troubling spot nevertheless, one that does not fit with Meckel's image of his father, which marks the latter as sharing a degree of complicity and responsibility with Nazism on an ideological level, but not as an actual perpetrator.

While the second and longest section of journal entries shows Eberhard Meckel's moral compass becoming clouded by the idealistic filter through which he viewed his wartime world, the third section, consisting of only four entries, gives a sense of his mindset directly after the war. On April 30, 1945, the day of Hitler's suicide, Eberhard Meckel's journal entry offers a narrative that would become commonplace in the post-war era: "*Elender Verrat der Führung am*

¹⁶⁹ Meckel 66.

irregeleiteten Volke.”¹⁷⁰ Once again the diarist distances himself from the wrongdoers of history – as he earlier distinguished between honorable soldiers and civilian garbage, now he is part of the German people betrayed by their leadership. The journal entries reproduced here do not elaborate on the nature of the betrayal, leaving open whether Eberhard Meckel is referring to the suicides of many high-ranking Nazis, the military capitulation, or the cruelty and persecutions he witnessed as a soldier.

This feeling of disappointment does not appear to alter the diarist’s nationalist feeling, however: in the months following the end of the war, Eberhard Meckel retreated once again into his appreciation for the natural world and classical German culture, which he hoped would re-emerge. “*Goethe, Hölderlin, Stifter, das sind doch wohl die Begrenzungen meiner Welt. (9.6.45)*” he notes, and “*Es gilt wieder Liebe und Ehrfurcht zu schaffen, europäische Werte zu erhalten. (August 1945).*”¹⁷¹ This last section of journal passages, then, finds Eberhard Meckel with a strikingly similar mindset as his pre-war entries indicated: he laments the “betrayal” of the German people by their leaders, but his attention returns quickly to what he sees as the “eternal” elements of nature and European culture, represented by Romantic and natural realist German poets. This is not only surprising against the background of his own war experiences, but also in light of the fact that, by the late summer of 1945, he would likely have an idea of the full horror of the Nazi concentration camps.¹⁷² From what we see in these journal entries, at least, Eberhard Meckel’s conception of his own position in German society and within a German cultural tradition seems unchanged by the Nazi period and his own activities during the war.

¹⁷⁰ Meckel 78.

¹⁷¹ Meckel 78.

¹⁷² It is difficult to say with certainty what information would have reached Eberhard Meckel’s Algerian POW camp at this time.

The selection and arrangement of Eberhard Meckel's journal excerpts in *Suchbild* direct the reader to the conclusions about his culpability that inform the greater narrative of complicity the author constructs. These compilations present a picture of Eberhard Meckel as at best idealistic, self-delusional, and callous, and at worst a cruel, ambitious hypocrite who criticized others for persecutions in which he himself played a role. The reader has no information that would contradict this reading of the journals, although the fact that Meckel titles the sections "Auszüge" implies that there was more material, and it is possible that more context for the statements we read would mitigate the negative impression created in the text. But the author has chosen these passages to represent the thinking and behavior of his father. Although they may seem designed to give the impression that the father is speaking for himself, the son's work of interpretation is evident. Furthermore, the work of interpretation challenges the truth claim inherent in Meckel's inclusion of the excerpts without direct comment. Presenting them in this way suggests authenticity, implying the truth and veracity of the material. But when we recognize the interpretive aspect of the process of selection and compilation, a picture of the author-narrator's own interests and agenda emerges: he seeks to portray his father as becoming complicit in spirit, but not actually in deed.

Witness Testimony: Der Mann auf der Kanzel

In *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, Rehmann similarly presents documentary "evidence" in her text without also depicting any work of interpretation on her part. In Rehmann's case, it is not journals she incorporates, but a type of testimony – the words and memories of others who "were there," who knew her father as adults during the Nazi period. The primary figure who provides this information is the old teacher Limbach, whom she encounters on her return to the village; it

is her discussions with him that provide the impetus for writing about her father. When presenting what she has learned from Limbach, Rehmann employs several different strategies, including extended direct quotation printed in italics and her own summary re-telling of his memories and ideas. Like Meckel, Rehmann treats her source's information as incontrovertible fact, whose significance is self-evident.

The figure of Limbach appears early in Rehmann's text; in the author-narrator's memories, he is "der rote Lehrer Limbach," though he characterizes himself as having been a radical democrat, and was a member of the Deutsche Demokratische Partei before it was dissolved in 1933.¹⁷³ At the time Rehmann visits him, he is 92 years old, and remains loyal to her father. When the author-narrator confesses that she is worried about what she may find if she examines her family history too closely, Limbach defends the late pastor. The author-narrator acknowledges "den makabren Wunsch, den dunklen Punkt, den Dreck am Stecken endlich zu finden, damit es einmal vorbei und ausgestanden ist: So war er; das hat er gemacht und jetzt ist er tot!" but Limbach insists "Dreck werden Sie schwerlich finden."¹⁷⁴ Still, the narrator notes that the words hang in the air as if to suggest an "aber", "irgend etwas, was statt Dreck, ebenso schlimm oder noch schlimmer."¹⁷⁵ We have seen this difference in Rehmann's and Limbach's attitudes towards the pastor: Limbach is able to accept that the pastor was not uniformly virtuous, while Rehmann herself resists a nuanced understanding of her father, allowing only for the possibilities of good and bad. This passage illustrates another aspect of Rehmann's perspective as well, however: in this conversation with Limbach, she presents herself as a critical

¹⁷³ Rehmann 14, 16.

¹⁷⁴ Rehmann 17.

¹⁷⁵ Rehmann 17.

investigator of the past, ready to accept unpleasant truths. I have shown that this is not the case in Rehmman's primary narrative of her father's life, and we can recognize a similar pattern in her integration of information from Limbach into her text.

Limbach's memories are most important for Rehmman's text when she reaches the point in her father's biography when his congregation begins to fracture, in response to differing ideas about the position of the church within the new National Socialist German state. Limbach was a central voice arguing that the church must oppose the Nazi government, and his memories of the conflict within the congregation are presented from his perspective. To achieve this, Rehmman's narrator steps aside, and the text is printed in italics to mark his narration. In the author-narrator's introduction of the section, she places herself in the dependent position of listener, characterizing Limbach's speech as "Belehrung, eine Art Colloquium von der altmodischen Art, in dem einer redet, der andere hört, zu Zwischenfragen berechtigt, aber nicht zu Folgerung oder Kritik."¹⁷⁶ She records Limbach's words in her notebook, "gehorsam."¹⁷⁷ In accordance with her own invocation of a lecture in the "old" – traditional, patriarchal – style, Rehmman's narrator does not interrupt, Rehmman's self-portrayal in this passage thus casts her as passive and obedient, respectful of Limbach's patriarchal authority. The section closes with a return to present time, allowing for a final statement from Limbach, but without any critical intervention from the narrator. When confronted with Limbach's "testimony," then, the narrator drops her critical pose, opting for a position of respectful deference that relieves her of the burden of asking questions and proposing interpretations.

¹⁷⁶ Rehmman 128.

¹⁷⁷ Rehmman 128.

Limbach's lecture itself traces the conflict between the Protestant church and the Nazi government, from the perspective of the German Christians. Although the majority of this section reads like an academic summary of historical circumstances, it begins on a personal note, as the teacher remarks that Rehmann's father had, like much of the Protestant church, followed Luther's dictum that "*wenn die weltliche Gewalt gegen das Recht verstößt, darf der Luther-Christ 'um Christi willen' leiden, jedoch nicht Widerstand leisten.*"¹⁷⁸ Limbach's speech outlines the power struggle between the National Socialist government, the church leaders who supported the church's close involvement with the government, and the church leaders who sought a separation between the church and the new political regime. In his account, the manipulations of the politicians put pressure on existing contradictions within the German church between allegiance to the nation and its leaders and to God.

At the end of his lecture, Limbach explicitly connects his story about general historical trends to the specific case of Rehmann's father. He asserts that, after the church leaders decided to support the Nazi government, "*die Schafe sind von den Böcken getrennt,*" and those who resisted, especially Niemöller, are imprisoned as enemies of the state, while the "*Kirchenvolk wendet sich mit Grausen. Mit Vaterlandsverrätern will es nichts zu tun haben.*"¹⁷⁹ In the final passage of the chapter, Limbach returns to the personal case at hand, telling Rehmann: "Auch Ihr Herr Vater [...] wollte mit Vaterlandsverrätern nichts zu tun haben."¹⁸⁰ As I have already noted, Rehmann inserts Limbach's speech into her own text, but clearly marks it as representing another's voice and perspective. In this final passage, we can see what is at stake for Rehmann's

¹⁷⁸ Rehmann 128.

¹⁷⁹ Rehmann 137.

¹⁸⁰ Rehmann 137.

image of her father in this narrative gesture: for Limbach, the pastor's unwillingness to oppose Nazism exemplified the church's missteps during the Nazi era. For the author-narrator, this concept remains untenable.

Rehmann adopts a similar strategy when she relates the incident that constitutes the evidence of her father's complicity in Nazism, however naïve, in its local incarnation. The author-narrator receives an envelope of "Unterlagen und Notizen" from Limbach, which she reads while waiting for the train. To represent this episode, Rehmann's narrator adopts a distanced, neutral, reporting tone, opening the passage with the statement "Folgendes war passiert."¹⁸¹ The account continues in this tone, and although the specific date is named – February 15, 1933 – no individuals, except for Limbach, are mentioned by name; the author's father is referred to simply as "der Pfarrer." This rhetorical turn to anonymity gives the narration an impartial quality, and indicates the certainty and authenticity of the report.

Rehmann's narrator does not state the accusation against her father contained in this account outright, leaving the reader to put the pieces together. After the shooting, the pastor arrives and prays over the dead SS member, lamenting that both murderer and victim came from his congregation. Kneeling over the body, he would have had a close-up view of the wound. In the aftermath of the incident, when the Communists are blamed for the shooting, the narrator notes that, after one witness (an elderly woman) was beaten on the street, "andere Zeugen melden sich nicht, weder der Pfarrer noch der Arzt, der kurz nach ihm eintraf."¹⁸² The finger is pointed more clearly at the pastor's responsibility when the narrator notes that the damage to the SS man's hat, which disappeared, would have been obvious "für einen in Wunden erfahrenen

¹⁸¹ Rehmann 164.

¹⁸² Rehmann 165.

Weltkriegsteilnehmer.”¹⁸³ We are to understand, then, that Rehmman’s father, having knelt over the fallen man, would have seen his wounds closely enough to recognize, with his war experience, that the shot came from behind, from his own comrades. Although he presumably had the opportunity to step forward during the trial, he did not. Rather than state the accusation herself, the author-narrator turns to Limbach, who asks the pastor, in an unsent letter, “Warum haben Sie geschwiegen?”¹⁸⁴ By excluding her own voice and perspective from this account of the events of 1933 – recounted through Limbach’s notes – Rehmman is able to present the story without taking a position on its contents, allowing Limbach’s conclusion that her father knowingly failed to intervene, and thus aided the SS group, to stand unquestioned. Indeed, there are many questions her narrator could have asked – can we be certain that the pastor noticed anything significant? If he did, can one fault him for not stepping forward, when he was already an old man himself and doing so could have exposed him to personal danger? And what is the moral significance of an individual not standing up for justice in this context? All of these issues are raised by Rehmman’s story, but the author-narrator only reports, refraining from debate or discussion.

Although Rehmman and Meckel incorporate documentary “evidence” in the same way – marking it off through italics, inserting it into the text without comment from the narrator – the different nature of the evidence they use has some consequences. Where Meckel only has his father’s words on paper to confront, Rehmman engages with the memories and ideas of an interlocutor who is still living. The means that the opportunity exists to investigate the accuracy of memories so old, to consider the influence of the intervening years, with their revelations

¹⁸³ Rehmman 165.

¹⁸⁴ Rehmman 166.

about the Holocaust, on the person remembering, or to compare Limbach's account with other sources of information about the events and discuss with him any possible discrepancies. The fact that none of this happens in Rehmann's text creates the effect that the narrator accepts Limbach's testimony "at face value," and as self-evident, not needing of interpretation or closer inspection. As I have shown, this is a pattern Rehmann's text shares with Meckel's *Suchbild*.

What both Meckel and Rehmann do with their documentary evidence – presenting it as if self-explanatory, without explicit narrator discussion or interpretation – makes their narrative tasks simpler. Distilling a single narrative out of the father's life, marking him as ideologically susceptible to Nazism (Meckel) or as exceptional and thus exempt from the possibility of complicity (Rehmann), they accordingly confirm or reject the accusation of complicity with Nazism that they find in the documents and verbal accounts they confront. Their narrators do not have to reflect on their own complicated emotions or ask themselves what they would have done in their fathers' shoes. Their own moral superiority is implied, without reference to the possible historical contingency of their presumed ability to separate right from wrong in the context of Nazism. This is the crux of the identity and guilt issues that the texts navigate – if father and child are alike, then the father's complicity suggests that the child, in the same situation, would have made similar choices. In the face of this intolerable logic, Meckel insists upon strong differences between himself and his father, while Rehmann, remaining attached to her identification with her father, rejects the idea of his guilt.

The use of documentary evidence makes visible the constructed nature of both Meckel's and Rehmann's subjective portraits of the father's life, despite the gestures towards something like objective, critical distance, showing themselves as willing to entertain the possibility of the father's complicity. What they do with those documentary sources shows their investment in the

image of the father that fits with their own self-understanding, with their own identification against or with the father. In other aspects of the text, however – around the edges of the primary narrative – different conceptions of the father emerge, introducing shadings to the portrait of him that cannot be contained in the primary narrative thrust of the texts. In both *Suchbild* and *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, these different aspects of the narrative are marked by formal shifts in the narrative voice as well as by explicit narrator reflections on the nature of the stories they are constructing.

Shifts in Narrative Voice: Poetic and Reflexive Moments in Suchbild

For the majority of *Suchbild*, Meckel employs a narrative voice that, while recognizable as his own perspective, seeks to maintain a critical distance from his subject. He makes very little reference to his own life at the time of writing, and the opinions and attitudes he permits to register in his narrative voice are ones which can be presumed to hold for the general public. When the author-narrator contrasts his father unfavorably with politically engaged authors who emigrated during the Nazi era, for example, it is clear that the author-narrator counts himself among the Nazi-averse majority of his contemporaries. Further, even when Meckel is writing of himself as a child, he frequently maintains a sense of narrative distance by referring to himself as “das Kind,” rather than transporting his narrator back to childhood by saying “I.” Even when he reflects upon his own development as a writer, and himself and his father as poets, Meckel narrates more often than not in the third person voice. The author-narrator’s tendency to evoke a narrative distance from the story he is telling lends a sense of validity and authority to his account, giving his narration a neutral, uninvolved tone, even as he describes his own personal experiences.

This construction of distance in the narration serves as a unifying element for Meckel's primary narrative of his father's complicity – as he traces the roots of his father's susceptibility to Nazi modes of thinking, their unfolding during the Second World War, and the persistence of those values in his father's postwar family role, the author-narrator's perspective remains consistently distanced and critical. This narrator perspective marks the primacy of this narrative trajectory over other undertones in the text. But these other elements in the text, passages where Meckel's narrative voice changes, introduce tensions that are important for our overall understanding of *Väterliteratur*. They demonstrate that, although the author-narrator is invested in constructing a primary, cohesive narrative of his father's complicit role in Nazism, there are elements of his own experience which do not fit into that narrative. Rather than allow these other elements to challenge and inform his primary narrative, however, the author reaches for other rhetorical strategies in order to represent them. In this way, the author is able to remain within the bounds of his critical, unsentimental pose while also registering a degree of unease with his own narrative path.

The two most important such elements in *Suchbild* are, first, Meckel's occasional use of poetic language to represent his own feelings about his father and, second, one passage in which his narrator explicitly reflects on the act of writing about his father and what it means to create a narrative of his father's life. A typical instance of the former phenomenon is a longer section representing the child's feeling of being deprived of lightness and joy in his family, while feeling overwhelmed by his father's presence. To create this feeling through language, Meckel presents a kind of detailed catalogue of all that was missing in his childhood, punctuated by the repetition of the phrase "es fehlte." The first lines function as a kind of title: "Alles, was der Kindheit und

Jugend fehlte. Alles Fehlende zusammengenommen.”¹⁸⁵ The compendium of lack stretches across nearly ten pages, and covers many aspects of the child’s life. “Es fehlte in allen Verhältnissen an Raum. Es fehlte an Wohnraum, an Zimmern und offenen Passagen,” and “es fehlten die Freude, der Luxus und das Glück.”¹⁸⁶ Later: “woher sollte da die Freude kommen. Sie fehlte. [...] Alles Überflüssige fehlte. [...] Die Freude fehlte. Obwohl mein Vater zur Freude fähig war, sich manchmal freuen konnte, sich wirklich freute, blieb sine Freude klein, sie steckte nicht an.”¹⁸⁷ As the listing goes on, the narrator’s begins to repeat the phrase “es fehlte” with increasing frequency, creating a rhythm like a nursery rhyme: “es fehlte. Es fehlte. [...] Die Vaterlosigkeit fehlte, sie fehlte und fehlte. Es fehlten Verschütten, Zerschlagen und Überschäumen. Es fehlte die gute und schöne Maßlosigkeit, aber der Mehltau, der Mehltau war immer da. Er deckte glanzlos die Familie zu. Der Vater hieß Mehltau, die Kinderkrankheit war Mehltau. Mehltau, Mehltau. Niemals fehlte der Mehltau.”¹⁸⁸ The musical rhythm of this passage, which continues for several more pages, sets it apart from the rest of the narrative, allowing the narrator a different kind of emotional engagement with his past.

Meckel incorporates the idea of the simultaneous lack and overabundance of his father’s presence into his primary narrative voice, as well, but in this passage the child’s suffering comes through without the element of accusation against the father that is otherwise generally present. When he communicates through poetic means, Meckel is able to infuse his writing with multiple meanings. The refrain of “es fehlte” creates a feeling of mourning through its lamenting

¹⁸⁵ Meckel 129.

¹⁸⁶ Meckel 129-130.

¹⁸⁷ Meckel 132-133.

¹⁸⁸ Meckel 135.

repetition, representing the myriad situations in which something was missing. But the nursery-rhyme rhythm that the passage develops also gives it a lightness, while creating the feeling that the suffering depicted here is childish suffering, real and yet blown out of proportion. The effect is almost self-mocking: the exaggeration of the author-narrator's suffering reflects how his childhood experience was saturated with his father's moods, but it also gives the suffering itself the unreal contours of a childhood memory, when things seemed bigger and more intense than they are in retrospect. Meckel's use of poetic language in this passage thus allows him to do two contradictory things: he registers his suffering in an effective way – the reader certainly gets a sense of the suffocating omnipresence of the father – but also to withdraw from that suffering to a degree, marking it as childish, and hence far in the past. The narrator's emotional engagement with his past suffering in this passage, together with the reductive gesture of its childish musical language, are at odds with the quasi-objective, moral tone that the narrator adopts in his primary narrative of his father's biography and their family life. This use of poetic language suggests that there is more to Meckel's experience than can be integrated into his main narrative of repudiation of the father under a strict moral code.

The limitations of Meckel's primary narrative are also in evidence in a rare moment of reflection on the act of writing. This passage represents the only reference Meckel's narrator makes to the time of writing, and it is only to reflect on how creating a narrative out of a person's life is necessarily a transformative process. The narrator muses,

während ich an ihn denke, wird er zum Thema. Die Sätze entfernen ihn in einen Wortlaut, der seine Erscheinung zugleich erhellt und verdunkelt. [...] Über einen Menschen schreiben bedeutet: das Tatsächliche seines Lebens zu vernichten um

der Tatsächlichkeit einer Sprache willen. [...] Ich habe nichts zur Person erfunden, aber ausgewählt und zusammengefaßt (unmöglich, darzustellen ohne Bewertung).¹⁸⁹

In these reflections, Meckel's narrator shows discomfort with his own narrative, as if writing about his father results in a portrait that does not quite ring true for him, because the language and the narrative have their own logic, their own manner of constructing meaning. The process of choosing words requires the exclusion of other words, and Meckel's narrator acknowledges that this process of selection is an interpretive process, one that necessarily reflects the writer's own values and judgments. On a certain level, these observations may seem banal, but for a text such as *Suchbild* they are significant: in the primary narrative of the text, the author uses a narrative voice that presumes the authority and authenticity of a factual, objective report. When he undermines the possibility of such reporting in this passage, he points to a problem inherent in his own narrative project. Rather than revise or revisit the presumptions of his narrative voice, however, he lets this passage stand as an isolated interlude, too important to ignore but too small to truly undermine the rest of his narrative.

Conversations about Complicity: Der Mann auf der Kanzel

While Meckel reflects on the process of constructing narrative and how it transforms his lived experience of his father, in Rehmans text reflections on the nature of memory are in tension with the portrait of her father that she constructs in her primary narrative. Moreover, like Meckel, Rehmann also shifts her narrative voice to allow a perspective to emerge that does not fit with her overall account. To an even greater degree than Meckel, Rehmann uses a third-

¹⁸⁹ Meckel 74.

person narrative voice to present her father's biography, going as far as to often remove any reference to her own perspective, referring to her father and other family members by their first names (rather than by their familial relationship to her) and describing their thoughts and feelings as if they were characters in a fictional narrative and she were a typical omniscient narrator. To give just one example, Rehmman narrates her parents' courtship, telling of a crucial moment at a concert: when the final song begins, "kommen Reinhold die Tränen. Er greift Elisabeths Hand..."¹⁹⁰ While in Meckel's text, the use of an anonymous narrative voice creates a sense of authority and distance, for Rehmman a similar strategy allows the daughter's perspective to disappear behind a story that appears to speak from the established canon of the family archive.

Rehmman's primary narrative of her father's virtuous nature is framed by discussions of the act of remembering and the role of memory within the family. Yet, despite the fact that Rehmman's narrator acknowledges the contingency of memory on the perspective and experiences of the person remembering, this understanding is not brought to bear on her narration of her father's life. In the opening chapter of *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, Rehmman's narrator discusses the topic of family memory with Limbach, as a precursor to their lengthy conversations about her father. The author-narrator asserts that the Nazi period has caused a disruption in family memories of Germans in the post-war era – a "Störung in der Leitung" prevents the normal transfer of memories from taking place.¹⁹¹ She points specifically to the problem of available categories for understanding the role of the individual during the Nazi era, asking Limbach, "Wie überliefert man Väter, die weder Naziverbrecher noch

¹⁹⁰ Rehmman 46.

¹⁹¹ Rehmman 17.

Widerstandskämpfer waren?“¹⁹² If we only allow for these two extreme categories, this question implies, a range of individual experiences find no place in family memories of the Nazi era. If these are the only acknowledged possibilities, individual stories that do not fit the models must be either relegated to silence or transformed to fit the available models. Although Rehmann’s primary narrative does neither of these things, neither does it manage to move much beyond the dichotomy, remaining stuck fast in the image of the father as exceptional, exempt.

A similar contradiction emerges when Rehmann’s narrator discusses her father’s life with her brothers Gerhard and Herbert. The former was the only one of the siblings to have followed their father’s footsteps into the clergy, while Herbert pursued a military career. When their younger sister asks them about their father’s time as a soldier, they offer very different accounts. In Gerhard’s memory their father left the military as he entered it “ohne Rang und Titel, nur ‘freiwilliger Feldgeistlicher.’”¹⁹³ Gerhard insists that, despite being awarded the Iron Cross twice, their father had not been a “Kriegsheld.” But Herbert “erinnert sich anders” – their father was promoted rapidly through the ranks, and he had a close relationship with officers in the highest positions.¹⁹⁴ Herbert himself is proud, the narrator notes, to be the only one of his father’s children to have followed the “Offizierstradition” of the family; Gerhard insists there never was one.¹⁹⁵ Rather than reflect on this indication of how subjectivity influences memory, Rehmann’s returns to her research: “Ich frage nicht weiter, vertiefe mich in die Briefe.”¹⁹⁶ She

¹⁹² Rehmann 17.

¹⁹³ Rehmann 83.

¹⁹⁴ Rehmann 84.

¹⁹⁵ Rehmann 84.

¹⁹⁶ Rehmann 84.

turns from here to her father's war experience, but she does not, unfortunately, set the record straight regarding her father's military rank. Instead, the significance of this conversation with her brothers seems to be merely that of indicating that her own narrative, based on her father's own letters and not merely on subjective memories, is the more authoritative.

This moment in Rehmann's text marks a missed opportunity for reflection upon or complication of ways of knowing about the past. Each of Rehmann's brothers remember a version of their father's biography which best suits their own needs for identification. In its way, Rehmann's narrative does as well, but marking her narrative as "objective," based on her father's letters is clearly meant to indicate that her account is superior to her brother's memories. Like Meckel, Rehmann does not allow her narrator to show the work of interpretation that is inherent in reading, selecting, and reporting on documents from the father's life. Instead, her narrator's acknowledgements of the contingency of family memory – it depends on the suitability of prevailing categories such as "Naziverbrecher" and "Widerstandskämpfer" and takes on the contours of the needs of the one remembering – remain on the periphery of her own account. Rather than explicitly asserting her right to her own understanding of her father's life, Rehmann's narrator adopts an authoritative tone.

It is only in the final chapter of *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* that the author-narrator's authoritative pose is dropped, and the work of interpretation is allowed to emerge. This point in the narrative finds the author-narrator coming to terms with the information she finds in Limbach's documents, but the old teacher has passed away before she can discuss the events with him. The author-narrator appears uncomfortable with this circumstance, and we see how important masculine authority still is for her. As Barbara Kosta has pointed out, the author-narrator never frees herself from the patriarchal structure represented by her father: without

Limbach to discuss her father's role in the Nazi-communist shooting with, the narrator is uncertain, and she seeks out her son, Thomas, to gain his opinion on her interpretation of what occurred.¹⁹⁷ She calls upon her son to "bezeugen, daß ich versuche, die Wahrheit zu sagen."¹⁹⁸ To further mark this account as unverified attempt, Rehmann narrates it in the subjunctive mood: if her father was the person she knew, "dann wäre diese Geschichte so und so zu erzählen."¹⁹⁹

Speaking with her son, the author-narrator presents a version of that night in February 1933 that fits with her understanding of her father. This time, she is more open about her father's shortcomings, acknowledging his prejudice against communists without drawing upon parallels to the Kaiser in order to mitigate her father's naiveté in political matters. His prejudice is simply a fault, clouding his vision: "Wenn mein Vater der gewesen wäre, den ich sehe, dann wäre er schon vor dem Eintreffen an der Unglücksstelle überzeugt gewesen, daß ein Roter den fraglichen Schuß abgegeben hatte. [...] Rot gleich Blut, Mord, Gewalt."²⁰⁰ When he knelt over the fallen man, he would have closed his eyes and begun to pray. Recognizing the accused communist as a member of his congregation, he would only have lamented his own failure to guide the souls entrusted to him, not have asked himself whether this was indeed the guilty man. Later on, when the trial against the communists was taking place, the author-narrator suggests that her father was likely not even aware of the trials, noting that not even Limbach had wanted to discuss the matter with him at the time. And here the author-narrator presents her conclusion on the question of her

¹⁹⁷ "The autobiographer has internalized an adherence to authority" and "in the end, she remains caught within the room of fathers, too fearful to cross the threshold she was taught to respect." Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography*, 119-120.

¹⁹⁸ Rehmann 218.

¹⁹⁹ Rehmann 217.

²⁰⁰ Rehmann 218.

father's guilt, which I have discussed above: his reflexive prejudice against communists, not his support for the Nazis, coupled with the community's desire for a spiritual leader who was "fröhlich im Herrn, den Miesigkeiten der Welt enthoben," led her father to this reprehensible blindness and tacit support of the Nazi leadership in his village.²⁰¹ Where Limbach wanted to ask the pastor why he did not come forward, Rehmann revises the question, asking "warum hat er nichts gesehen?"²⁰² Here again, Limbach appears willing to ascribe agency to the pastor, while Rehmann continues to view her father as essentially incapable of acting differently.

With this passage, Rehmann constructs a nuanced perspective on her father's complicity for the first time, in which he behaved wrongly but not out of malice or moral corruption. As I have already argued, this fits with Rehmann's own psychological investment in defending her father's character: she is quick to focus on the guilt of others, including herself, rather than attribute responsibility to the father with whom she still closely identifies. At the same time, her description of the events sounds plausible to today's reader precisely because it allows for a more complicated conception of guilt and innocence than the absolute categories she presumes in the rest of the text. This narrative of shared complicity is too diffuse for her son Thomas, however. He sees his mother's account as a way of making a small amount of guilt seem so "menschlich verständlich" that the greater "unbegreifliche Schuld" of the Nazi era remains distant, "weit weg, ganz woanders, [...] in einem Morast von Feigheit und Gemeinheit, [...] fremd wie ein Meteor."²⁰³ Thomas objects that Nazism was created by the Germans of that time, not imposed upon them from the outside, and so, for him, stories like his mother's are missing an

²⁰¹ Rehmann 221.

²⁰² Rehmann 217.

²⁰³ Rehmann 222.

element – a trace of that incomprehensible guilt belongs in her father’s biography somewhere. In Rehmann’s response to her son’s objection we see yet another pair of contradictory positions. She sees a problem for “befangene Zeugen” like herself:

Die Schuld ist ihnen so nah, daß sie nie pur erscheint, sondern in undurchsichtigen Mischungen, die sich der sauberen Trennung entziehen. Je genauer sie zu schneiden versuchen, desto näher geraten sie an die eigene Person, desto tiefer und schmerzhafter ins eigene Fleisch, desto schwieriger wird die Trennung, nicht nur zwischen Gut und Böse, auch zwischen ihnen und denen von damals, so daß sie am Ende die Prüfung gar nicht fortsetzen können, ohne sich selbst zu prüfen und dabei besonders auf das Unwesentliche zu achten, das, was immer aufgeschoben, von den Prioritäten an den Rand der Wahrnehmung gedrängt wird. Denn genau da, im Unwesentlichen, könnte die undichte Stelle sitzen, das heimliche Leck, durch das unbemerkt Schuld eindringt.²⁰⁴

For Rehmann, then, the personal connection to the Nazi era – particularly her father’s choices but also, as is suggested here, her own position as a young adult – make it impossible to clearly separate good individuals from evil ones, to map one’s own experiences onto the understanding of Nazism that has developed in hindsight. Here, Rehmann’s narrator embodies the problem that her son is pointing to – guilt is still something that comes from the outside, in the case of those like her father who were otherwise virtuous, respectable people. In this final characterization, Rehmann seems finally ready to allow for a possibility that is incompatible with

²⁰⁴ Rehmann 223.

the image of her father in the rest of her text: the possibility that her father was both the person she knew and admired *and*, when put on the spot, a tacit supporter of the Nazi regime. Her son Thomas presents a stricter perspective that calls for seeing guilt in close relatives like his grandfather, while the narrator remains troubled by this, having identified a variety of circumstantial factors that led her father to become who he was. These tensions, as well as the conflict between the interpretive role she adopts at the end of the text and the authoritative validity she presumes for the rest of the narrative, remain unresolved.

V. Conclusion

What we find in both Meckel's and Rehmann's texts, then, are elements which undermine or call into question the authoritative nature of their primary narratives that they presume. This constitutes the undecided nature of the texts – they oscillate between an apparent claim to certainty about the past, represented by the critical, journalist, or third-person narrator they employ for the majority of their texts, on the one hand, and an indication of how their subjective investment colors their view, on the other. It is not the case that these two currents in the texts flow with equal strength, however: these other elements point to insufficiencies in the main narrative, but it is ultimately not called into question. The picture that emerges, when we consider Meckel's and Rehmann's texts together, is one of struggle with narrative possibilities, in which each author composes a biography of the father that fits with the strict moral imperative they want to uphold, while emotions and ideas that conflict with this moral imperative register through other narrative styles.

Examining two examples of *Väterliteratur* with narratives as different as Meckel's and Rehmann's makes it possible to see important characteristics of the trend beyond general

statements about the works' private engagements with the national German past. When viewing their personal family history, the author-narrators take a stance on the father's complicity in Nazism, and we can observe their struggle to construct a narrative consistent with this position. Furthermore, they display a trust in the ability of language to represent their experience, documenting and reporting while rarely acknowledging the work of interpretation. In reading these works of memory, we can see how the authors' present positions shaped their acts of remembering the past: although their texts illustrate the complexity and slippery moral circumstances of the average citizen of National Socialist Germany, they remain unable to fully engage the possibility their fathers may have simultaneously been the man they knew *and also*, on some level, a supporter of a particular current of Nazism. Such a tolerance for moral ambiguity remains elusive today, but for the authors of *Väterliteratur* it was an urgent, immediate problem, one that left its mark on the texts they created.

Chapter 2:

Writing the Family Ghosts. Masculinity, Narrative Voice, and Uncanny Genealogy in Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* and Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*

I. Introduction

In 2003, two autobiographical works appeared which mark a shift away from the *Väterliteratur* trend in West German literature around 1980 and towards a new approach to representing German family history. Both texts are notable for their reconciliatory tone, especially in comparison with the works of their *Väterliteratur* predecessors, as both author-narrators display a willingness to make peace after a long period of intergenerational conflict. These texts, Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and Stephan Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land*, were heralded by critics above all for their combination of critical and emotional engagement with the past. "Nüchterner und liebevoller, zarter und unerbittlicher ist über die deutsche Vergangenheit selten geschrieben worden," writes Hubert Spiegel in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* about Timm's novel. Dirk Knipphals, writing in *die tageszeitung*, finds that "es herrscht in [Wackwitzs Roman] eine feine Melancholie vor, ab und an auch feiner Spott. Deutlich ist auch der gelassene, erwachsene Wille, die Dinge so zu sehen, wie sie sind." Such reviews paint a picture of mature protagonists who narrate from a position of controlled emotion. But is this assertion of balanced tones, which so eluded the author-narrators of *Väterliteratur*, actually borne out by close readings of the texts (which book reviews generally do not undertake)? If the authors are able to integrate both a critical perspective and a reconciliatory gesture, by what stylistic and rhetorical means is this accomplished, and what becomes of the darker periods in recent German history as a result?

In this chapter, I argue that Timm's and Wackwitz's novels in fact make quite different reconciliatory gestures from one another – one still deeply ambivalent, the other almost cavalier – vis-à-vis the older generations of their families. Twelve years apart in age (Timm b. 1940, Wackwitz b. 1952), the authors focus their texts on different generations of their family, Timm reflecting on his father and brother, Wackwitz exploring his grandfather's life. While reconciliation awakens persistent anxieties in Timm's autobiographical narrator, Wackwitz's narrative is one in which a sense of personal significance is gained through identification with a family history. This is especially evident in the authors' self-positioning within a gendered genealogical structure. Timm responds to his anxiety about similarities he sees between himself and his late brother, SS-soldier Karl-Heinz by rejecting the form of traditional masculinity embodied by his father and his late brother. In its place, Timm presents a different conception of masculinity that combines qualities associated with both Timm's father and his mother, who raised him while his father served in the war. Like Timm's father, Wackwitz's grandfather ascribes and aspires to the Wilhelmine ideal of masculinity, but this has a different significance for the latter, younger author-narrator. Wackwitz's autobiographical protagonist discovers a fresh admiration for his grandfather's masculinity, and this inspires narrative excursions into the deepest reaches of the male line of Wackwitzes, through which the author positions himself as heir to a rich masculine historical tradition.

The gender-identity dynamics of the authors' reconciliatory attitudes towards the past represent a key difference from their *Väterliteratur* predecessors, and the narrative perspective from which the authors present their autobiographical projects is similarly new. Adopting a postmodern attitude toward the inherent subjectivity of their engagements with family history, these author-narrators implicitly reject the imperative to judge family members that was central

to the *Väterliteratur* project. Instead, their subjective perspectives are manifested in narrators who experiment with different possibilities of what their family history could mean, offering suggestions of interpretations without asserting the authority of any one main narrative, or themselves as authoritative narrators. While Timm writes from a position of uncertainty about his family past, skeptical of his own ability to know that past, Wackwitz's narrator asserts his own reality, claiming both a philosophical and a genealogical right to construct his own version of his family history. This openness allows an element of reconciliation to emerge, with both author-narrators, who are approaching or have reached middle age, ready to re-examine an earlier, ideologically motivated family conflict (Timm's with his father, Wackwitz's with his grandfather).

Still, all is not well in these family narratives: as the authors reflect upon dark periods of the German past, both use tropes of the uncanny to represent their family connections to recent German history. Using the vocabulary of the uncanny is nothing new in writing on the Nazi era, of course, with phrases like "the specter of National Socialism" fast becoming cliché. These texts go further than offhand characterizations of the persistence of the Nazi past in post-war culture and society, however. Timm uses the uncanny motifs of phantom possession and ghosts to represent his lingering anxiety about his family connection to Nazism – his brother enlisted in the SS, his father fought in the Luftwaffe, and the rest of the family supported the Nazi government. For Wackwitz, the uncanny serves a different function: it provides a supernatural rhetorical vocabulary for representing a family past marked by historical accidents whose significance remains inexplicable. In both texts, the uncanny points to the grave and horrific nature of the Nazi past while also reflecting the author-narrators' willingness to tolerate a degree of epistemological uncertainty in their explorations of the past.

II. Intergenerational Conflict and Resolution

Uwe Timm's 2003 novel *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* is an autobiographical family portrait centered on the author's late brother, Karl-Heinz. This 16-years-old brother, the author's only male sibling, enlisted in the Waffen-SS in 1942, at age 18, and died on the eastern front less than a year later. In the stories told about him within the family, he is remembered as a "brave boy," the dutiful, model son against whose example his younger brother Uwe is always measured, and is usually found wanting. Timm's fragmentary novel is driven by a questioning, reflective narrator who, in the process of reading his brother's war journals, expands the scope of his reflections to include portraits of his father, his mother and his older sister. The narrator begins with the question of why his brother enlisted in the Waffen-SS, and goes on to ask questions about his brother's personality and character, as well as similar questions about the rest of his immediate family. Timm's novel does not follow a main narrative arc; rather, its non-linear structure – comprised of short narrative passages, excerpts from letters and journals, recalled conversations and childhood memories – suggests an ongoing conversation with no definite resolution.

Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* is also loosely structured, but its long chapters are essayistic where Timm's contain vignettes or fragments. The novel casts a spotlight on different phases of Wackwitz's process of becoming acquainted with a new side of his grandfather, which he discovers through reading hundreds of pages of memoirs the latter left behind. Wackwitz recalls his grandfather Andreas as a taciturn and squeaky-voiced, subservient figure in the presence of women and a moody tyrant, full of infantile resentment, when among men. In the memoirs, however, the author-narrator finds an idealist and adventurer in whom he recognizes

himself. This identification is maintained despite the fact that Andreas Wackwitz had been part of the German Protestant mission in post-colonial Namibia, was a supporter of the Nazi regime, and maintained a racist and chauvinist perspective after the war. As he explores his grandfather's biography and reflects upon his own life, Wackwitz places them both within a family history extending back through the Protestant Reformation's incursions into Poland to the first appearances of the Wackwitz name on German territory.

The premises of these two novels already show a departure from the *Väterliteratur* model: Wackwitz focuses on his relationship with his grandfather, an evangelical pastor and a WWI veteran who did not fight under Hitler, while Timm's novel is centered around the figure of his older brother. However, the generational conflict so often (if erroneously) associated with *Väterliteratur* – the 68ers confronting their NS-era parents – makes a reappearance in these novels. In Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, this conflict remains for the most part in the background as the narrator reflects upon his childhood and his relationships with his parents, but it must be present in the mind of any reader familiar with Timm's work. Born in 1940, Timm originally followed his father's wishes and footsteps into a career as a furrier, which he broke off in 1961 in order to pursue his *Abitur*, eventually becoming a successful writer of novels and children's books. As a university student in the late 1960s, Timm was active in the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*, and he was a member of the German Communist Party from 1973 to 1981; his "68er trilogy" of novels, *Heißer Sommer* (1974), *Kerbels Flucht* (1980) and *Rot* (2001), chart their protagonists' shifting commitment to Leftist ideals. Timm's father

and 16-years-older brother, on the other hand, were both supporters of Nazi ideology and soldiers in WWII.²⁰⁵

Although as a public figure Uwe Timm is associated with the 68er activists (he was also close friends with Benno Ohnesorg when both were studying for the *Abitur* in Braunschweig), an ideologically motivated confrontation with his father is not central to this autobiographical work. On the one hand, there are biographical reasons for this: Timm's father died of a heart attack in 1958, and Timm did not become politically active until after the death of his school friend Benno Ohnesorg a decade later. It is hence possible that Timm and his father never actually clashed over politics. At the same time, it is not unthinkable that the two would have argued over political worldviews at some point, and a reader familiar with Timm's political background may well expect such an autobiographical text to underscore the ideological differences between father and son. Indeed, Timm characterizes his relationship to his father as marked by "eine rechthaberische Strenge von seiner Seite, ein verstocktes Schweigen von meiner Seite."²⁰⁶

Surprisingly, however, one of the few references to Timm's own political beliefs in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* in fact suggests continuity between his father's interest in politics and his own, even though his father is represented in the novel as privately maintaining his support for many Nazi ideals after 1945. Despite the significant contrasts between the political ideals each supported, the author singles out values they shared. Reflecting on his admiration for his fellow Communists who had been imprisoned in concentration camps, Timm's narrator muses that this feeling "hatte ihren Beweggrund auch in den von dem Vater eingeforderten *alten*

²⁰⁵ Born in 1899, Uwe Timm's father, Hans Timm fought in both World Wars: he fought with the field artillery in WWI and in the Luftwaffe in WWII. See Martin Hielscher, *Uwe Timm* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007) 11-13.

²⁰⁶ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2003) 21.

Tugenden: Stetigkeit, Pflichterfüllung, Mut, die bei diesen Kämpfern verbindlich waren. Und so schloß ich mich ihnen an.”²⁰⁷ When he finally left the Party, he admits, “blieb dennoch das quälende Gefühl, einen Verrat zu begehen.”²⁰⁸ This tentative acknowledgement of continuities or parallels rather than a depiction of conflict is characteristic of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*.

We can locate part of the personal motivation for this indication of political similarity in the family relationships depicted in Timm’s text. Before Uwe was born, his two siblings were closely aligned with their same-gender parents: the father had little interest in his first-born, his daughter Hanne Lore, but celebrated his second child, his son Karl-Heinz. Father and son spent much of their time together, as did mother and daughter. Because Uwe was born so long after his older brother, the two had not developed a competitive relationship by the time Karl-Heinz died in 1943. As Uwe grew up, however, he found himself competing with the family’s memory of his brother. Their reverence for the soldier-son only grew after his death, and the child Uwe, raised for the most part by his mother, did not embody the same strength and traditional masculinity of his brother. Against this background of (posthumous) sibling competition, the author-narrator’s suggestion of some parallels between his father’s and his own values appear not only as an overture to the father, but also as an assertion that his brother, who shared the father’s political beliefs fully, was still not the only one with some ideological affinity with their father. On the other hand, Timm’s claim of a degree of similarity between his and his father’s political attitudes also draws our attention to the qualitative difference between the two: both generations of Timms may have been admirably loyal to their political causes, but the ideologies they supported remain, even in this more reconciliatory text, strongly opposed.

²⁰⁷ Timm 146.

²⁰⁸ Timm 147.

In Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land*, the author's political activity serves a similar function. Twelve years younger than Timm, Wackwitz was a member of the *Marxistischer Studentenbund Spartakus* during his university studies in Munich, and belongs to the "78 generation," who initially followed the political path set by the 68ers.²⁰⁹ Alongside his political activity, Wackwitz studied German literature in Munich; his dissertation on Friedrich Hölderlin formed the basis of his first monograph, an introduction to the life and work of the Romantic poet for the "Sammlung Metzler" series of reference works. Wackwitz is not primarily known for his literary criticism, however, but as an essayist and the director of the Goethe Institutes in New Delhi, Krakow, Tokyo, New York, and Tbilisi. His experiences as a foreigner exploring new cultures provide the material for the majority of his published essays, while *Ein unsichtbares Land* and the follow-up volume *Neue Menschen* (2005) find the author reflecting on his own place in German national history: *Neue Menschen* undertakes a more thorough examination and repudiation of the author's Communist activities in the 1970s.

In *Ein unsichtbares Land*, Wackwitz presents an Oedipal conflict between himself and his tyrannical, Nazi-supporting grandfather akin to what we find in some works of *Väterliteratur* that describe father-son relationships. The two of them, he recalls "konnten [...] nichts miteinander anfangen," and a "monumentale Verhältnislosigkeit [hat] immer zwischen uns geherrscht."²¹⁰ Although Wackwitz thematizes his inability to communicate with his grandfather, the bulk of the novel tells of his discovery, through reading his grandfather's memoirs, of a wealth of similarities in their lives. Furthermore, the conflicting political ideologies the two

²⁰⁹ For descriptions and a detailed sketch of generations in twentieth-century Germany, see Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, 58-69.

²¹⁰ Stephan Wackwitz, *Ein Unsichtbares Land : Familienroman*, (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 2003) 56.

generations represent are portrayed here, as in Timm's novel, as a factor linking them, although here Wackwitz presents his own Communist activities as to an extent analogous to his grandfather's adherence to National Socialism. In a scene describing a journey with other members of the MSB Spartakus into the GDR, the narrator reflects, "insofern bin ich meinem Großvater vielleicht nie im Leben so nah gewesen wie 1975 in jenem Gewerkschaftserholungsheim im kommunistischen beherrschten Brandenburg [...] zur Zeit meines Flirts mit dem anderen Totalitarismus."²¹¹ Whereas Timm's conflicted emotions about his break with Communism seem still fresh in his memory, Wackwitz distances himself from that period of his life, portraying his political activity as a regrettable youthful peccadillo.

In comparison with the vivid portrayal of his grandfather Andreas, the author's father Gustav Wackwitz appears only indistinctly in the text, and there is no suggestion of intergenerational conflict between father and son. For the most part, the author's father is present as his son's companion, as in visits to Anhalt, the small town near Auschwitz where the family lived when Gustav was born, and to Luckenwalde, where the family lived after the Second World War. In these episodes, the father's memories, when they are referenced at all, are narrated by the son. The author-narrator seems generally disinterested in his father's perspective, but gives no indication that this stems from animosity. Although the reader is given no direct information about the father's own political leanings, in one brief passage Wackwitz does suggest that his father does not share his grandfather's attitudes. Reading a passage from his grandfather's memoirs that contains racist language in reference to Africans, the narrator asserts that such passages are meant as provocations to Andreas Wackwitz's readership, i.e. his own sons. Unfortunately for the memoirist, Wackwitz's narrator reflects, Gustav and his brother

²¹¹ Wackwitz 233.

would have read these sections with resignation, shrugging their shoulders “in einer ratlosen Mischung aus Traurigkeit und komischer Verzweiflung.”²¹² With this comment, the author-narrator indicates that, while his father and uncle did not share their father’s prejudices, they were also not concerned with their father’s political ideas in general. Indeed, perhaps this is a clue to the marginal role Wackwitz’s father plays in the text: if he in fact lacks strong opinions, Gustav Wackwitz may not fit the model of masculine strength and adventurous spirit that Andreas embodies and with which Stephan seeks to identify. I will discuss this aspect of Wackwitz’s text in the section on gender below, but, given the dearth of attention to the father overall, one can only speculate as to the reasons for the omission.

While Timm and Wackwitz represent their political attitudes in a similar manner, these attitudes figure differently in the two texts in a way that points up a central contrast between the two. Timm speaks in the above-cited passage of the regret and the emotional difficulty of leaving a political organization in whose ideals or strategies he no longer believed, but his political beliefs and their influence on his relationship to his family play only a minor role in the text, as part of a larger complex of motivating factors. In this passage, Timm’s reaction to the decision to leave the Communist Party is connected to values he learned from his father, values which are in turn derived from political views that Timm opposes. This entanglement of politics, moral implications and family feeling is mapped out in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, and their interaction points to contradictions which Timm does not attempt to resolve neatly. Wackwitz, on the other hand, treats his years in the Leftist movement with a disdainful criticism, as a lamentable waste of time that only becomes important as a parallel to his grandfather’s Nazi sympathies. As an adult, Wackwitz abandons his Communist leanings, and shows no hesitations

²¹² Wackwitz 159.

about publishing essays in more conservative German papers, such as *Die Welt*. The correspondence between the political positions of different generations of the family is much more important for *Ein unsichtbares Land* than for Timm's novel, as Wackwitz uses this similarity to authorize himself as qualified to interpret and explain his grandfather's attitudes. His association with the "other totalitarianism," which he, in contrast to his grandfather, brought to a timely end, gives him a privileged position from which to speak about the ideologies of the past, as someone who has held similar ideas but has seen the error of his ways.²¹³

III. Reconciling Masculinities

In addition to the political component of Timm's and Wackwitz's family narratives, the element of reconciliation in the texts is also established through each author's positioning of himself within a gendered genealogy. The masculinity represented by Timm's brother and father, as well as by Wackwitz's grandfather, is linked to a traditional, *Kaiserreich*-era ideal of the German man. As Jochen Vogt explains in an essay on gender and *Väterliteratur*, although it suffered a major setback with the loss of the Second World War, "das wilhelminisch geprägte, von den Nazis nochmals soldatisch zugespitzte deutsche Männer- und Väterbild," lived on into the Adenauer era, persisting until it was ultimately rejected as part of the cultural transformations of the 1960s.²¹⁴ The fact that the elder men of both the Timm and Wackwitz families are

²¹³ This attitude has similarities, on the one hand, to the argument that the 68ers cast their fathers categorically as Nazis in order to at least symbolically do what their fathers did not do (i.e., resist Nazism), and on the other hand, with the privileged speaking position claimed by the "first generation," as Weigel discusses in her essay "Generation as Symbolic Form." Sigrid Weigel, "'Generation' As a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945," *The Germanic Review* 77 4 (2002): 264-78.

²¹⁴ Vogt, "Er fehlt, er fehlte, er hat gefehlt... Ein Rückblick auf die sogenannten Väterbücher," 387. See also Kosta's "Väterliteratur, Masculinity, History: The Melancholic Texts of the

identified with Wilhelmine ideals of strict, unsentimental masculinity that were also celebrated in the Nazi era is a stumbling block for each protagonist's struggle to construct his own genealogy.

The two authors approach the issue of gendered identity in ways indicative of their overall projects. Timm considers the effects of gender in his family from different perspectives, and links gender to different ways of engaging the past. He positions himself against the masculinity of his father and brother, while at the same time asserting his own heterosexuality, establishing a new norm distinct from the Wilhelmine model. Wackwitz, on the other hand, describes a developmental arc in which his autobiographical protagonist proceeds from a childhood feeling of emasculation in interactions with his grandfather to an adult conception of his own masculinity as a form of that represented by his grandfather. As we will see, the authors' constructions of masculinity reflect the nature of their reconciliatory projects: Timm's is cautious, based on a very limited identification with his father, while Wackwitz, although he also qualifies his identification with his grandfather, more readily embraces the latter as a role model.

“Zu viel unter Frauen”: Masculinity in Am Beispiel meines Bruders

In *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm's acknowledgment of certain similarities between himself, his father, and his brother is offset by his continued resistance to the masculinity they

1980s”: “At the end of the war, the images and concepts that steadily fueled the understanding of masculinity and the cultural ideals it represented were shattered, but the residues, that is, the internalized images, could not be swept away. No open forum existed to address the emotional vacuum and disorientation, let alone the suffering inflicted on the millions of victims of fascism. An injured masculinity resorted to brutality, or expressed itself in melancholia, depression, and an obsessive desire to monitor and control. Overcompensating for their own sense of loss and emptiness, many fathers after World War II fiercely clung to familiar patterns of behavior, with the private sphere serving as the site where they struggled to restore their deeply disturbed sense of masculine subjectivity.” Barbara Kosta, “Väterliteratur, Masculinity and History: The Melancholic Texts of the 1980s,” *Conceptions of Postwar German Masculinity*, ed. Roy Jerome (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY 2001) 228-9.

represent. Gender relations are a main factor in Timm's critical examination of his family. His father is depicted as an adherent of a strict Wilhelmine model of masculinity: he was a soldier and the family breadwinner, was emotionally distant and believed in corporal punishment. In Timm's portrayal, this conception of masculinity was a cause of suffering for his father himself (whose pain over his son's death persisted longer because he "konnte Trauer nicht zulassen") and also for Timm's sister, who, all but ignored by her father, made seeking his approval a central focus of her life.²¹⁵ Further, his father himself did not consistently live up to his own ideal, becoming an alcoholic after his initial post-war economic success subsided, and leaving the running of his furrier business to his wife and younger son.²¹⁶ In addition, Timm's depiction of his father points to an element of deceit: the latter told good stories, flattered his rich customers and always looked the part of a successful dealer in luxuries, but his business was in fact nearly bankrupt at his death.

Timm places himself in a different category than that of his father and brother, which begins with his young childhood, during which he developed a strong attachment to his mother. Born in 1940, Timm was primarily raised by his mother while his father and brother were fighting in the war (his sister was sent to other relatives for the duration of the war). Like many of his contemporaries, his first memory of his father is as "ein fremder Mann in Uniform" lying in his mother's bed.²¹⁷ Although the narrator describes himself as a "Muttersöhnchen," he is also quick to counter any suggestion of effeminacy that may be read into this statement by asserting his heterosexuality, adding "ich mochte den Duft der Frauen, diesen Geruch nach Seife und

²¹⁵ Timm 50, 75.

²¹⁶ Timm 107.

²¹⁷ Timm 23.

Parfum, ich mochte und suchte - eine frühe Empfindung - die Weichheit der Brüste und der Schenkel. Während er, der große Bruder, schon als kleiner Junge immer am Vater hing.”²¹⁸

Although the constellation Timm describes has Oedipal overtones, the sensual imagery with which the narrator expresses his desire for women also sharply contrasts with the stereotyped masculinity of his father and brother. Timm’s memories of this time are represented through moments of closeness with his mother, as the two of them scavenged in the rubble for food, sharing interests and a secret language, and with whom he felt protected, under “ein verlässlicher, nie in Frage stehender Schutz.”²¹⁹ Despite the hardship of the end of the war, Timm characterizes his childhood with his mother as happy and secure. His alignment with her creates a narrative of masculinity that developed separately from the influence of his father and brother, which is confirmed in his father’s proclamation that his younger son was “zu viel unter Frauen.”²²⁰ In this context, his father’s declaration is more affirmation than condemnation.

These gender identities are also at work in Timm’s adoption of a questioning voice for his autobiographical narrative, which I will discuss in more detail below. Important here is the fact that the masculinity represented by Timm’s father corresponds to a particular attitude towards the National Socialist past, one which contrasts with his mother’s thinking. While the latter represents an inflexible way of thinking conditioned by militarism, the former is less dogmatic, allowing dynamism in her attitudes about the past. Timm’s father, we are told, is typical of his generation, and refuses to acknowledge that his own values (during the NS era and afterward) were consistent with those of the death camps. This was “eine Frage, die sich die

²¹⁸ Timm 18.

²¹⁹ Timm 117.

²²⁰ Timm 17.

Vätergeneration selbst nicht stellte - als fehle ihrem Bewußtsein dafür das Instrumentarium - und auf die sie, kam sie von außen, keine Antwort fand, sondern nur Ausreden.”²²¹ This strict refusal to either answer or ask such questions is not shared by Timm’s mother, who “fragte sich immerhin nach ihrer Schuld.”²²² Moreover, for Timm’s mother, asking questions is significant on its own: “Was hätte ich tun können, was tun sollen? Wenigstens ein Nachfragen, sagte sie. Wo waren die beiden jüdischen Familien aus der Nachbarschaft geblieben? Wenigstens diese Frage, die hätte man nicht nur sich, sondern den Nachbarn stellen müssen, genaugenommen jedem. Erst wenn etwas zur Sprache gebracht wird, kann sich auch Widerspruch bilden.”²²³ Carrying on this spirit, Timm’s narrator positions himself as more significantly influenced by his mother than his father. The questions he asks are different from those which plagued his mother (she was less willing to think in new ways about her older son), but for both it is the gesture itself which is important: it is not subject to the rigidity of thinking which is demanded by the masculinity Timm’s father represents.

Even when Timm does consider some aspects of continuity in his family, he also asserts his difference from his father. This is especially apparent in his depiction of the family fur coat business. The author’s father, a skilled taxidermist, took up the furrier trade after the war, having found a fur sewing machine in a bombed-out building. Both the author and his brother Karl-Heinz were trained as furriers, but only the older son enjoyed his work – the narrator notes with

²²¹ Timm 149.

²²² Timm 129.

²²³ *ibid.* Of course, on the one hand, Timm’s text cannot fulfill the function of enabling contradiction that his mother prizes – he only writes about his family after their deaths. On the other hand, however, Timm does at least address the failure of communication while his family was still alive, which stemming from the ritualized way in which they spoke about the past.

evident surprise that his brother “mochte offensichtlich den Beruf.”²²⁴ Timm himself, like his father, disliked the work: the former found it boring, while the latter saw the shop as “ein notwendiges Übel.”²²⁵ Despite their shared aversion to the profession, Timm and his father proved to have quite different capabilities as managers of the business. When the son took over the shop after his father’s death, it was deeply in debt, and he “arbeitete gemeinsam mit Mutter und Schwester an dessen Entschuldung.”²²⁶ Not only does this passage show the son as dutiful, responsible and hard-working, but also as succeeding where his father had failed. In this sense, Timm himself better embodies some aspects of the masculine identity that his father idealized – the latter prided himself on his commitment to taking responsibility for “seine Leute” (i.e., his family and employees).²²⁷ At the same time, Timm’s use of the word “Entschuldung” reminds us of the link in German between “debt” and “guilt,” adding another layer of meaning. While the son may be able to redeem his father in a financial setting, the other “Schuld,” that of having supported and fought for Nazi Germany, is something that no son can make good again.

Of course, ultimately Timm did not follow in his father’s footsteps – as soon as he could, he left his trade to return to school, going on to study German literature before becoming a successful author. His father may have been “ein guter Redner” with some artistic talent (he was renowned as a taxidermist for his lifelike creations) but the son made similar talents the center of his life.²²⁸ In his depictions of his family relationships, then, Timm shows that, despite certain

²²⁴ Timm 42.

²²⁵ Timm 42.

²²⁶ Timm 157.

²²⁷ Timm 83.

²²⁸ Timm 78, 64.

family similarities, he represents a different conception of masculinity than his father and brother. While they all valued family and responsibility, Timm did not subscribe to the nationalism, militarism and emotional restraint modeled by his father and brother. This insistence upon their different masculinities allows the author-narrator to maintain a clear divide between the National Socialist leanings in his family history and his own position.

Masculine Roots: Ein unsichtbares Land

While Timm constructs a narrative in which some family similarities coexist with differing masculinities, Wackwitz's text moves in a different direction. In *Ein unsichtbares Land*, Wackwitz presents a narrative in which genealogical continuity is restored, and this relies in part upon a reconciliation of conflicting conceptions of masculinity. As he revisits his own childhood through his memories of his grandfather, Wackwitz describes his own progression from being enticed by the traditional masculine world of his grandfather as an adolescent to rejecting his grandfather's model during his young adulthood. Finally, from his midlife perspective, Wackwitz revises his own connection to his grandfather's masculinity, re-establishing his grandfather as a model. Like Timm's father, Wackwitz's grandfather represents a conception of masculinity rooted in late Imperial Germany; he was also a soldier, a strong supporter of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and an avid big-game hunter in Africa. As a child living with his parents in his grandfather's house, Wackwitz's narrator recalls an awareness of a clear separation of gender roles: "Ich hatte mich daran gewöhnt, dass Kinder und Männer offenbar verschiedenen Stämmen angehörten ... (die Frauen bildeten einen wieder eigenen, uns wieder anders

verschlossenen Kreis).²²⁹ In these childhood reflections, passage into adulthood is synonymous with initiation into the world of men, comprised here of his grandfather, father, and uncles. Once the narrator is older, as a teenager with the status of a “Probemann,” he discovers that “das Leben der Männer begann, wenn die Kinder im Bett waren.”²³⁰ When he is first allowed to join the men, his grandfather’s fine wine, “zusammen mit dem Duft der nun allseits angesteckten Zigarren, versetzte mich ... schnell in einen angenehmen Benebelungs- und Erhobenheitszustand. So also war das Erwachsensein.”²³¹ These images, which unite ideas of manhood and adulthood, resonate with the descriptions of Wackwitz’s great-grandfather, who is characterized by the smell of “*Tabak, Hunde, Lederzeug*,” as recalled in Andreas Wackwitz’s memoirs.²³² The link between masculinity and adulthood, established in these passages through the somewhat over-determined image of the cigar, thus also symbolizes the male line of Wackwitz family history itself – this ideal of masculinity is family tradition.

At first, Wackwitz depicts his grandfather’s attempts to induct him into this world of adult masculinity as fruitless. The young Wackwitz resists his grandfather’s expectations, and the grandson’s coming of age is marked not by his entrance into the masculine tradition, but by his break with his grandfather. As a teenager, Wackwitz identifies with the “transusig” villains of his grandfather’s stories, comparing them to his own feeling of “resignierter Subordinationsbereitschaft, zugleich aber Insuffizienz, Verträumtheit, Scham und unterdrückter

²²⁹ Wackwitz 21. Note the implication here that “Kinder” refers to male children, and that, while the women’s sphere is definitively closed to them, the separation between them and the men is dependent upon age.

²³⁰ Wackwitz 23.

²³¹ Wackwitz 23.

²³² Wackwitz 122. Wackwitz’s use of italics for his grandfather’s writing is preserved here.

Auflehnung” whenever he faced his grandfather.²³³ Not only did the young Wackwitz feel himself bound by family custom to repress his intellectual objections to the conservative ideology apparent in his grandfather’s stories, but he also saw himself as emasculated. Wackwitz recalls feeling “in seiner Männlichkeit gekränkt,” because his grandfather “verwandelte [ihn] in eine Frau,” by telling objectionable stories to which he knew his grandson would feel compelled by propriety not to respond.²³⁴

Though he felt belittled by his grandfather at the time, Wackwitz shows his younger self seeking ways to satisfy the masculine family imperative represented by their patriarch. For example, Wackwitz’s political activity during his university years represent a final attempt to approximate his grandfather’s wishes. His membership in “einem jener karnevalistisch-kommunistischen Kampfbünde” at the university is in fact a rejection of his grandfather’s urging that he join a “schlagende Studentenverbindung.”²³⁵ Though he chose a political “Kampfbund” over a fencing fraternity, this small rebellion confirms his grandfather’s lingering influence, as both a negative impetus and as a model (if unrecognized by Wackwitz as such at the time) for that ideological commitment. Later, however, his grandfather becomes increasingly irrelevant for Wackwitz’s self-conception, and, by the late 1970s, the former’s indifferent judgment of his grandson’s girlfriend (“na ja,” he declares after a moment of inspection) only becomes a joke between the young couple.²³⁶ Andreas Wackwitz’s death shortly thereafter adds the final note to this process, coinciding with the death of Rudi Dutschke a few months later to punctuate the end

²³³ Wackwitz 55-6.

²³⁴ Wackwitz 156-7.

²³⁵ Wackwitz 58.

²³⁶ Wackwitz 158.

of Wackwitz's ambivalent position between the extremes marked by these two men. After this period, he is, he claims, "wieder sicher, [...] wer ich bin."²³⁷

At the midlife point from which Wackwitz narrates his autobiographical novel, his perspective has shifted: where he once saw himself as rebellious, he now recognizes continuity between his grandfather's and his own conceptions of masculinity. In hindsight, he views their differences as the result of historical accident rather than as a product of unique personality traits or conflicting value systems. Not only are National Socialism and Leftist radicalism represented as analogous totalitarian ideologies, but many of Andreas Wackwitz's Wilhelmine and neo-Romantic ideals, which formed the basis for his Nazi sympathies, are re-coded in *Ein unsichtbares Land* as timeless, desirable qualities. Although the author-narrator does not share his grandfather's nationalist or racist inclinations, he emphasizes what he sees as positive traits embodied by his grandfather, in particular "seine praktische Nüchternheit, seine Abenteuerlust, sein Freiheitsdrang, sein Sinn für die Natur, sein Mut, sein Selbstbewusstsein, jene steinerne oder projektilartige Geschlossenheit seiner Meinungen und Handlungen."²³⁸

Although the two of them were doomed by historical contingency to mutual incomprehension during Andreas Wackwitz's life, in retrospect the grandson points to what could have been "unter anderen politischen Umständen."²³⁹ Indeed, Wackwitz's depiction of his own biography in the text points to a successful internalization of some of these values; his narrator is certainly a self-confident, independent admirer of the natural world. Even Wackwitz's career path points to his grandfather's influence: Andreas Wackwitz's love of adventure,

²³⁷ Wackwitz 270-1.

²³⁸ Wackwitz 57.

²³⁹ Wackwitz 57.

reflected in his sojourns in Poland and Namibia, reappears in his grandson's own travels as an employee of Goethe Institutes on three continents. Beyond this, his narrator's assertion of a kind of metaphysical connection between himself and his grandfather suggests that this identification gives him a sense of importance. At the beginning of the final chapter of *Ein unsichtbares Land*, Wackwitz's narrator muses that his and his father's lives seem a kind of continuation of Andreas Wackwitz's life, "als sei dieses Leben etwas von uns dreien Unabhängiges; vielleicht größer und wichtiger als wir."²⁴⁰ Viewed from this perspective, Wackwitz's autobiographical project – undertaken around the author's fiftieth birthday – also appears to reflect an existential concern with the significance of one's own life, not uncommon as one approaches middle age. For Wackwitz, this search for significance takes the form of self-positioning within a masculine genealogy.

While Uwe Timm notes similarities between his father and himself only to better underscore the crucial differences between them, then, Wackwitz does the opposite. Although Wackwitz marks the differences between himself and his grandfather – they were drawn to conflicting ideologies, the grandfather's authoritarian personality hindered their communication –, he is primarily invested in portraying their similarities. By decoupling his grandfather's more desirable traits from their association with older, authoritarian-nationalist conceptions of ideal masculinity, and suggesting that it was only through an accident of politics and history that they acquired a negative connotation, Wackwitz is able to rehabilitate the masculinity his grandfather represents.²⁴¹ In the end, rather than presenting an obstacle in his identification with his

²⁴⁰ Wackwitz 272.

²⁴¹ Aleida Assmann, like Wackwitz himself, sees a positive connotation to this conservative genealogy of masculinity, asserting that this genealogy connects him with "lebenswichtige Energien aus der Vergangenheit." Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, 90.

grandfather, the latter's model of masculinity is thus made to support the restoration of genealogical continuity between the men of the Wackwitz family.

In some respects, these authors' navigation of concepts of masculinity is reminiscent of their *Väterliteratur* predecessors: the influence of the author-narrators' own self-conception on their investigations of the past is important for both the *Väterliteratur* trend and the more recent *Generationenromane*. At the same time, exploring the gender subtext of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and *Ein unsichtbares Land* sheds light on some significant differences between the two trends. Timm's and Wackwitz's negotiation of the conceptions of masculinity represented by their family patriarchs demonstrate a tolerance for nuance and an interest in subtle difference that writers of the *Väterliteratur* era struggled to accept.

IV. Certain and Uncertain Narrators

If Timm's and Wackwitz's engagements with models of masculinity demonstrate the nuanced approach each author takes towards family and collective history, this is even more clear in the authors' narrative perspectives. Each author writes from a narrative perspective that reflects a postmodern acceptance of the uncertain or undefined; examining the texts' narrators brings in to view the functions and consequences of these authorial choices. As I will show, each author's autobiographical alter ego contributes to the creation of a discursive space within which a reconciliatory gesture can take shape; in both cases, the narrator's behavior points to the indeterminate quality of his story. In *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm employs a narrator who continually poses questions about whose answers or significance he will only speculate, while in *Ein unsichtbares Land* Wackwitz's narrator both reflects philosophically on the contingency of

concepts of historical reality and at the same time posits a version of how things are or were “in reality.”

On the one hand, these narrators represent a shift away from the authoritative, quasi-objective pose adopted by authors of *Väterliteratur*, demonstrating a more sophisticated conception of the subjective, conditional nature of any knowledge about the past. On the other hand, the self-assured narrators of *Väterliteratur* enabled those authors to maintain a critical voice, communicating their moral condemnation of whatever traces of Nazi thinking they identified in their family history. With this in mind, as I examine the narrative strategies of Timm’s and Wackwitz’s texts, I will also consider how and to what degree the authors incorporate a critical (if not moralizing) position into their narratives.

The Questioning Narrator of Am Beispiel meines Bruders

In *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm’s vignette-style reflections and anecdotes are punctuated not only by excerpts from his brother’s war diary, but also by questions the narrator asks about his brother’s character and actions, as well as, occasionally, about the personalities and motivations of his parents. Often, these questions are prompted by the brevity of the entries in his brother’s journals, as the narrator asks himself what troubling meaning could lie behind them. For example, when the journal reports “*Feb. 28. 1 Tag Ruhe, große Läusejagd,*” the narrator wonders “*Könnte mit Läusejagd nicht auch etwas ganz anderes gemeint sein, nicht einfach das Entlausen der Uniform?*”²⁴² Similarly, when he reads “*Gelände wird durchkämt. Viel Beute!*”, the narrator asks himself “*Was verbirgt sich dahinter? Waffen? Warum dieses*

²⁴² Timm 15.

Ausrufezeichen, das sich sonst selten in seinen Notizen findet?“²⁴³ The repetition of these questions represent the narrator’s lingering worry that his brother participated in the atrocities committed by the Waffen-SS.

Also on a formal level, these questions suggest dialogue, and with them Timm points to the lack of satisfactory dialogue about the relationship between his family’s past and the Nazi past. Although the narrator describes a family penchant for storytelling which often includes stories about his brother, the number of unanswered questions that remain underscores his assertion that such storytelling within the family consisted of language that had become ritualized and meaningless, and functioned in fact as a way of *not* talking about certain issues. In one passage, the narrator recalls asking his mother why his brother enlisted in the Waffen-SS and receiving only “einige naheliegende Erklärungen. *Aus Idealismus. Er wollte nicht zurückstehen. Sich nicht drücken*” and the claim that “*Die SS war eine normale Kampftruppe. Die Verbrecher waren die anderen, der SD.*”²⁴⁴ Timm’s frustration with his mother’s repetition of clichés and narrow conception of Nazi guilt is indicated through his narrator’s lack of commentary on these views, as if, even in a rhetorical forum, he sees nothing substantive to be gained through conversation.

In the absence of dialogue which would have helped him understand his family’s past, Timm uses the vignette structure of his novel to suggest certain answers, but without arguing for the validity of any particular explanation or interpretation. The narrator finds some information in the memoirs of Holocaust victims and in historiographical analyses of the Nazi era such as Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men*, but such sources seem to do little to help his

²⁴³ Timm 15.

²⁴⁴ Timm 19.

understanding of his family's specific experiences. Instead, he situates his brother's journals and the biographies of his family members as potential sources of information. The novel consists of short passages separated by a few empty lines, and Timm often ends one section with a question to which the following section refers thematically, resulting in an implicit question-and-answer format. For example, the questions "Wie sah der Bruder sich selbst? Welche Empfindungen hatte er? Erkannte er etwas wie Täterschaft, Schuldigwerden, Unrecht?" are followed by some comments on a journal fragment in which his brother appears to acknowledge the brutality of the Waffen-SS.²⁴⁵ Similarly, a passage that ends with his mother's assertion "Ich war dagegen, [...] daß sich der Karl-Heinz zur SS meldet" and the narrator's question "Und der Vater?" is followed in the next section with a portrait of his father's military career, from the field artillery in the First World War to the *Freikorps* afterwards and eventually in the Luftwaffe under Hitler.²⁴⁶ This structure allows Timm to suggest certain understandings of his family members, but without resolving them into a unified portrait of the family, in which the gaps in his knowledge are filled with his own inferences or interpretations. Instead, the questions preserve a sense of the uncertainty with which the author approaches his family history.

The questioning narrator of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* allows Timm to acknowledge a social imperative to engage critically with his family's relationship with National Socialism, but the narrator's unwillingness to assert an authoritative interpretation of his family history helps Timm avoid claiming a position of moral superiority over his family members: he disagrees with their politics, but is not certain that he, in their place, would have been different. This allows the

²⁴⁵ Timm 88. In the latter section, the narrator observes that "Es gibt in seinen Aufzeichnungen, in seinen Briefen nur einen Hinweis, der diesen Mythos von der anständigen, tapferen Waffen-SS, der später von den Kameradschaftsverbänden verbreitet, aber auch zu Hause von den Eltern gepflegt wurde, in Frage stellt."

²⁴⁶ Timm 20ff.

narrator to assume a stance that is critical but does not require a break with his family. Unlike the authors of *Väterliteratur*, who try to take a definite, authoritative position vis-à-vis their fathers, Timm simultaneously brings troubling questions into focus and distances himself from their implications (he doesn't claim to know what the answers to his questions might mean), creating in the end an indeterminate space from which to reflect upon his family history.

The degree to which Timm is critical of his family has been a point of disagreement in literary scholarship on *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*. Erin McGlothlin, although she rightly observes that Timm “largely avoids the dichotomy between condemnation and exculpation that plagues many of the father texts...,” characterizes Timm’s approach to his family history as predominately critical, and reads the novel as a clear break with his family’s storytelling traditions.²⁴⁷ Anne Fuchs and Helmut Schmitz, on the other hand, view Timm’s novel as largely compassionate, and in fact very selective in its criticism. For Fuchs, Timm’s disapproval is largely reserved for the masculinity represented by his father and brother: “Although Timm demonstrates a heightened self-awareness and the ability to empathize with his family members, like [Christoph] Meckel he too distances himself from the male protagonists with their cold persona and false code of honor.”²⁴⁸ Similarly, Schmitz argues that Timm’s novel is remarkable for its tolerance of complex victim and perpetrator identities. In the cases of Timm’s father and brother, according to Schmitz, “suffering Germans become recognisable as the Nazi

²⁴⁷ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature. Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Rochester: Camden House, 2006) 227. See also 223.

²⁴⁸ Fuchs, “The Tinderbox of Memory: Generation and Masculinity in *Väterliteratur* by Christoph Meckel, Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Dagmar Leupold,” 53.

Volksgemeinschaft,” and Timm is able to oppose their politics while empathizing with their suffering.²⁴⁹

My reading of Timm’s use of questions to facilitate a less determinate narrator position supports Fuchs’ and Schmitz’ characterizations of the interplay between critique and compassion in Timm’s novel. This analysis also describes the formal underpinnings of Inge Stephan’s argument that *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* maintains “eine merkwürdige Ungewissheit,” and that it establishes a kind of twilight in our knowledge about the past rather than an enlightenment.²⁵⁰ This is not to say that Timm’s autobiographical project represents a “Relativierung historischer Ereignisse,” Stephan argues, but rather an exploration of “die Relativität der Erinnerung,” because memory work relies upon both the availability and accessibility of information as well as the interpretive work of the remembering individual.²⁵¹

We can see this work of interpretation not only in Timm’s suggestion of answers to the questions he poses, but also in the way that understanding and criticism are interwoven in his text. For example, when Timm’s narrator recalls discovering his father’s professional shortcomings and lack of business acumen, he acknowledges that “das Nichtkönnen des Vaters” also reflects a wider phenomenon: “es war nicht nur der Vater gescheitert, sondern mit ihm das kollektive Wertesystem.” Similarly, when Timm reflects upon his family’s unwillingness to talk

²⁴⁹ Helmut Schmitz, “Historicism, Sentimentality, and the Problem of Empathy: Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* in the Context of Recent Representations of German Suffering,” *A Nation of Victims? Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, ed. Helmut Schmitz. (Amsterdam - New York: Rodopi, 2007) 211-212.

²⁵⁰ Inge Stephan, “Nachgetragene Erinnerungen. Die Wiederkehr des Nationalsozialismus in Familientexten der Gegenwart - Uwe Timm *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (2003) und Ulla Hahn *Unschärfe Bilder* (2003),” *Nachbilder Des Holocaust*, ed. Inge Stephan, Alexandra Tacke. (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2007) 34-5.

²⁵¹ Stephan 35.

substantively about the Nazi period, he muses that “dieses Nicht-darüber-Sprechen findet eine Erklärung in dem tiefverwurzelten Bedürfnis, nicht aufzufallen, im Verbund zu bleiben, aus Furcht vor beruflichen Nachteilen, erschwerten Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten und in einer hintergründigen Angst vor dem Terror des Regimes. Es ist die zur Gewohnheit gewordene Feigheit – das Totschweigen.”²⁵² Here, Timm provides an explanation of the rationale behind his family’s silence about the past, even as he condemns their cowardice.²⁵³ In passages like these, the reader sees Timm actively navigating different ways of knowing about the past, including not only his own perspective, critical of his parents’ choices, but also an idea of his parents’ own point of view, in addition to a more general, collective context.

By weaving together understanding and critical perspectives, Timm addresses a potential problem with his open, understanding narrative position. Although his narrator exhibits a postmodern skepticism towards objective knowledge and truth about the past, he resists the relativism of which the postmodern perspective is sometimes accused. In this text, the author-narrator reminds the reader that he views his father and brother as complicit in Nazism and fears that the latter participated in atrocities. He criticizes his father’s suggestion that the Americans shared responsibility for the Holocaust (because of their early refusal to accept Jewish refugees) as a “Versuch, die Schuld zu relativieren, das eigene Schuldigsein auf die Sieger zu übertragen.”²⁵⁴ Timm’s narrator also acknowledges a fear that accompanies his research into his brother’s wartime activities, the fear “daß seine Einheit, das SS-Panzierpionier-Btl. 3, und damit

²⁵² Timm 133.

²⁵³ Timm 108, emphasis original.

²⁵⁴ Timm 134.

auch der Bruder, an der Erschießung von Zivilisten, von Juden, von Geiseln beteiligt war.”²⁵⁵ His investigations turn up no evidence of such atrocities, but his narrator does not take this fact as definitive evidence, qualifying his statement that this was “nicht der Fall” with the caveat “soweit ich herausfinden konnte.”²⁵⁶ With such careful balancing of ambiguity about the past and reminders about the Nazi crimes and the importance of acknowledging individual complicity, Timm qualifies his postmodern narrative perspective. Although his autobiographical narrator presumes the inaccessibility of absolute truth about the past, he does not slip into moral relativism, which could open the door to an apologetic discourse on the Nazi past.

Narrator Trouble: Ein unsichtbares Land

Wackwitz’s *Ein unsichtbares Land* also engages postmodern perspectives on the possibility of knowledge about the past. As we have seen in his navigation of masculine role models within his family history, Wackwitz turns his family past into a genealogy with which he happily identifies. This undertaking is supported on a theoretical level by his narrator’s discussion of philosophical arguments put forth by Friedrich Schleiermacher, with whom the narrator claims a kind of metonymic family connection, as well as postmodern thinkers Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas. Using these philosophers’ ideas, Wackwitz provides theoretical underpinnings for a concept of the past that views the meaning of history to be contingent on narrative and thus entitles an individual to his or her own understanding of events. At the same time, Wackwitz’s narrator repeatedly uses expressions such as “wirklich” or “in Wirklichkeit,” suggesting, in contrast to his philosophical argument, that his version of his family’s history is in

²⁵⁵ Timm 102.

²⁵⁶ Timm 102.

fact authoritative. Even as Wackwitz's philosophical discussions validate the postmodern subjectivity that animates both his and Uwe Timm's narrative perspective, he also, in a perplexing move, departs from that position through references to a reality that exists beyond his own subjective perspective.

To introduce an understanding of the constructed nature of history, Wackwitz cites a long passage from the writings of 18th century philosopher and Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. This philosopher has special significance for Wackwitz's project because of a coincidence in their personal histories: Schleiermacher's family occupied the parsonage in the Polish town of Anhalt where Wackwitz's father and grandfather also lived. In a chapter titled "Eine erfundene Geschichte," which traces the history of the Anhalt region, Wackwitz recounts an anecdote from Schleiermacher's own autobiographical writings in which the latter recounts his suspicion, as a youth, that "alle alten Schriftsteller und mit ihnen die alte Geschichte untergeschoben wären. Andere Gründe hatte ich nicht dafür als die, daß ich keine Zeugnisse über ihre Echtheit wußte und daß mir alles, was ich davon wußte, romanhaft und unzusammenhängend vorkam."²⁵⁷ Unlike Schleiermacher's contemporaries, the narrator asserts, we in the 21st century are sympathetic to such suspicions, having witnessed America's continual self-redefinition and Europe's reinvention of its own history in the wake of various upheavals since Schleiermacher's time.

This conception of history as dependent on interpretation for its legibility is later restated with an emphasis on the construction of narrative, again with reference to Schleiermacher: "ich [...] denke an Friedrich Schleiermacher, der [...] darüber nachgegrübelt hat, ob die ganze antike Geschichte vielleicht nur schöne Literatur sein könnte und alle Ursprünge nur Fiktion, jedes

²⁵⁷ Wackwitz 78-9.

Land ein erfundenes, jedes Volk ein Zufall und jede Tradition nur eine Geschichte, die auch anders ausgehen kann. Die wir anders weitererzählen könnten.”²⁵⁸ For Wackwitz, Schleiermacher represents this conception of history and origin, in which the progression of events does not represent absolute causality (or necessary sequence), and in which events or series of events acquire “historical” significance only in hindsight and in relation to the concerns or needs of the present. This anti-determinist position is invoked by the narrator (via Schleiermacher) as an ideological defense against the folk-nationalism of his grandfather. The latter has his own intellectual forbear in his grandson’s text, namely Schleiermacher’s contemporary, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, whose “Flammenreden” reflect the same nationalist fervor that Wackwitz sees in his grandfather.²⁵⁹

At the same time, the personal link constructed between Schleiermacher and the Wackwitz family means that the latter’s philosophy can also be cast as a part of familial and national history with which Wackwitz can, in turn, comfortably identify. This allows him to oppose but not reject his grandfather, and even to claim a deeper historical significance for their conflict. In addition, the conception of history and origin that the narrator borrows from Schleiermacher creates a space in which he can essentially pick and choose which aspects of his family’s past are meaningful for him and in what way, permitting a greater freedom of self-definition within the context of family history. Schleiermacher thus provides a theoretical

²⁵⁸ Wackwitz 179.

²⁵⁹ Helmut Schmitz makes a similar observation in his essay “Annäherung an die Generation der Großväter”: “Im Zentrum von Wackwitz’s ‘Familienroman’ steht damit die Zurückweisung philosophischer Systeme und Denkstrukturen, die Zugang zu einer absoluten Wahrheit vorgeben, zugunsten eines Denkens, das Sprache und damit Darstellung und Wahrheit als kontingent begreift.” Helmut Schmitz, “Annäherung an die Generation der Großväter: Stephan Wackwitz’ *Ein Unsichtbares Land* und Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen des Großvaters*,” *BIOS 2* (2006): 259.

foundation for the narrator's selective identification with his grandfather. Adopting Schleiermacher's doubts about the objective truth-value of history allows Wackwitz to develop a destabilized understanding of history and to reflect upon how historical meaning is created through narrative and over time. In these reflections, the narrator frequently makes reference to "reality" or "truth" in an informal way that recalls both the constructed nature of what we call history and the way it is employed to serve the needs of the present. At times, his concept of the real in history seems synonymous with casual, everyday understandings of the past, as when he asserts that history can be "real" when it becomes part of the self-understanding of groups across multiple generations (this idea is consistent with the concept of communicative memory developed by, among others, Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Aleida Assmann).²⁶⁰ At other points, Wackwitz emphasizes the intangibility of the real, asserting that "historical reality" is not a matter of time and place, but rather of retroactively determined meaning.²⁶¹

At times, however, Wackwitz's narrator uses this strategy to characterize phenomena that are questions of interpretation rather than fact. A passage describing Wackwitz's visit with his father to his family's former home in Poland illustrates the narrator's varied usage of claims to "Wirklichkeit." Describing the park where his father had wandered as a child, Wackwitz uses details about time and place to cast into greater relief his feeling of the symbolic significance of own his presence in this park: "Durch Tore [...] würden wir in immer neue Parkunendlichkeiten weitergehen. Und zugleich (in Wirklichkeit fast fünfzig Jahre später) stand ich, jetzt selbst ein Erwachsener, [...] in Polen vor jenen schwarzen, gusseisernen Löwen auf den Pfeilern des

²⁶⁰ Wackwitz 65.

²⁶¹ Wackwitz 136ff.

Laskowitzer Schlosstors...²⁶² Here, the phrase “in Wirklichkeit” underscores the contrast between the fact that Wackwitz is standing at a fixed point in time and space, on the one hand, and with the feeling of infinite space and the simultaneity of historical moments evoked by the park and shared by father and son, on the other. In this example, the term “Wirklichkeit” is used conventionally, marking the difference between what is verifiable in the empirical world and the author-narrator’s subjective experience. A few lines later, however, the same phrase is used metaphorically: the narrator reflects on all the parks “in die ich seither gekommen bin, im Hamstead Heath, im Bois de Boulogne, im Englischen Garten, im Central Park, in all diesen Kunstlandschaften (die in Wirklichkeit eine unendliche Gegend im Innern unserer Seele sind)...²⁶³ In this instance, the phrase is used to imply that the symbolic meaning of a park is more significant or more “real” than the empirical experience of standing in it. In these two uses of “in Wirklichkeit,” the phrase distinguishes a conventional understanding of reality from a subjective understanding, but with a contradictory result: in the first passage, it is the conventional experience which is marked as real, while in the second it is the subjective experience. Inconsistencies like these make it difficult to conclude what the concept of reality in fact signifies for Wackwitz’s autobiographical alter ego.

At the end of the same section, the term “wirklich” is used in yet another sense, this time distinguishing empirically verifiable and subjective experiences, on the one hand, from something even more fundamental. Here, the narrator reflects that perhaps “seien die Erinnerungen und Träume der Väter und Söhne und Enkel ineinandergeschoben, und

²⁶² Wackwitz 188.

²⁶³ Wackwitz 188.

wahrscheinlich lebt wirklich keiner sein innerstes Leben nur für sich.”²⁶⁴ In this passage, the term “wirklich” has moved beyond an empirical or even symbolic usage, suggesting instead a deeper “reality” and connection between individuals than we can normally perceive. With these references to the “real,” Wackwitz contradicts the postmodern notion of contingent historical knowledge that he celebrates in other sections of his text. Now, his autobiographical alter ego seems to posit a kind of profound knowledge about the meaning of family connections, gained through his exploration of his ancestors’ lives. In one sense, this passage reflects the narrator’s newfound awareness of the influence of tradition, upbringing and historical context on individual identity. Beyond this, however, the idea that the paternal line of the Wackwitz family is held together by a transgenerational inner bond also reinforces the sense of importance that the autobiographical protagonist seeks to establish in his genealogical heritage, as shown in the previous section.

Wackwitz’s novel contains dozens of examples of these varied references to the “real.” At times the narrator’s assertions of “reality” are delivered in an offhand, seemingly reflexive manner that, in effect, point to the non-objective, interpreting, partisan nature of any autobiographical narrator. At other times, the narrator uses the terms “wirklich” or “eigentlich” to denote “realities” of a non-empirical, symbolic, or metaphysical significance. The effect of this is disorienting, especially because Wackwitz’s philosophical discussions invite us to be on the lookout for his narrative constructions of his understanding of the past. The narrator’s statement that the writings of Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas have helped him to understand “dass man nicht nur die Geschichte, sondern auch die Wahrheit herstellen muss und nicht einfach besitzen kann” is not reflected in a coherent reading of the past that indicates a

²⁶⁴ Wackwitz 188-9.

certain subjective truth for the author-narrator, as his contradictory uses of the idea of “Wirklichkeit” demonstrate.²⁶⁵

While the postmodern perspective of Uwe Timm’s narrator enables the author to intertwine understanding and critical perspectives on his family’s past, Stephan Wackwitz’s integration of postmodern ideas of history has a different effect. On the one hand, Wackwitz’s narrator has a performative quality, demonstrating the fact that the construction of meaning or truth with respect to the past is an active process, influenced by a variety of subjective factors. On the other hand, the narrator’s insistence upon the contingency of all narratives of history and his fascination with the selective and interpretive aspect of any understanding of historical processes draws his, and thus the reader’s, attention away from a consideration of what is at stake in these narrative decisions. As the historian Saul Friedlander has pointed out, this is a common problem in postmodern approaches to representations of history, and one which has particular consequences for engagements with the Holocaust. As Friedlander observes: “notwithstanding the importance one may attach to postmodern attempts at confronting what escapes, at least in part, established historical and artistic categories of representation, the equivocation of postmodernism concerning ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ - that is, ultimately, its fundamental relativism – confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties.”²⁶⁶ In the next section, we will look more closely at how Timm and Wackwitz address this problem in their representation of the darker corners of the family’s and Germany’s past.

²⁶⁵ Wackwitz 153.

²⁶⁶ Saul Friedlander, “Introduction.” *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 20.

V. Phantoms, Ghosts, and Other Mysteries: The Uncanny in Family History

For both Timm and Wackwitz, the genealogical positioning that takes place in their narratives relies rhetorically upon motifs of the uncanny, in addition to their use of narrators who embrace epistemological uncertainty. Although both employ devices common in uncanny literature, neither text is an uncanny tale in the style of classical examples of the genre such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* or Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*. Although it is over ninety years old, Freud's 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" remains the most relevant discussion of the uncanny today. In it, Freud describes the uncanny effect as emerging "wenn verdrängte infantile Komplexe durch einen Eindruck wieder belebt werden oder wenn überwundene primitive Überzeugungen wieder bestätigt scheinen." In Timm's and Wackwitz's texts we find examples of both types of the uncanny – that resulting from the return of the repressed and that originating in the recurrence of old superstitions. The two authors use the idea of the uncanny, as well as its markers and motifs, in very different ways, however. For Timm, the uncanny becomes a means of registering the author-narrator's persistent anxiety about his family's Nazi past, despite his desire to integrate himself into his family narrative tradition. In Wackwitz's text, however, the uncanny marks points of uncertain significance in the author's family history; the category functions more as a label than as a rhetorical trope.

An Uncanny Return: Ghosts and Possession in Am Beispiel meines Bruders

In the opening of *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm's brother is introduced as a figure simultaneously there and not there: "Abwesend und doch anwesend hat er mich durch meine Kindheit begleitet, in der Trauer der Mutter, den Zweifeln des Vaters, den Andeutungen zwischen den Eltern. [...] Auch wenn nicht von ihm die Rede war, war er doch gegenwärtig,

gegenwärtiger als andere Tote, durch Erzählungen, Fotos und in den Vergleichen des Vaters, die mich, den *Nachkömmling*, einbezogen."²⁶⁷ This passage presents a snapshot of Timm's family, organized around the memory of his lost brother. In it, the character of his parents as he knew them, from childhood on, is always marked by this loss, and their frequent references to the older son made him a significant presence for the younger brother who could hardly remember him. While it is unremarkable for parents to compare their children, what the narrator describes here is more akin to Marianne Hirsch's concept of a "postmemory," in which a child's life is strongly influenced by the mediated memories of his or her parents.²⁶⁸ The bitterness reflected in the author's italicization of the term "Nachkömmling" underscores this: the younger son's position in the family, as the one who came after, is determined in relation to his older brother.

The phantom-like quality of Timm's brother is not restricted to his role in postwar family life in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, but is also positioned farther back in time, as part of his character as a child. Citing his mother's memories, the narrator tells of his brother's secret hiding place in the family home, to which the latter would frequently disappear, and which their mother discovered only years later. This tendency to suddenly "vanish" was consistent with his character, we learn. Karl-Heinz was "verträumt [...] als Kind, als Jugendlicher, abwesend, und manchmal verschwand er eben, erzählte die Mutter, wie von Geisterhand weggeführt."²⁶⁹ Timm portrays his brother not only as capable of disappearing, both physically and mentally, but also as ghostly in appearance. He was "blaß, regelrecht *durchsichtig* [...] und so konnte er

²⁶⁷ Timm 8.

²⁶⁸ See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); and "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission," *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana and Chicago: U Illinois Press, 2002).

²⁶⁹ Timm 27.

verschwinden und plötzlich wieder auftauchen.“²⁷⁰ By attributing these qualities to Karl-Heinz himself, and not only to the family’s treatment of his memory, the author-narrator suggests that his older brother may indeed be capable of one day returning to occupy the space the family has kept reserved for him.

The brother’s ghost-like quality, in life and in his “afterlife” in Timm family memory, develops into an uncanny presence in the author-narrator’s dreams and even some waking experiences; the memory treasured and honored by the parents becomes threatening and frightening for the narrator. When he dreams of his brother, the latter appears as a faceless figure trying to force open the front door to their home. In the dream, the narrator struggles to keep his brother from entering: “Mit aller Kraft stemme ich mich gegen die Tür, dränge diesen gesichtslosen Mann, von dem ich aber bestimmt weiß, daß es der Bruder ist, zurück. Endlich kann ich die Tür ins Schloß drücken und verriegeln. Halte aber zu meinem Entsetzten eine rauhe, zerfetzte Jacke in den Händen.“²⁷¹ In Timm’s description of this dream we can recognize the primary elements of the Freudian uncanny: Freud defines the uncanny as “jene Art des Schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, Längstvertraute zurückgeht,” as well as a subset of the merely frightening which involves “etwas wiederkehrendes Verdrängtes.”²⁷² In Timm’s dream, the threatening figure in the door is identified as his brother, an “altbekannte” presence, who tries to force his way in despite the author-narrator’s attempts to resist or “repress” him. The shredded jacket that the dreamer finds in his hands is suggestive of the terrible legacy of Nazi

²⁷⁰ Timm 14, emphasis original.

²⁷¹ Timm 10.

²⁷² Sigmund Freud, “Das Unheimliche” (1919), Studienausgabe, ed. Angela Richards, Alexander Mitscherlich, James Strachey, IV (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1994) 244, 264. For Freud, “das Altbekannte” would be sexual in nature; here, it is historical.

violence – the jacket represents the younger brother’s fear that he must somehow take up the mantle of his older brother.

The fear Timm points to with his uncanny portrayal of his brother can be read as a child’s fear of not pleasing his parents, but it is also a deeper fear of the return of the past represented by both the brother and the father: Nazism, Hitlerism, and war.²⁷³ At other points in the text, the author-narrator underscores the implication that, by virtue of family membership, the past may indeed live on in the form of the younger brother himself. His own name – Uwe Hans Heinz Timm – includes part of his brother Karl-Heinz’s name, given at the older brother’s insistence, the narrator reveals, in the desire “wenigstens mit dem Namen weiterzuleben, im anderen...”²⁷⁴ Further, in the author-narrator’s recollection of his childhood self, he suggests correspondences between his own and his brother’s characters and childhood experiences as sons of the same parents. At times the narrator claims to know how his brother felt in certain situations: although they both must have shared a “Gefühl wie ein Befehl: *mutig sein*,” coming from their father, the narrator asserts that “wahrscheinlich war der Bruder ein so ängstliches Kind wie ich.”²⁷⁵ At moments like these, the author-narrator displays empathy towards his brother, but the idea of commonality between the two brothers also has troubling consequences for Timm’s self-conception, which are reflected in his uncanny dreams. There we see that Timm’s brother is not

²⁷³ This is, of course, also what Timm’s father represents. Accordingly, the narrator at one point expresses the fear that his father had not really died, that “er hatte sich nur totgestellt” (Timm, p. 153). On the correlations between Timm’s father and brother, see Fuchs “Tinderbox of Memory.”

²⁷⁴ Timm 19. For a detailed discussion of naming in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and other works by “68ers,” see Thomas Andre. *Kriegskinder und Wohlstandskinder. Die Gegenwartsliteratur als Antwort auf die Literatur der 68er*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011) 120-122.

²⁷⁵ Timm 54, 57.

only the predominant site of memory²⁷⁶ about the Nazi past within the family; he is also, for Timm's narrator alter ego, an ominous figure, a terrifying ghost rather than a sad memory.

It is not only in the author-narrator's dreams that his brother's identity threatens to take over his own, however; the disturbing parallel between the brothers also yields a more traditional uncanny moment in his waking life. As Freud recognizes, not every ghost story is uncanny, and experiences are uncanny in life which may not be so in literature and vice versa.²⁷⁷ One of the distinguishing factors of the uncanny, however, according to both Freud and Tzvetan Todorov, is the occurrence of seemingly supernatural events within the narrative framework of the "real."²⁷⁸ The autobiographical mode in which Timm narrates *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* implies that the events described take place in the world of conventional reality. And yet, the narrator describes an incident that took place during his visit to Kiev that moves beyond realm of ordinary experience into the classical uncanny.

The author-narrator is invited to give a reading in Kiev, not far from where his brother was injured by shrapnel, which required the amputation of both legs, and where he eventually succumbed to his injuries. The narrator describes a feeling of compulsion to visit the site: "ich müsse einmal die Landschaft sehen, in der er damals gekämpft hatte, wo er verwundet und *gefallen* war. Wo er andere verwundet und getötet hatte."²⁷⁹ While still in his hotel in Kiev,

²⁷⁶ Timm's brother does indeed function within the family much like the sites of memory theorized by Pierre Nora.

²⁷⁷ Freud 271-2.

²⁷⁸ Freud 272-3; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic. A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973) 44-46.

²⁷⁹ Timm 123.

however, he has another dream, in which his brother appears as a “schattenhaft” figure.²⁸⁰ Timm wakes up, but finds that he cannot move his legs: “Im Schreckzustand versuchte ich aufzustehen. Ich konnte nicht. In beiden Beinen war ein unerträglicher Schmerz.”²⁸¹ In this passage, the narrator’s dreaming and waking states seem to merge, as his own body takes on the symptoms of his brother’s injuries. The narrator is eventually able to shake off this feeling as he becomes fully awake, but later, during his reading in Kiev, something similar happens. After his presentation, he discovers that, while he was speaking, his face had become “bleich, fast weiß, die Augenhöhlen tief verschattet, violette, wie die eines Sterbenden.”²⁸² The moderator of the event confirms that a shadow seemed to come over him during his reading – the transformation was not simply imagined. This description both echoes the earlier image of Karl-Heinz’ pale complexion and suggests a deathly, ghostly look. In this episode, Timm appears to have been possessed by his brother, feeling the brother’s wounds on his own body and dying the brother’s death on the eastern front. As in a traditional uncanny tale, here something inexplicable and sinister erupts in “real life,” something which points back to the author-narrator’s childhood fear of being replaced by his ghostly brother.

In Timm’s uncanny dreams and experiences, we see the return of his childhood psychic past, namely, the desires to please his parents and to emulate the older brother always adored by their parents. These uncanny passages point to a childhood fear of not living up to the brother’s model, and of the brother returning to take his rightful place in the family. At the same time, these fears are coupled with another terrible layer of adult knowledge – the brother not only

²⁸⁰ Timm 125.

²⁸¹ Timm 125.

²⁸² Timm 122.

represents a psychological threat to the younger son's place in his family, but is also a reminder of the Nazi past within family history. The author-narrator has shaped his adult life and identity around a rejection, on ideological grounds, of his father's and brother's model, but the brother's uncanny return threatens to undo this work of self-determination. In Freud's theory, an uncanny quality emerges when a reminder of psychological processes of subject formation (especially repression) appears together with a breakdown of the boundary between the real and fantasy. This combination produces the threatening, frightening affect that is fundamental to the uncanny experience. Both of these points resonate with Timm's autobiographical novel. The phantom figure of the fallen soldier, returning to possess the body of his younger brother, represents the intrusion of the supernatural into the real, and the ominous aspect of it is rooted in its association with "something that should have remained hidden," i.e., his family's connection to the Nazi past, from which he had disassociated himself and which challenges his own self-conception and sense of agency.²⁸³

In some respects, Timm's representation of his brother carries on a family narrative tradition. As Timm paints a picture of his family in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, he portrays each family member as a storyteller. His father "erzählte [...] gern, nahm sich Zeit, war ein Weltdeuter"; the narrator recalls "eine Geschichte, die von der Mutter immer wieder erzählt wurde"; and his older sister "erzählte von dem Bruder, von gemeinsamen Spielen und Streichen."²⁸⁴ Further, the motif of his brother as a phantom appears to stem from his mother's recollections of her pale child who disappeared into his secret hideaway. Timm's inscription of

²⁸³ Freud 248-9. Freud quotes Schelling here, who defines the uncanny as "alles, was im Geheimnis, im Verborgnen ... bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist." Freud first argues that Schelling's definition is insufficient, but later revises this, asserting that it is through repression that something comes to be "hidden" in Schelling's sense. 263-4

²⁸⁴ Timm 21, 11, 73.

this phantomlike quality into his own memories thus keeps his story in line with a certain familial practice. This is at odds with the critical stance Timm adopts towards the discursive patterns he recognizes from his childhood, however, in which the repetition of certain stories and phrases reduces their affective power. He recalls, for example “noch Jahre nach dem Krieg, mich durch meine Kindheit begleitend, wurden diese Erlebnisse immer und immer wieder erzählt, was das ursprüngliche Entsetzen langsam abschliff, das Erlebte faßbar und schließlich unterhaltend machte.”²⁸⁵ Timm’s own narrative, as I understand it, is not in fact a further instance of these familial repetitions, though he does re-present stories his family has told. Instead, by creating a text (itself a meaningful step away from private storytelling) which alternately narrates, questions, and critically reflects, Timm is able to stake out a middle ground between simply carrying on a family tradition and distancing himself from those patterns of representation altogether.

Timm’s use of the uncanny provides him with a new vocabulary with which to address the problems that plagued the authors of *Väterliteratur*. Through the representation of his brother as a haunting phantom, Timm registers the fear of his own assumption of the ideology that permeated his family, a possibility he addresses directly in the passage paralleling his own politics with his father’s. Having both expressed that possibility metaphorically and briefly named it, Timm makes no grand proclamations – though he distances himself from this ideology, he condemns neither his father, nor his brother, nor himself. In contrast, most *Väterliteratur* texts struggle with a perceived imperative to judge and denounce the father. On the other hand, Timm’s novel shares with that earlier trend a tendency to view himself in the largely passive role of a child with respect to his family: his genealogical reflection is focused on what his family has

²⁸⁵ Timm 36.

made him, what he is because of who his relatives are. “Was wollte der Vater?” he wonders, and, though he doesn’t know how to answer the question, he asserts that “es sind diese Wünsche wie auch die Abneigungen, gerade die nicht ausgesprochenen, die weiter reichen und, den Linien eines Magnetfeldes vergleichbar, unserem Handeln die Richtung geben.”²⁸⁶ In this passage, Timm points to the subtle ways in which parents influence their children; his use of the uncanny registers rhetorically his anxiety about what ideas and values he may unwittingly share with his Nazi-supporting family.

In Timm’s text, the symbolic vocabulary of the uncanny, through whose ghosts and possessions the dead revisit the living, is a way to express both rational and irrational elements within his autobiographical text. Rationally, he wants to present himself as self-determining, as having made choices that break with his family’s values; this idea is definitive for his self-understanding. But an irrational fear persists – the fear that his striving was all for naught, and that dark past, represented by his brother, will return in him. This anxiety is rooted in the fact that the same family memory practices that concealed their former NS sympathies through ritualized language that marked the older brother’s absence as the result of a “Schicksalsschlag” also inscribed Timm himself into a narrative of family identity and continuity. In *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm seeks to intervene in that family narrative tradition, composing a new role for himself that both acknowledges certain commonalities between himself, his brother, and his father, while also maintaining a critical distance from the ideology to which his family subscribed. As a part of this narrative intervention, Timm uses uncanny motifs and experiences to instill his project with a sense of ongoing, unresolved anxiety: coming to terms with his family past is an unending process, which will never lose its troubling quality.

²⁸⁶ Timm 41.

A History of Haunting in Ein unsichtbares Land

While Timm uses the uncanny to symbolically represent anxiety about his own origins and identity, Wackwitz uses uncanny motifs to mark points of semantic uncertainty in his family history that are ultimately not frightening. Wackwitz begins *Ein unsichtbares Land* with stories of ghosts, his first chapter presenting something like a historiography of ghosts in the region of Poland around Auschwitz. “Im neunzehnten und noch bis weit ins zwanzigste Jahrhundert hinein hat es in der Gegend um die alte galizische Residenzstadt Auschwitz viel gespukt,”²⁸⁷ the narrator declares in a firmly matter-of-fact tone. These ghosts are not instances of the uncanny, however, but rather part of everyday life in this part of the world. Here, each historical period has its own frightening tales: it is as if all of the region’s

Dämonen [...] sich seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters in den Bäumen, Teichen, Dörfern und Pfarrhäusern des Herzogtums und der umliegenden Herrschaften bereitgehalten hätten. Polen, Deutsche und Juden haben jahrhundertlang von überall her ihre Geschichten und Gespenster in das moorige, birkenbewachsene Hügelland am Oberlauf der Weichsel mitgebracht und das Gruseln vor Doppelgängern, umgehenden Gestorbenen und Poltergeistern war noch zwischen den Weltkriegen so lebendig und alltäglich in der österreichisch-preußisch-polnischen Provinz wie die Sagerinnerungen an die Mongoleninvasion des dreizehnten und an die Schwedengreuel im siebzehnten Jahrhundert.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Wackwitz 7.

²⁸⁸ Wackwitz 7.

The combination of atmospheric description with a journalistic narrative voice in this passage sets the stage for a modern ghost story that does not fit the uncanny model. Rather than pointing to repression (following Freud's definition of the uncanny as a return of the repressed), the presence of ghosts in this region of Poland is simply its normal state. The implication of such a ghost story, in which "es ist im Indikativ von 'Spuk' die Rede," is troubling: in the historicized ghost story told here, the ghosts of the Auschwitz gas chambers are (merely) the terrifying figures particular to the mid-twentieth-century, as if they were somehow the continuation of an earlier, more primeval tradition.²⁸⁹

Wackwitz's own family, we learn, also has its place in this spectral history. As noted earlier, the Wackwitz family lived in Anhalt, a small village located thirty kilometers from Auschwitz, through the 1920s. According to tradition, the parsonage in Anhalt is haunted by the spirit of a pastor and a maid, whose identity no one seems to recall. The forgetting of the story of the ghosts of the Anhalt house, stretching back generations, is mirrored by a more recent lapse in Wackwitz family memory – the narrator reveals that his grandmother, father, aunts and uncle, although they told many stories about their life in Anhalt, neglected to mention "dass der Schauplatz ihrer Kindheit und der Ort des Jahrhundertverbrechens einen längeren Spaziergang und ein knappes Jahrzehnt voneinander entfernt sind."²⁹⁰ While the historical basis of the parsonage ghost story has been lost to memory, however, in the case of the Wackwitz family's geographical connection to Auschwitz, the inaccessible knowledge is of a different quality. Although Wackwitz's narrator cryptically claims that "der Spuk vom Pfarrhaus von Anhalt in meinem Leben weitergegangen ist," the significance of the family's link to Auschwitz is never

²⁸⁹ Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte*, 208.

²⁹⁰ Wackwitz 10-11.

determined.²⁹¹ At no point in the text does the narrator discover criminal activities in his family history, and the knowledge of his grandparents' support of Hitler, evidenced in his grandfather's journals, is not new to him.

Although the revelations in Wackwitz's first chapter are provocative and seem mysterious, they remain only that: they set the stage for the discovery of surprising and disturbing truths about the author's family past, but such discoveries never come. Instead, the importance of ghosts in the parsonage seems restricted to the fact that it connects the Wackwitz family to a larger historical "tradition" of haunting in the region. That is, the ghosts of Auschwitz are part of the background of Wackwitz's family novel; they are neither elements of an uncanny tale of repressed horrors nor the lingering voices of concentration camp victims calling to be heard. At the end of the section, the narrator asserts that "jeder Mensch hat ein Recht auf eine geschichtslose Kindheit," and, as literary critic Sybille Horstkotte rightly summarizes, in this text "die wahren Geister von Auschwitz bleiben ungesehen."²⁹²

In the place of a moral reckoning, Wackwitz offers explanations for how his grandfather could have come to support a repugnant ideological position, employing characterizations that tend toward an apologetic position. For example, the author-narrator attributes to his grandfather a certain "pathologische Geschmeidigkeit," an "Anverwandlungsfähigkeit" that made him susceptible to such ideas, suggesting that he followed the lead of others rather than developing his own perspective.²⁹³ Elsewhere, having come across some crude stereotypes about Poles in his

²⁹¹ Wackwitz 11.

²⁹² Silke Horstkotte, "Die Geister von Auschwitz: Fotografie und spektrale Erinnerung in Stephan Wackwitz' *Ein Unsichtbares Land* und *Neue Menschen*," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 64 1 (2007): 297.

²⁹³ Wackwitz 48.

grandfather's memoirs, Wackwitz characterizes his grandfather's persistent use of racist language as a "völkisches Tourette-Syndrom," comparing him with an "Opfer des Tourette-Syndroms," whose obscene utterances come "unvermittelt und wie nicht sie selber."²⁹⁴ Here, Andreas Wackwitz appears as an individual who lets himself be carried along by the crowd, someone through whom other voices and influences speak. Rather than taking his grandfather to task for his racist language, the author-narrator finds it difficult, "derlei ernst zu nehmen."²⁹⁵ For him, Andreas Wackwitz's racist nationalism is a sign of personal weakness, but the ideas themselves seem to come from somewhere else. The idea of Andreas Wackwitz as suffering from a kind of nationalistic Tourette's Syndrome, speaking in a voice that is not his own, is reminiscent of another classical uncanny figure – that of the automaton, a lifelike machine animated by a hidden controller. In Wackwitz's text, however, the concept has an apologetic function: through it, the author-narrator explains his grandfather's support for racist and nationalist positions as reflective of a pathological "Zwang" that does not need to be taken seriously.²⁹⁶

While Wackwitz makes light of some of his grandfather's unsavory political attitudes, he finds something mysterious at work in other aspects of his grandfather's biography. This is especially the case with certain geographical coincidences he identifies between his grandfather's life and the course of twentieth-century German history. In addition to living in Friedrich Schleiermacher's former residence in a village near Auschwitz, Andreas Wackwitz was a soldier in the First World War, a missionary pastor in the former German colony of Namibia in

²⁹⁴ Wackwitz 176.

²⁹⁵ Wackwitz 176.

²⁹⁶ Wackwitz 48.

the 1930s (ruled by South Africa at the time), and, from 1939 on, a pastor in Luckenwalde, Brandenburg, the childhood home of Rudi Dutschke. He saw Hitler from afar on two occasions. For the author-narrator, his grandfather's presence at these locations represent "ein wirklich etwas beunruhigender Zug" in the latter's life, and Wackwitz is disturbed not by what his grandfather may have been involved in, but rather the apparent meaninglessness of these geographical coincidences.²⁹⁷ He attributes to his grandfather "die seltsame Begabung [...], an verschiedenen Orten des letzten Jahrhunderts und während verschiedener historisch bedeutsamer Augenblicke seiner Zeit im Hintergrund irgendwie aufzutauchen und anwesend zu sein – ohne dass er sich in diese Momente und Orte wirklich verwickelt..."²⁹⁸ In Wackwitz's characterization of his grandfather's Zelig-like ability to appear in significant historical locations as a strange "talent," we can see that the author-narrator finds this mystery thrilling, in contrast to what he see as the "unfreiwillig komischer völkischer Unsinn" of his grandfather's political ideas.²⁹⁹

Reflecting on this perplexing trait in his grandfather's biography, Wackwitz turns to the language of the supernatural to characterize the geographical coincidences he finds. For example, he asserts that "auf diese Weise habe ich inzwischen auf eine **nicht ganz geheure** Weise ein familiäres Verhältnis zu einigen zentralen Ereignissen des letzten Jahrhunderts gewonnen."³⁰⁰ Here, the narrator explicitly claims a genealogically based connection to important moments in German history via his grandfather, but points to an uneasy feeling, as if there is something

²⁹⁷ Wackwitz 47.

²⁹⁸ Wackwitz 47.

²⁹⁹ Wackwitz 177.

³⁰⁰ Wackwitz 177, emphasis added.

troubling about this connection. In a related passage, the nature of this troubling factor becomes clearer: these coincidences “rücken mir meinen Großvater inzwischen in das geisterhaft-bedeutungsvolle Licht, das im wirklichen Leben nicht herrschen sollte...”³⁰¹ Similarly, reflecting on the fact that his grandfather and Rudi Dutschke both lived in Luckenwalde, the narrator muses that “das unterirdische Zusammentreffen meines Großvaters mit dem größten Charismatiker meiner Generation jedoch kommt vielleicht nicht nur mir ... gespenstisch vor.”³⁰² In these examples, the author-narrator uses the language of the supernatural to mark surprising coincidences that, in the closed symbolic system of art or literature, would have a special meaning; because they appear in “real life,” however, these coincidences strike the author-narrator as signifiers without referents. The category of “gespenstisch” or “geisterhaft” thus seems to mark points in the grandfather’s biography that the author-narrator would like to view as significant – they lend his family history an air of excitement – but whose meaning is indeterminable within the realm of conventional reality. Once again, Wackwitz uses language drawn from uncanny or ghost stories, but in a way that divests them of their usual frightening quality.

A similar problem with determination of meaning is posed for the author-narrator by a classically uncanny story his grandfather recorded in his memoirs – Andreas Wackwitz’s so-called “Schlangengeschichte.” In this story, frequently re-told by the author’s grandfather, Andreas Wackwitz and friend kill a cobra while on a tour in Namibia and place the dead snake on the seat of their car in order to frighten their Herero guide. Although Andreas Wackwitz had bored a hole through the snake’s head with his walking stick, the snake awakens in the car;

³⁰¹ Wackwitz 49.

³⁰² Wackwitz 50.

apparently it was not dead after all. The snake escapes, disappearing first underneath the car, and then (they believe) into a hole in the ground. They spend the night at the home of some friends twenty miles from where the incident took place, and continue on their trip the next morning. Shortly thereafter, they meet their Herero guide again, and he tells them that, during the night, the cobra had reappeared, frightening the lady of the house. This time the snake is killed by a son of the family, and the hole in its head confirms for all that it is indeed the one Andreas Wackwitz and his friend had lost track of earlier in the day. Writing in his memoirs years later, the elder Wackwitz is still astonished by his own story, but insists upon its authenticity: *“Die ganze Geschichte klingt so unglaublich wie unheimlich, aber ich versichere nochmals, sie ist Wort für Wort wahr und genau so passiert wie hier aufgezeichnet!”*³⁰³

Unlike Wackwitz’s other references to ghosts and the supernatural, this story has many markers of a traditional uncanny tale. It is introduced with a reflection on strange occurrences which occasionally come to pass in real life, events which “etwas zu bedeuten [...] habe[n],” but which seem to be part of “ein geschlossenes, wenn auch vielleicht unerklärliches oder gespenstisches Begebenheitssystem.”³⁰⁴ We also find here the narrator’s assurance that his grandfather is himself a reliable narrator – “er war das Gegenteil eines Hysterikers”³⁰⁵ – which is a strategy often employed by writers of uncanny literature to locate their eerie stories in the real world, rather than in the fantastical setting of, for example, a fairy tale. Lastly, much like E.T.A. Hoffmann’s story *Der Sandmann*, Wackwitz’ “Schlangengeschichte” is told by alternating narrators: the grandson introduces the story, the grandfather tells the story in his memoirs, the

³⁰³ Wackwitz 217.

³⁰⁴ Wackwitz 212.

³⁰⁵ Wackwitz 213.

grandson offers a variety of attempts to interpret or understand the story, and refers again to his grandfather's memoirs. Like the assurance of narrator reliability, this alternation between narrators serves to underscore the "reality" of this puzzling series of events, indicating that several individuals attest to its veracity.

Wackwitz presents his grandfather's "Schlangengeschichte" as an uncanny tale, and his narrator struggles to determine what it means. A long excerpt from Andreas Wackwitz's memoirs is followed by the author-narrators' attempts to interpret the story, although he begins with the declaration that "so bestimmt ich das Gefühl habe, dass diese Geschichte nicht nur etwas genau Umgrenztes, sondern auch etwas sehr Wichtiges bedeutet, ist es mir nicht gelungen, diese Bedeutung zu fassen..."³⁰⁶ Despite this claim of incomprehension, Wackwitz's narrator outlines several insightful analyses of the episode, reflecting the author's experience as a literary scholar. He provides a realistic, historical reading of the event, suggesting that their young Herero guide had fabricated the story of the snake's return, as revenge for the older German men's attempt to frighten him. This interpretation fits with the historical background, underlining the postcolonial context: the events took place a few decades after the German colonial presence in Namibia violently put down an uprising of the native Herero people. Wackwitz's narrator sees even more in the story, however, offering a psychoanalytic interpretation as well. He recalls that the snake is, for Freud, the most important symbol for the male genitalia, and suggests that this African cobra represents a threat to Andreas Wackwitz' masculinity.³⁰⁷ He finds further confirmation of this reading in a later passage in his grandfather's memoirs, in which Andreas Wackwitz is admired by a group of women for bravely killing a snake with his pocketknife.

³⁰⁶ Wackwitz 217.

³⁰⁷ Wackwitz 219.

In a third interpretation, the narrator considers that the snake is also the most important Christian symbol of evil, and the narrator claims to know “unzweifelhaft” that evil in fact awaited his grandfather not in Africa but back home in Nazi Germany, an evil “dessen unverstellter Realität und Konsequenz [Andreas Wackwitz] sein Leben lang immer wieder um Haaresbreite entgangen ist.”³⁰⁸ Although all of the readings Wackwitz provides are valid and shed light on the circumstances and significance of the story, his narrator remains unsatisfied with these interpretations, insisting “dass [er] mit der Schlangengeschichte [...] in keiner Weise zu Rande gekommen [ist].”³⁰⁹ The author-narrator moves associatively through three readings of the story, ending the chapter by pointing to the family’s journey out of Africa, but without offering any final statement on the relationship between his interpretations or on the overall significance of the snake story. After having introduced the story as a model for the whole course of his grandfather’s life, one that involves “das Zusammenspiel zwischen einer dämonischen Bedrohung und einer göttlichen Fügung,” Wackwitz in effect leaves his reader hanging, as the significance of the “Schlangengeschichte” remains elusive for his autobiographical alter ego.³¹⁰

That pattern that has emerged in our examination of *Ein unsichtbares Land* thus far is the use of uncanny stories and ghostly motifs as a way of marking events or correspondences that the author-narrator cannot explain or understand, but which seem significant to him. At the same time, his narrator seems more comfortable marking such points in his grandfather’s memoirs as unknowable than as meaningless historical accidents (as in the case of the geography) or as open to interpretation by analytical methods available to one trained in literary studies. What is often

³⁰⁸ Wackwitz 222.

³⁰⁹ Wackwitz 217.

³¹⁰ Wackwitz 213.

missing in these episodes is an insight that Wackwitz's narrator himself has at other points in the text – the fact that the significance of past events is generated by the needs and circumstances of the individual remembering in the present. The author-narrator's reticence about examining his own interest in his grandfather's stories often makes for an unsatisfactory reading experience, in which the suggestion of significance seems to be the most important element of the protagonist's engagement with the past.

Although the uncanny often marks points of enigmatic or indeterminate meaning in Wackwitz's family past, this is not always the case. In the final episode I will consider here, Wackwitz uses the concept of the uncanny as a hermeneutic tool for understanding both his grandfather's position in the Nazi past and his own participation in Communist groups. In the chapter of Wackwitz's text devoted to the Nazi era, titled "Mord," the narrator characterizes life during the Nazi period as uncanny, because, as he puts it, the country was at the time filled with the living dead: "unheimlich für Kinder und Erwachsene wird an der Herrschaft der Nazis vor allem gewesen sein, dass es damals auch in einer idyllischen Allerweltskleinstadt wie Luckenwalde plötzlich Menschen gab, die bei lebendigem Leib so etwas wie Tote geworden waren." Even the Jews who were still present were, by virtue of being marked by the yellow star, "schon seit 1938 lebende Tote," according to the narrator.³¹¹ Explaining the uncanny quality of these figures as rooted in their simultaneous presence and absence (they are visible, but marked for death), the author-narrator draws a problematic parallel between victims of Nazi persecution and the young Germans kept away from their homes by the war: he describes his own father (in a Canadian POW camp for the duration of the war) as the most important "halb Tote oder nur noch

³¹¹ Wackwitz 229.

virtuell Lebendige” in the Wackwitz family.³¹² At the end of this paragraph, the narrator extends this uncanny status to all who suffered as a result of the war, regardless of their role in it and which side they represented: “und so erschienen und verschwanden der den ganzen Krieg über siebzehn Jahre alt bleibende kriegsgefangene Sohn des Generalsuperintendenten Wackwitz, die Väter auf Fronturlaub, die Fremdarbeiter, die Dienstmädchen aus Minsk, Leningrad oder Lublin, die Juden, die Ausgesonderten damals so spurlos, gedankenschnell und unerklärlich, wie man es den Geistern nachsagt.”³¹³ In these passages, the author-narrator appears to be seeking a common ground for a variety of fundamentally different experiences during the Nazi era; he finds it in the figure of an uncanny presence, but the overall effect – suggesting equivalencies in victim and perpetrator experiences – is troubling.

To further explain the uncanny quality he sees in the Nazi past, Wackwitz’s narrator cites Freud’s argument that an uncanny feeling can result when “primitive” beliefs held by early humans seem to re-emerge, because “nun etwas in unserem Leben ereignet, was diesen alten Überzeugungen eine Bestätigung zuzuführen scheint, haben wir das Gefühl des Unheimlichen, zu dem man das Urteil ergänzen kann: also es ist doch wahr, daß man einen anderen durch den bloßen Wunsch töten kann, daß die Toten weiterleben und an der Stätte ihrer frühen Tätigkeit sichtbar werden...”³¹⁴ Wackwitz’s narrator sees this phenomenon at work in the Nazi era, arguing that the Germans of that time lived in a world where unuttered wishes were fulfilled as if by magic. This included not only their “heroischen und idyllischen Träume” of a strong Germany, but also “die geheimen und bösen Teufelswünsche, die man manchmal vor dem

³¹² Wackwitz 230.

³¹³ Wackwitz 231. The title “Generalsuperintendent” refers to Andreas Wackwitz’s position within the Protestant church in Brandenburg.

³¹⁴ Quoted in Wackwitz 241.

Einschlafen, unter der Dusche oder beim Staubsaugen hat: dass der kranke Nachbar endlich abkratzen soll und der reiche Jude von nebenan auch, damit wir seine Wohnung kriegen. Gespenster bevölkerten die Stadt. Und die Obrigkeit des tief unheimlichen und bedrückenden Landes befahl einem zu tun und zu beschweigen, was man kaum je zu denken oder zu wünschen gewagt hatte.”³¹⁵ Wackwitz sees this principle manifested in a kind of double consciousness among the Nazi perpetrators: “die Mörder selbst” knew what they were doing “in Wirklichkeit,” but they were also operating in an uncanny world of ghosts and granted wishes, giving their experiences a sense of unreality.³¹⁶

Scholars have tended to read Wackwitz’s use of uncanny motifs less critically, often accepting the discussion of ghosts and uncanny superstitions at face value, or as simply an apt metaphor for life in post-war Germany. In Aleida Assmann’s discussion of Wackwitz’s novel in her study *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, for example, it is often unclear whether she is describing the world of Wackwitz’s autobiographical novel or the postwar Germany family itself: “das wichtigste Milieu, in dem sich der historische Spuk entfalten konnte, ist das familiäre Schweigen”; and “die Menschen, die man damals nicht gesehen hat oder hat sehen wollen, die deportierten Juden, die Zwangsarbeiter, die KZ-Häftlinge in ihren gestreiften Anzügen, kehren als Geister in den Familienroman zurück.”³¹⁷ As we see in these passages, in her discussion of Wackwitz, Assmann gives the impression that the ghosts in Wackwitz’s family novel actually represent the victims of Nazi persecutions. As I have argued, the Wackwitz family ghosts may share a geographical origin with the ghosts of Auschwitz, but that is all. Further, it is problematic

³¹⁵ Wackwitz 242.

³¹⁶ Wackwitz 242.

³¹⁷ Assmann 87.

to suggest that the familial failure to speak about the proximity of their Anhalt home to the concentration camps at Auschwitz provides space for a historical phantom in some meaningful way. The Wackwitz family left Anhalt well before the concentration camps were built: their failure to speak of the geographical proximity does not represent the concealment of a dark secret. This silence is disturbing to Wackwitz's narrator precisely because it does *not* conceal a deeper significance.

Friederike Eigler, who discusses Wackwitz's use of the uncanny in a chapter on *Ein unsichtbares Land* in her *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromane seit der Wende*, also reads this aspect of the text less critically. Eigler provides a detailed overview of the uncanny motifs in Wackwitz's text, but frequently remains in a descriptive rather than an analytical mode, which leads to some misreadings of the author's use of uncanny language. For example, Eigler rightly characterizes Wackwitz's recognition of himself in his grandfather's autobiographical self-portrait, as suggestive of a Doppelgänger relationship, but does not examine the significance of the motif further. She writes, "wenn er dieses Wiedersehen zugleich als Begegnung mit sich selbst darstellt, dann evoziert er hier das klassische Doppelgängermotiv - Inbegriff des 'Unheimlichen'."³¹⁸ Because she refrains from further consideration of this motif – she does not ask, for instance, what effect is created when the author represents trans-generational inheritance as uncanny rather than natural – Eigler does not address the fact that, if this is a use of the uncanny, it is an unconventional one. The similarities Wackwitz identifies between himself and his grandfather are not troubling to him (as the suggestion of similar parallels between Uwe Timm and his brother in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*), but rather a welcome discovery. When the author-narrator sees in himself, for example, certain

³¹⁸ Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte*, 211.

“Erbanlagen... : eine große Nase, eine Vorliebe für Havanna-Zigarren, eine Neigung zu frühem Grauerwerden und ein Weltkrieg,” that he shares with his grandfather, it is not a disturbing experience, but rather “ein rührendes Wiedersehen.”³¹⁹

While Eigler overlooks contradictory elements in the suggestion that Wackwitz’s autobiographical alter ego is a Doppelgänger of his grandfather, at other points her identification of uncanny motifs leads her to overstate their significance. For example, regarding the coincidences that Wackwitz identifies between his family history and national German history, Eigler asserts that the suggestion of an uncanny relationship between these histories reveals a deeper meaning: “die unheimliche Konvergenz von privater und kollektiver Geschichte verweist auf eine Geschichte von Verdrängungen, Verschiebungen und Aussparungen.”³²⁰ As I have shown, Wackwitz does not use the uncanny to point to a familial history of repression – though the family lived near Auschwitz, it was not at that time a concentration camp, nor did the family have any involvement in Nazi crimes –, but rather searches these coincidences for a significance that is not there. What such readings miss, I believe, is Wackwitz’s tendency to use the uncanny as a way of marking the intersection of personal and political in his family history that is often achieved at the expense of important differentiations between the experiences of supporters and victims of National Socialism.

VI. Conclusion: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators

³¹⁹ Wackwitz 102. The idea that both the narrator and his grandfather experienced a world war is put forth later, when the narrator asserts that World War I never ended, and that not only Andreas Wackwitz but his son and grandson both fought in it as well. Wackwitz 133.

³²⁰ Eigler 210.

In Aleida Assmann's *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, a study of memory in contemporary German culture, she observes: "Es ist die Aufgabe der zweiten und dritten Generation, diese streng getrennten Überlieferungen des subjektiven Familiengedächtnisses und des heutigen objektiven historischen Wissens zusammenzuführen. Der Familienroman ist die Gattung, in dem diese Erinnerungsarbeit auf immer wieder neue Weise vollzogen wird."³²¹ The imperative tone of this statement aside, Assmann offers here an apt description of the task assumed by Timm and Wackwitz. In their novels, memory work is performed in new ways, as they stage the search for the intersections between their family's past and the recent German past, but it yields very different results. The autobiographical family novels the two produce are unconventional in comparison with both traditional autobiographies and with the realist family novels of the nineteenth century. Timm's fragmented style and rhetorically questioning narrator reiterate that, although he is willing to acknowledge some similarity or continuity between his father, brother and himself, he is not ready to suggest a smooth genealogical progression. Wackwitz's text, composed of loosely interconnected reflective or analytical essays, offers a self-styled postmodern take on a more traditional family novel, constructing a more conservative genealogy for himself. This contrast between the two is especially evident in their engagement with the masculine ideals represented by their male family members: Timm locates an alternative masculinity for himself between the femininity represented by his mother and the extreme soldier ideal of his father, while Wackwitz strips his grandfather's Wilhelmine conception of masculine identity of its negative connotations.

Compared with the more rigid categories that cast a shadow over *Väterliteratur* authors' engagement of their father's biographies, writers like Timm and Wackwitz operate with much

³²¹ Assmann 87.

more fluid identity positions with regard to the Nazi era. The loosening of categories allows Timm to portray his brother and father as simultaneously humans who suffer and convinced supporters of Nazi ideology. For Wackwitz, it means that his grandfather can have had sympathies with the Nazis and still be an ancestor with whom one is willing to identify. In an essay on the '68 generation's alleged taboo on narratives of German victimhood, Helmut Schmitz discusses the danger that the recent tolerance for victimhood discourse may open the door to morally irresponsible inclinations to de-historicize, relativize, or adopt a position of non-critical empathy.³²² In their use of the rhetoric of the uncanny, Timm and Wackwitz navigate the complex terrain between critical and non-critical positions, compassionate and unfeeling attitudes that Schmitz outlines. In *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Timm is not mystifying the picture when he represents his brother as a phantom, but rather insisting upon the lasting presence of Nazi-era attitudes and values, organized around the memory of his brother. In his novel, we almost always remain safely in the realm of metaphor (and the exceptions to this prove the rule – at no point are we to believe that Timm's narrator believes he is being haunted). In *Ein unsichtbares Land*, on the other hand, Wackwitz asserts that the correlations between his grandfather and different forms of German nationalism, as well as between his grandfather and himself, are indeed mystifying, and this inexplicable quality is part of his narrator's real experience. These two sets of correlations function differently – the coincidences between Andreas Wackwitz's biography and German history become less significant when represented as uncanny, while the parallels between grandfather and grandson are, for the narrator, suggestive of some deeper meaning to his life. For Timm, genealogy remains an uneasy constellation of individuals; for Wackwitz, it represents a cohesive family identity.

³²² Schmitz, "Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy," 199.

Chapter 3:

“Die Geschichte wird nicht umgeschrieben.”³²³ Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* and

Barbara Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*

I. Introduction

The appearance of the *Generationenromane* trend in the late 1990s follows the increased official confrontation of the Nazi past in Germany, which began in the mid-1980s and included the construction of memorials, visits and speeches by government representatives acknowledging the crimes of the Nazi era, as well as a growing interest in cultural representations of the experiences of the Nazis’ victims. Furthermore, the demise of the East German state and the reunification of Germany both marked an end to one post-war paradigm, inviting new reflection on that period, while also expanding the conversation about the Nazi past to address the dominant GDR narrative about Nazism. In this context of “German memory contests” (Fuchs and Cosgrove) concerning collective memory, the *Generationenroman* trend represents a (re)turn inwards, to consider once again the position of the Nazi era within the family history and in family memory. At the same time, although the majority of the *Generationenromane* situate the Nazi era as their central reference point in German history, the trend, like its *Väterliteratur* predecessor, is characterized by the variety of narratives it incorporates. For the *Generationenromane*, this means that the Nazi era can appear alongside, and in some cases even subordinate to, other collective experiences such as participation in the West German student movement in the 1960s and 1970s or life in Communist East Germany. While the West German Leftist movements were important for Stephan Wackwitz’s and Uwe Timm’s work, for the two

³²³ Monika Maron, *Pawels Briefe: Eine Familiengeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1999) 79.

texts I will examine in this chapter – Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* (1999) and Barbara Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (2004) – the East German and Jewish experiences are paramount.

The *Generationenromane* invite comparison with the *Väterliteratur* texts of around 1980 by virtue of their similarities in both form and content. Like the *Väterliteratur*, the more recent texts follow contemporary protagonists exploring their own family connections to the recent German past, bringing their memories together with narratives told in the family, family photos, journals and letters written by family members, as well as official documents and information derived from historical research or media sources. Both trends place multiple modes of knowing about the past in dialogue, use hybrid prose styles, and often have a non-linear, vignette structure. Both are also predominantly autobiographical, though there is a larger minority of more fictional *Generationenromane*.³²⁴ In contrast with the works of *Väterliteratur*, however, the *Generationenromane* cast a wider net, looking beyond the Nazi era to confront and represent a wider range of experiences than the West German perspective around 1980. Although *Väterliteratur* was written by both men and women, their objects of study were exclusively fathers, while some *Generationenromane* consider mothers and grandmothers, in addition to fathers and grandfathers. Similarly, the recent works include non-Christian German perspectives, including individuals of Jewish and Turkish heritage.

In this chapter, I examine two works that exemplify both the main characteristics of the *Generationenromane* and also the variety of positions from which authors in the genre undertake an engagement with family history. Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* and Barbara Honigmann’s

³²⁴ For example, Kathrin Schmidt’s *Die Gunnar-Lennefsen-Expedition* (1998), Ulla Hahn’s *Unschärfe Bilder* (2003), Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten* (2003), Arno Geiger’s *Es geht uns gut* (2005), and Rafael Seligmann’s *Die Kohle-Saga* (2006).

Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben show the familial conflict typical of both *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*, as well as the changed attitude towards family history and conflict which marks the later trend. While the authors of *Väterliteratur* texts struggle with a perceived imperative to renounce the father on the basis of his ostensible ideological complicity with Nazism, the political-personal conflicts at the heart of the *Generationenromane* are more individual. Still, as we see in Maron's and Honigmann's texts, the core issue of these conflicts is the intersection of family roles and political convictions. In these two particular texts it is the authors' mothers who are confronted, and their support of the Communist GDR government which is problematic.

Indicative of the diversity of narratives within the *Generationenromane* trend, these two texts approach both the legacy of the Nazi era and the totalitarianism of the GDR with an eye toward Jewish experiences: Maron's grandfather Pawel was born Jewish and his conversion to the Baptist faith in the 1920s did not spare him from Nazi persecution, while both of Honigmann's parents were Jewish Communists who spent the war years predominantly in England. As I will show in the first section, the genealogical framework within which Maron and Honigmann situate themselves in their texts is constructed around each author's conception of her Jewish heritage. In the second section, my analysis of these works will also demonstrate the intentionality and resolution with which these authors approach the instability of family memories and our imperfect ways of knowing about the past, as they assert their own right to investigate and relate their stories as they see fit, consciously constructing their usable past out of the stuff of family memory they have inherited. In the final section, I examine how each author confronts the challenges of examining private family memories in the public context of a literary text, which is complicated in both texts by the presence of a public figure in the family: Maron's

stepfather Karl Maron Interior Minister in the GDR from 1955 to 1963, and Honigmann's mother's husband Kim Philby, a British Intelligence officer famously revealed to have been a Soviet spy in 1963.

A GDR Generation: Monika Maron and Barbara Honigmann

In contrast to the other texts I have chosen to represent *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* in this dissertation, whose authors and subjects do not fit neatly into generational categories, in Maron's and Honigmann's cases, the author-narrators and their mothers represent recognizable generational perspectives. According to both their age and their political identifications, the mothers Hella Maron (b. 1915) and Litzy Honigmann (b. 1910) belong to the founding generation of the GDR, represented by the early Communist leaders.³²⁵ In an essay on generations in the GDR, historian Mary Fulbrook characterizes the founder generation as marked by the experience of persecution by the Nazis followed by the ascension to power in the new East German Communist state. The prototypical model for this generation is that of the Communist concentration camp inmate, but it also includes exiled Communists. Each

³²⁵ Sociologists and historians of generational patterns and/or of East Germany have noted that the concept of generational identity had a much stronger resonance in the BRD than in the GDR. This is generally attributed to the breadth of the student activist movement that began in West Germany in the mid-1960s and expanded swiftly after 1968, and which specifically grouped individuals into generational cohorts – the student generation confronted the Nazi generation. This classical division of the young generation from the old, hinging on a major historical paradigm shift, did not resonate with the GDR postwar meta-narrative. The West German conflict was based upon accusations of continuity between the Nazi era and the Adenauer government, but the GDR foundation story, in which the persecuted resisters against the fascist Nazi state at last came to power, did not open it up to accusations in the same way. As Mary Fulbrook argues, the restrictive social and cultural climate of the GDR did not lend itself to as clear generational groupings as emerged in the BRD, but a couple of significant generations can still be distinguished. Mary Fulbrook, "Generationen und Kohorten in der DDR," *Die DDR aus generationengeschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. Annegret Schüle, Thomas Ahbe, and Rainer Gries (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag GmbH, 2006) 116.

GDR citizen was invited to identify with this model, and Hella Maron and Litzy Honigmann, both Communists before the Nazi era and both of whom chose to live in East Berlin, would particularly have recognized themselves in this generational narrative. The birth years of Hella's and Litzy's daughters, 1941 (Monika Maron) and 1949 (Barbara Honigmann), place them into the "Aufbau" generation in Fulbrook's system. This group grew up with GDR Communist doctrine and were the first generation whose young adulthood contributed to the establishment and fortification of the GDR.

The generational identities of these women are mediated by both their Jewish heritage and their membership in the GDR political elite. Considered Jews under the terms of the Nürnberg laws, both mothers were the objects of Nazi persecution: Hella managed to survive in Berlin, "passing" as non-Jewish with the help of family friends, while her Jewish father, a Baptist convert, was deported and murdered; Litzy survived in exile in London and Paris, and was able to bring her parents with her to England. In the GDR, their circumstances were less similar with respect to Judaism: Hella, who was raised Baptist and became a Communist as a young adult, had never identified as Jewish as was not part of any Jewish community in the GDR. Litzy, on the other hand, was part of a Jewish-Communist social network throughout her thirty years in East Berlin. In terms of Hella's and Litzy's social status within the Communist state, however, the two are once again in a similar position, both enjoying the privileges of the well-connected. Hella lived comfortably as the wife of Karl Maron, chief of police and Interior Minister from 1955 to 1963, while Litzy's longstanding connections to the KGB, for whom she worked in England and France beginning in the 1930s, aligned her with the Russian powers whose influence was felt throughout the European Communist countries during the Cold War.

While Hella and Litzzy experienced the establishment of the GDR as a realization of their pre-war Communist objectives, their daughters, part of the first group of GDR citizens to experience “real existing socialism” from childhood on, both developed critical attitudes towards the East German state. Despite the fact that Monika Maron and Barbara Honigmann enjoyed comfortable circumstances growing up in the GDR, both grew increasingly dissatisfied with what they saw as contradictions between Communist doctrine and actual GDR practices. In both cases, this dissatisfaction led to emigration: Maron left for Hamburg in 1988, while Honigmann moved to Strasbourg in 1984. Furthermore, both authors criticize their parents in their texts for demonstrating elitist attitudes in contradiction with the working-class values they ostensibly championed: Maron’s narrator wonders drily about the state of her mother’s purported class instinct when Hella “in den Augen der Arbeiter des Arbeiter- und Bauernstaates zu einer Bonzenfrau geworden war und ich zu einem Bonzenkind,” while Honigmann repeatedly refers to her mother as a member of the “antifaschistischer Adel.”³²⁶

Both Maron and Honigmann are known for writing prose works focusing on recent German history, and the work of each is often autobiographical. The experiences of Maron’s grandparents, Pawel and Josefa Iglarz, who converted to the Baptist faith in Poland and emigrated to Germany in the early twentieth century, were incorporated into some of her early novels, and issues surrounding the lingering remnants of the Nazi era in West Germany was the subject of her 1991 novel *Stille Zeile Sechs*. She is an occasional contributor of personal essays and both cultural and political commentary in the German feuillets, writing articles with such titles as “Ich war ein antifaschistisches Kind.” In 1995, Maron was also the subject of a small scandal, when her Stasi file was discovered by *Der Spiegel*, who revealed that Maron had been

³²⁶ Maron 128-9; Barbara Honigmann, *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (München: Hanser, 2004) 7.

an “*informelle Mitarbeiterin*,” though her involvement with the Stasi was brief and her reports largely critical of the GDR. (In a section of *Pawels Briefe*, Maron responds to these accusations).

In *Pawels Briefe*, Maron investigates and seeks to reconstruct her grandfather Pawel’s life, and this project is undertaken together with her mother Hella, with whose memories and opinions Maron’s autobiographical narrator is in constant dialogue. Maron’s interest in her grandfather’s life is sparked, we learn, by her and her mother’s discovery of a box of Pawel’s letters from the Polish-German border after he was deported by the Nazis together with other Polish nationals of Jewish descent (despite his conversion to Christianity decades earlier). Approximately the first two-thirds of *Pawels Briefe* are devoted to retracing Pawel’s and his wife Josefa’s lives, as the narrator reads letters, examines photographs, consults historical sources and even travels to her grandparents’ hometown in Poland. Pawel’s death (probably in 1943, either outside of the deportee camp or subsequently in a concentration camp) closes this line of narrative, but the text continues, now focused primarily on Maron’s own childhood in the nascent GDR, her relationship to Communism, and, especially, her mother Hella’s abiding commitment to Communism, which persists even after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

To an even greater degree than Maron, Barbara Honigmann has focused her literary production on her own life, with narratives of her young adulthood and her progression towards a more orthodox practice of her Jewish faith appearing in her novels and short stories. She has also written about her father – in *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* (1991), for example, Honigmann’s autobiographical narrator examines her father’s role in her life shortly after he has died. Largely absent from these other autobiographical explorations is her mother, who makes only marginal appearances in Honigmann’s writing before *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*. Although in her texts Honigmann portrays her relationship to her parents as marked by “Liebe, Trennung, und

Verrat,³²⁷ she follows in their footsteps by choosing to live abroad – her parents’ lives took them from Germany, Austria, and England back to East Berlin, and Honigmann herself left the GDR before the *Wende* in 1989. After tiring of her job as a dramaturge in East Berlin, Honigmann moved to Paris in 1984, attending art school there before eventually settling in Strasbourg, where she joined the observant Jewish community. In her autobiographical novel *Roman von einem Kinde*, Honigmann describes her emigration as a “dreifache Todessprung ohne Netz: vom Osten in den Westen, von Deutschland nach Frankreich, und aus der Assimilation mitten in das Thora-Judentum herein.”³²⁸

While Maron’s text follows an investigative, imaginative narrator, Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* creates a portrait of the author’s mother Litzzy consisting primarily of the author-narrator’s own memories. The text is divided into sections that capture different aspects or periods of her mother’s life, including chronological “chapters” (Litzzy’s own term for distinct periods of her life), relationships and facets of her personality. The “chapter” which gives Honigmann’s text its title is the period of her mother’s brief marriage to the famous English spy Kim Philby in the 1930s. Philby, a member of the “Cambridge Five” spy ring, became a high-ranking member of the British intelligence, providing sensitive information to the KGB until he was exposed in 1963. Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* begins with her own confusion when Western reporters begin knocking on the door asking for “Mrs. Philby” – the daughter had no knowledge of her mother’s past marriage at the time – and follows through to her adult conversations with her mother about the latter’s relationship with Philby. As the author-narrator traces her mother’s biography, we see Litzzy becoming increasingly less political,

³²⁷ Volker Breidecker, “Nah an der Wahrheit lügen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* December 18, 2004.

³²⁸ Barbara Honigmann, *Roman von einem Kinde*. (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001) 111.

her social life less populated with strict Communists. Unlike Maron, Honigmann generally narrates from her adult perspective, after her mother had died, but rarely adopts the reflective, analytical tone of the investigating, researching narrator typical of *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*. Instead, Honigmann focuses her reflections on her own experiences and relationship with her mother, guided by personal interests even as she considers the public and political context of her family history

II. Genealogical Interventions

In *Pawels Briefe* and *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, the author-narrators situate themselves in a genealogical chain that underscores their Jewish heritage. In order to do so, each must repair a break with her family's past resulting from a rupture in communicative memory for which the mother is made responsible. Although both of these families experienced major disruptions as a result of historical events – Monika Maron lost her grandparents to Nazi persecutions, and Honigmann's mother Litzy fled her native Austria as the *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany loomed – the major obstacle to the construction of a meaningful connection to family history that these authors confront in their texts is the problem of communicated memory. In *Pawels Briefe*, it is the mother's forgetting – primarily her forgetting of the existence of Pawel's letters – that prevents the author-narrator from knowing about the grandfather she never knew. In *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, the challenge to familial knowledge is not only the mother's forgetting of important dates and facts, but also, especially, her unwillingness to speak about certain aspects of her own and her family's past. While both authors present family narratives in which Jewish identity plays a central role, the significance of their Jewish heritage is different for each author: Nazi persecutions struck both families, but this background of Jewish suffering

plays a defining role for Maron's genealogy while Honigmann seeks to move away from a discourse of victimhood and toward a traditional, religious conception of Judaism.

The Grandfather as “Wunschvater” in Pawels Briefe

For Maron, a new connection with her grandfather's memory is formed as she becomes acquainted with both him and her grandmother Josefa through Pawel's letters. The author-narrator extrapolates from the letters and her mother's memories of childhood, imagining what Pawel was like and how they could have interacted. Although her engagement with her family history is sparked by the discovery of his letters, Maron describes an attachment to Pawel beginning in her childhood. When she was young, during what she calls her “kindlichen Krisenzeiten” she describes longing to be different from the family she knew, and “weil die Fotografie meiner Großmutter, die schmal gerahmt in meinem Zimmer hing, sie allzu deutlich als die Mutter meiner Mutter auswies, fiel meine Wahl als einzigen Ahnen, von dem abzustammen ich bereit war, auf meinen Großvater.”³²⁹ Although the selection of Pawel as a desirable ancestor is presented in this passage as a convenient choice, based on physical appearance, Maron also suggests specific qualities shared by her and her grandfather. The two of them, she insists, “waren eben ein bißchen anders, ein bißchen unpraktisch, dafür verträumt und zu spontanen Einfällen neigend, nervös, ein bißchen verrückt.”³³⁰ This self-characterization is corroborated by her narrative style, a stream-of-consciousness mode which allows disparate times and places to flow together associatively in the common space of the narrator's mind.

³²⁹ Maron 9.

³³⁰ Maron 63.

As is evident in the language with which Maron describes her identification with her grandfather, Pawel functions as what Freud calls a “Wunschvater” for her, a more desirable parent or ancestor than the ones she knows.³³¹ When discussing this aspect of her childhood, Maron does not specify what led her to seek out another family member with whom to align herself, and why she needed an alternative to identification with her mother. Later in her text, however, as she examines Pawel’s letters, this family dynamic takes a more distinct shape. Now, the author-narrator presents herself as the only family member who honors Pawel’s life and responds to his desire for family togetherness and to be remembered. These wishes are expressed in entreaties to his children in letters from the Polish ghetto in which he was held by the Nazis after being expelled from Germany. In a letter postmarked July 1942, Pawel writes,

Meine geliebten Kinder, ihr habt es am eigenen Leibe und an unseren Eltern erlebt, was eine Trennung bedeutet. Selbst eine harmlose Trennung kann dazu führen, daß man sich im Leben nicht mehr sieht. Infolgedessen, meine Lieben, bitte ich euch, haltet zusammen, haltet fest zusammen, nützt jede Gelegenheit des Zusammenseins aus, vertragt euch in jeder Weise gut. Seid lieb zueinander, liebet euch untereinander, wie Mama euch geliebet hat und wie ich euch liebe. Laßt keinen fremden Menschen hindernd zwischen euch treten.³³²

³³¹ Sigmund Freud, “Der Familienroman der Neurotiker,” *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7: 227-31. In this essay, Freud describes “den Ersatz beider Eltern oder nur des Vaters durch großartigere Personen.” 230.

³³² Maron 149.

Pawel's entreaty for togetherness, written from the perspective of an older man forcibly separated from his family, increasingly certain that he will die without seeing them again, turns out to not be practicable for his children. In the aftermath of the war and the Shoah, however, Pawel's three surviving children – Paul, Marta, and Hella – did not stay together. In the reorganization of Germany after 1945, the political differences between the siblings became divisive, and Hella and Marta resolved to stay in East Berlin while their brother Paul moved to the West.

Maron specifically invokes the idea of intergenerational family responsibility by referring to these letters as Pawel's "Vermächtnis."³³³ Locating a kind of last will and testament in Pawel's letters, the author-narrator seeks to fulfill her grandfather's requests through writing about both his life and hers. At the same time, Pawel's *Vermächtnis* is also a bequest, and the narrator sees herself as the true, because most deserving, recipient of Pawel's legacy. This situating of the narrator as her grandfather's rightful heir circumvents her mother Hella, who does not function as an intermediary in this generational transfer. Rather, it is precisely her neglect of Pawel's memory and his letters for which Maron's own text aims to compensate.

What the narrator calls Pawel's "Vermächtnis" comprises not only in his entreaty to his children to keep together, but also another request that appears in one of his last letters to Hella, written in July 1942, shortly before the liquidation of the Belchatow ghetto. In it, he pleads her, "Zeigt niemals dem Kinde, daß es Haß, Neid und Rache giebt. Sie soll ein wertvoller Mensch werden."³³⁴ The first of these excerpts resonates with the narrator because it specifically refers to her, and because it implies a kind of security and comfort that she feels her mother in fact did not

³³³ Maron 112.

³³⁴ Maron 112.

provide her. Much of this insecure feeling remains opaque, because Maron resists writing directly about her stepfather and thus her home life as a child (a fact I discuss in detail below). Ample evidence is present, though, in her characterizations of the GDR government she grew up with, in her desire to leave the GDR, and in her sense of liberation at Karl Maron's death in 1975. Imagining a post-war Berlin in which Pawel had survived the concentration camp and walks down the street with her, "freundlich zu allen, damit mir das Schreckliche verborgen bleibt," underscores this contrast, reiterating the supportive role Pawel plays in the narrator's self-understanding.³³⁵

A subsequent reference to this letter takes the implied contrast even further, giving it political overtones. Referring to Pawel's appeal to Hella that she shelter her child from the cruelty of the world, the narrator takes the opportunity to assert that her grandfather would not have supported the GDR like her mother did, reasoning that someone who would have written such a letter from the ghetto, as he awaited his own death "muß [...] gefeilt gewesen sein gegen den Unfehlbarkeitsanspruch einer Partei, der hätte nicht gleichgültig bleiben können gegenüber den Opfern der nächsten Diktatur."³³⁶ This insistence carries with it the implication that Pawel's daughter Hella, who supported the GDR throughout its existence, did precisely this. Maron's engagement with her grandfather's "Vermächtnis" thus seems primarily to serve as an implicit critique of what she sees as her mother's neglect of Pawel's memory and her departure from the values with which she was raised.

This understanding of Pawel and his daughter Hella is challenged by the author-narrator's discovery that her grandfather had also, late in his life, become a Communist. In order to

³³⁵ Maron 112.

³³⁶ Maron 181.

reconcile this knowledge with the conception of Pawel's character and values that she has constructed, the author-narrator engages in interpretive and explanatory work, separating Communist ideology from its realization in the GDR. When she discovers that her grandfather had been a member of the Communist Party (and had his name struck from the Baptist community register), Maron insists that the East German Communist state would have been anathema to Pawel. As Maron elsewhere contrasts Hella's character with the harsh measures inflicted by the GDR government (as I show below), in this passage Pawel's personality is set against an ugly portrayal of the Communist state. Pawel is "gutmütig und sanft, nur gelegentlich [...] jähzornig," and thus the narrator cannot imagine him as "Glied einer straff organisierten Parteigruppe; als einer, der in Sozialdemokraten Sozialfaschisten erkennt; dessen Genossen sich Saalschlachten mit den Nazis liefern."³³⁷ This opposition is challenged, though, by Hella's insistence that Pawel's Communism was not incompatible with other aspects of his life, that "ihr Vater hätte zwischen seinem kommunistischen und seinem religiösen Bekenntnis keinen Widerspruch empfunden, beider Ziele seien ihm identisch gewesen."³³⁸ The narrator does not contest this, chalking her grandfather's Communism instead up to his particular idealism and an ignorance of what the Communist governments would become, concluding that Pawel "nicht seine Überzeugung gewechselt hat, sondern nur die Gemeinschaft, mit der er für sie eintreten wollte."³³⁹ In this passage, Maron insists that the East German Communist regime does not fit with her conception of her family, and therefore her grandfather's professed support for Communism must be ascribed to naïveté or a forgivable lack of foreknowledge.

³³⁷ Maron 59.

³³⁸ Maron 59.

³³⁹ Maron 60.

Although Maron allows herself some interpretive license regarding her grandfather's politics, in general she positions her exploration of her grandfather's life as an effort to restore an understanding of his life as he himself viewed it to their family history. For example, she imagines her grandfather as he was in his everyday life, based on the information she finds in his letters "fromme Lieder singend, im Kreise der Baptisten, Pawel auf der sonntäglichen Fahrradtour oder nähend oder Zither spielend."³⁴⁰ Maron imagines her grandparents as hopeful immigrants, escaping the poverty of their Polish home to bring their "Überlebensträume" to Berlin, confident that "diese Millionenstadt hielte auch für sie einen bescheidenen Platz zum Überleben."³⁴¹ In accordance with these modest hopes, they are painted as a contented working-class couple, who for nearly twenty years "saßen im Fenster, nähten Jackenfutter ein oder hefteten Säume und sprachen miteinander"; "Juscha," she imagines hearing her grandfather say, "gibst du mir bitte mal die Schere?"³⁴² The narrator admits to reflexively distrusting this idyllic portrait, but in this case her mother's memories are helpful: Hella assures her daughter that the family was in fact so harmonious.

By imagining her grandfather's life, Maron responds to what she sees as her mother's neglect of Pawel's memory and his desire to be remembered with her own autobiographical project, through which she seeks to restore an authentic conception of Pawel's life to their family memory. Although Pawel implored his children "vergeßt mich nicht," Hella failed to honor her father's plea, however, both by forgetting about his letters and by allowing her daughter to grow

³⁴⁰ Maron 59.

³⁴¹ Maron 31-2.

³⁴² Maron 32-3.

up with little knowledge of her grandfather.³⁴³ While Maron is unable to literally fulfill her grandfather's request to be remembered, because she does not have any of her own personal memories of Pawel, her imagination, fueled by her grandfather's letters and the memories they call up for her mother, together with her writing, allows her an approximation.³⁴⁴ Maron does not only restore individuality and specificity to Pawel's life story through imagined recollections of his everyday life, however, but also by examining the role of Jewish heritage in his life.

As Maron reconstructs her genealogical connection to her grandfather, her investigations bring her to examine with her family's Jewish heritage, but Jewish religion and culture play only a minor role in her text. Because her grandfather left the traditional Jewish community in which he was raised in order to join the Baptist congregation in Poland, where he met and married Josefa, a Baptist convert from Catholicism, Jewish identity was primarily a negative factor in his life. Judaism became for him a "Schicksalsgemeinschaft": he ultimately shared his fate with other Eastern European Jews, though he no longer shared their faith.³⁴⁵ Pawel's Jewish identity is thus for the most part a marker of victimhood and persecution in Maron's text, and the experience of oppression that she identifies in Pawel's biography in turn plays an important role in Maron's characterization of her own position within the GDR.

Maron's autobiographical memory project is not only cast as a corrective to her mother's forgetting, but also as an effort to restore a sense of self-determination to her grandfather's life, which, at its end, had been reduced to one facet of his identity – his Jewish roots. In the author-

³⁴³ Maron 137.

³⁴⁴ cf. Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromane seit der Wende*: "An die Stelle des abgebrochenen kommunikativen Gedächtnisses und fehlender eigener Erinnerungen tritt hier die Imagination," 158.

³⁴⁵ Maron 99.

narrator's words, her grandfather "wurde als Jude geboren, er ist als Jude gestorben, aber er hat nicht als Jude gelebt."³⁴⁶ In his letters, Pawel insists that he is not responsible for his Jewish heritage and the suffering it brings to his family, writing that, "wenn mir die Eltern zur Wahl gestellt worden wären, ich hätte mir womöglich auch andere Eltern gewählt aber ich mußte es auch so nehmen, wie es mir geboten wurde."³⁴⁷ The narrator reads in Pawel's letters an insistence on the "Wirklichkeit seines Lebens," i.e, the life he chose, a reality that was quickly and ominously being replaced by the Nazi version. For example, she finds that it is not his impending death that troubles Pawel in the Belchatow ghetto, but rather "das nachträglich entwertete gelebte Leben, die geraubte Sittlichkeit, die enteignete Liebe zu seiner Frau."³⁴⁸ She sees this in the same letter, in which Pawel begs his children not to forget him: "letzten Endes, [...] hat Mama mich aus Liebe geheiratet, denn ich hatte sonst nichts, nur meine Arme und den guten Willen, eine Familie anständig zu ernähren. Inwiefern es mir gelungen ist, das müßt ihr selbst beurteilen. Ich bitte euch darum, tragt es mir nicht nach und vergeßt mich nicht."³⁴⁹ When she claims that this knowledge of Pawel's life could "nur in der Erinnerung seiner Kinder behalten bleiben," the author-narrator is honoring her grandfather's final wishes by re-introducing his version of his own story into the family's communicative memory. Further, by creating a text that itself represents a fulfillment of Pawel's last wishes, the author-narrator manages, at least figuratively, to usurp her mother's position as Pawel's rightful heir.

³⁴⁶ Maron 53.

³⁴⁷ Maron 98.

³⁴⁸ Maron 136-7.

³⁴⁹ Maron 137.

Jewish Genealogy in Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben

While *Pawels Briefe* demonstrates the typical *Generationenroman* focus on multi-generational family history primarily through close examination of the relationship between three figures – her grandfather, her mother and herself – Barbara Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* takes up a broader perspective, situating her family within European Jewish history. In contrast to the role of Jewish identity in Maron’s text, where it is chiefly linked to discontinuity and suffering, for Honigmann Jewish heritage plays a more central role, in her text and in the lives of her family members. In previous novels and short stories, however, Honigmann has explored Jewish experiences in the GDR as well as stories about her own Jewish ancestors, particularly the collection *Damals, dann und danach*. Her decision to join an observant Jewish community as an adult is a topic frequently revisited in interviews with the author, occasionally to her exasperation.³⁵⁰ In *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, however, no members of Honigmann’s family actively practice Judaism; Jewish heritage is a common bond between the family and their closest associates, but Jewish identity represents a social-cultural group rather than the observance of religious tradition. Moreover, although the circle of friends around Honigmann’s mother Litzky includes former exiles and concentration camp survivors, Jewish suffering is almost entirely absent from Honigmann’s depiction of her family, reflecting

³⁵⁰ See, for example, Honigmann’s oft-cited declaration, “Ja, ich bin Jüdin, Deutsche, komme aus der DDR, lebe jetzt in Frankreich. Ob ich mich jetzt in Straßburg zu Hause fühle, weiß ich nicht, ob ich orthodox bin, bezweifle ich. Jedenfalls nicht, wie Sie sich das vorstellen.” Barbara Honigmann, “Zürcher Poetikvorlesung,” *Deutsches Seminar der Universität Zürich*, 2002. 12

what Elke Segelcke has observed in Honigmann's other texts: a "longing for a normal Jewish life without the eternal discourse of victimization."³⁵¹

As she examines her family past, Honigmann uses references to European Jewish archetypes and significant moments in Ashkenazi Jewish history to provide a socio-cultural context. For example, she marks her father as the assimilated German Jew and her mother as (in her father's words) the "Wiener Kaffeehausjüdin."³⁵² As the narrator explains, these different backgrounds influence her parents' adult relationship to their Jewish identity: her mother refuses to talk about the religious orthodoxy of her childhood, but initially joins the Jewish community in the GDR, while her father, whose parents were already non-practicing Jews, would never have thought of it. Honigmann's own attachment to religious Judaism is evident in her particular interest in her mother's roots in a traditional Jewish community, and she makes a point to note the position of Litzy's family in their Austro-Hungarian Jewish context. In contrast to many Hungarian Jews of the time, who expressed patriotic feeling through the adoption of Magyar names, the family kept the surname Kohlmann, and Litzy's father and grandfather had Hebrew names (Israel, Sacharia) rather than Hungarian or Germanic ones.³⁵³ The casual, familiar way in which Honigmann's narrator speaks of "diese legendäre Welt der ungarischen Frömmigkeit" suggests that this is well-worn knowledge of family history and Jewish history, and not a newfound discovery resulting from recent investigation.

³⁵¹ Elke Segelcke, "Breaking the Taboo: Barbara Honigmann's Narrative Quest for a German-Jewish (Family) History," *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933-1945. (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture*, ed. Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroeder-Skinner (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006) 175.

³⁵² Honigmann 31-2, 37.

³⁵³ Honigmann 30-31.

Furthermore, Honigmann's narrator notes that the family name "Kohlmann" has even greater significance within Jewish history. The name is derived "von dem legendären Kalonymos," she states, who was the first Jew to settle north of the Alps, and thereby "die jüdische Gelehrsamkeit mit herübergebracht und die aschkenasische Welt sozusagen erfunden hat."³⁵⁴ In this passage, Honigmann depicts her Jewish roots as long-established and enduring, but she integrates this discussion of the family Jewish heritage into a narrative of her mother's break with her traditional Jewish childhood. It is this rich cultural and religious tradition "von der sich [Honigmanns] Mutter später so radikal losgesagt hat" when she became a Communist.³⁵⁵ The knowledge of Jewish history that the author-narrator exhibits in this section points to her respect for tradition and the importance of Judaism to her, which contrasts with her mother's break with that aspect of their family past.

A sense of lost family history is particularly evident in Honigmann's reflections upon Litzy's neglect of her own parents' last wishes. Honigmann recalls that, while her mother was alive, she had a lax attitude towards mementos: the few family photos that she did have were in a box, stored "in wildem Durcheinander in einem Schuhkarton, ... obwohl diese Art der Aufbewahrung eher der Zerstörung nahekam; jedenfalls wurden in dieser Sammlung keine Zeugnisse der Erinnerung gepflegt..."³⁵⁶ After Litzy's death, however, this disorganized, and apparently disinterested, attitude towards her family memories takes on new and distressing contours for her daughter. In an episode reminiscent of Maron's *Pawels Briefe*, Honigmann finds letters from and photos of her grandparents after her mother's death. Litzy's parents had

³⁵⁴ Honigmann 30.

³⁵⁵ Honigmann 31.

³⁵⁶ Honigmann 13.

followed her to London, where both passed away; they were buried there, but without gravestones. Litzy never gives an explanation for this, and whereas Maron's narrator expresses outrage and anger when she discovers her mother has neglected Pawel's memory, Honigmann's narrative voice registers a sense of loss and mourning without directly attacking her mother. She observes that Litzy never mentioned her parents' deaths, but left them in England "ohne Namen, ohne Zeichen, ohne Stein."³⁵⁷ Because *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* is in the first place a portrait of Honigmann's mother, the narrator focuses here on her mother's actions and possible motivations, suggesting that her mother left the old letters and papers behind like a secret treasure for her daughter to find. With sadness, the narrator muses, "die Briefe, die Karten fand ich, aber eine Erklärung fand ich nicht."³⁵⁸

The disconnection from her maternal, traditional Jewish grandparents, brought about by Litzy's disregard for their memory, stays with the author-narrator, however, and returns in the final scene of the text, as a reminder of the instability of memory and the irrevocable loss of the past once those who do remember have died. In this passage, she returns to the box of photos her mother left behind, settling on a photo of a man in a World War One uniform. Litzy had claimed that this was a photo of her father, but the author-narrator's own father Georg insisted that the man in the photograph could not possibly be the Israel Kohlmann he had known in London. With both of her parents having passed away, the narrator imagines she sees a resemblance between the figure in the uniform, her mother and her own sons. This physical reflection of Honigmann's

³⁵⁷ Honigmann 109.

³⁵⁸ Honigmann 110.

Jewish genealogy remains uncertain, however, and in the closing line she muses, with characteristic brevity, “Vielleicht ist es mein Großvater. Vielleicht auch nicht.”³⁵⁹

Whereas Jewish identity is primarily linked to Nazi persecutions in Maron’s *Pawels Briefe*, Honigmann resists casting Jewish identity as a basis for persecution. In part, this reflects her family’s relatively fortunate position during the Nazi era: her parents’ Communist activities, rather than their Jewish identity, made them a potential target for the Nazis early on, and both had the means to emigrate from Nazi-controlled areas before their lives were threatened on the basis of their Jewish heritage. Honigmann’s mother was also able to bring her own parents out of Austria to avoid persecution. In her text, Honigmann rarely makes reference to the suffering and loss of Jewish lives during the Shoah, although her extended family must have been substantially affected. Only once does the author-narrator mention absent family members, and from the context it is ambiguous whether the reference is to Nazi murders or to another of her mother’s characteristic omissions of certain aspects of her past. When the author-narrator recalls her mother’s stories about visiting her Hungarian relatives as a child in the 1910s and 20s, she remarks that “die Cousins und Cousinen hatten in diesen Erzählungen ihre letzten Auftritte, aus späterer Zeit gab es keine Erwähnungen mehr.”³⁶⁰ After this observation, the author-narrator does not return to the question of what fate her Hungarian cousins met. In *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, at least, Honigmann follows her mother’s lead in keeping this aspect of their family history private.

Although her immediate family remained relatively safe during the Nazi period, Honigmann does show them to be marginalized to a degree within the GDR. Her narrator

³⁵⁹ Honigmann 142.

³⁶⁰ Honigmann 31.

remarks on several occasions that both of her parents interacted on a social basis almost exclusively with other Jewish Communists, but she does not dwell on the marginalized position of Jews in GDR society. For example, in a rare indication that Jewish identity brought difficulties to their lives, Honigmann notes that Jews in the GDR were disallowed from holding membership simultaneously in the Jewish community and the SED in 1951; for this reason, Litzy and most of her friends gave up their official Jewish affiliation.³⁶¹ Even in this passage, however, Honigmann's narrator is quick to avoid linking Jewish identity and persecution, noting that this forced "choice" was "nur eine der zahlreichen Unterwerfungsgesten, die man den Genossen abverlangte, besonders, wenn sie aus dem westlichen Exil zurückgekehrt waren."³⁶² This suggestion that it was not the family's Jewish identity, but rather their time in the West that aroused suspicion in the GDR government is indicative of Honigmann's tendency in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* to avoid discourses of Jewish victimhood and create instead a positive, if loosely-defined, Jewish identity.

Honigmann's insistence on the continuity of Jewish identity in her genealogy also shapes her depiction of how her mother's political convictions develop over the course of her life. As we see in Monika Maron's text, the mother's Communism and support for Communist states also conflicts with the genealogical narrative that Honigmann seeks to construct. One way that Honigmann confronts this problem by representing her mother's Jewish identity as more fundamental in her life than her Communist convictions. Early on, Jewish identity and Communism are presented as equally determining factors in Litzy's life: she and her friends were the "antifaschistischer Adel," marked off as part of the "Parteielite ... als überlebende

³⁶¹ Honigmann 123.

³⁶² Honigmann 123.

Juden und als Kommunisten.”³⁶³ As the text continues, the Communist sentiment of Litzy and her friends is consistently challenged, as I will examine in detail below: they are shown to be snobbish, superficial, and they increasingly adopt a dissenting attitude. Later in her life, Litzy “sympathisierte ... mehr und mehr mit diesen vorsichtigen Verweigern, ... während sie sich von einigen alten Freunden, die krampfhaft an den alten Parolen festhielten, entfremdete.”³⁶⁴ In the final chapter of the text, we see Litzy come full circle: like most of her Vienna friends, she re-joins the Jewish community of her childhood when she returns to Austria in her seventies.

Honigmann’s narrator is quick to note that Litzy’s return to the Jewish community does not imply a surge of religious feeling, observing wryly that it is rather a reflection of Litzy’s and her friends’ desire for a favorable burial site. At the same time, however, Honigmann emphasizes the genealogical continuity established by Litzy’s action: “auch meine Mutter trat nun wieder in die Israelitische Kultusgemeinde ein, deren Beamter ihr Vater bis zum ‘Anschluss’ gewesen war.” (134) Rather than representing a “return to the fold” in a religious sense, in Honigmann’s text the mother’s Jewish identity is the default affiliation which outlasts all of her other interests and associations, reflecting the narrator’s own desire to emphasize the Jewish contours of her family history.

The suggestion that Jewish tradition remains the most important frame of reference for Honigmann’s family history finds a particularly poignant realization in the author-narrator’s representation of her mother’s death. Because Litzy died at night in her sleep and was not found until the next morning, it was impossible to determine the precise date of her death – no one knew whether she died before or after midnight. As Honigmann’s narrator points out, however,

³⁶³ Honigmann 7.

³⁶⁴ Honigmann 128.

this final instance of Litzy's enigmatic nature can actually be resolved within the traditional Jewish dating system: "nur nach der jüdischen Zählung ist ihr Sterbetag eindeutig, da der jüdische Kalender den Tag nicht in der Mitte der Nacht bricht."³⁶⁵ Honigmann's wording here, asserting that it is *only* in the Jewish tradition that this final question about her mother can be clarified, indicates the importance that Judaism has for the author-narrator's own thinking and her conception of her family. Further, there is a subtle note of criticism of the non-Jewish calendar in the statement that the Jewish system does not break the day in the middle of the night. Here, Honigmann's word choice suggests that the traditional Jewish marking of time, according to which a day ends at sunset, is more natural, and is thus better in tune with some essential aspects of life and death.

Disruptions in Genealogy

The effort to construct a multi-generational family connection is a hallmark of the *Generationenroman* trend, but these narratives are animated by obstacles to a sense of genealogical continuity. In both Maron's and Honigmann's texts, the obstacle to the construction of a desirable family history is the mother's connection to Communism and her support of the East German Communist state. The author-narrators' engagement with their mothers' Communism is the subject of the next section, but I would like to first briefly explore one scene in each text which provides a glimpse of the disruption that the mother represents. These scenes are unusual and interesting in the texts because they are private, intimate family moments in which something like traditional "mothering" takes place – providing milk, providing comfort – but the mother herself is displaced within the family structure. In Maron's scene, the mother

³⁶⁵ Honigmann 47.

disappears altogether, while in Honigmann's she is in the place of the child, receiving comfort from the parent.

In Maron's text we see the daughter's usurpation of her mother's place as Pawel's daughter confirmed in the narrator's fantasies concerning a particular idyllic scene from her mother's childhood. The narrator recounts Hella's memory of her father preparing a different beverage for each of his children every morning – tea for Bruno, coffee for Marta, milk for Hella and cocoa for Paul. Hella insists that this ritual took place each morning, not only on special occasions, and the narrator adds that “diese Szene aus dem Leben meiner Mutter gehört seit jeher zu meiner Vorstellung von Glück.”³⁶⁶ Maron evokes this scene again late in the text, but with an important change. In this passage, the narrator imagines how her childhood after the war would have been different if Pawel had survived, and her fantasy includes both the ideological thought that Pawel would have opposed his daughter's support for the emerging Communist government in East Germany, as well as the more sentimental vision of leisurely afternoon walks around the neighborhood. The narrator ends this wistful interlude with the line “Trink deine Milch, sagt er zu mir.”³⁶⁷ Milk was, of course, the drink that Pawel prepared for Hella. In this fantasy, the narrator replaces her mother in a scene of comfort and security, and her sense of longing implicitly suggests that her own childhood in the early days of the GDR was something quite different. Indeed, as Maron's narrator states early in the text: “Hella sagt, sie hätte eine schöne Kindheit gehabt, eine sehr schöne Kindheit sogar. Ich habe sie um diese Kindheit immer beneidet.”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Maron 25.

³⁶⁷ Maron 183.

³⁶⁸ Maron 24.

In Honigmann's text, we find a similar scene of family life in which a male figure appears in the "mothering" role. Here it is the author's father who is offering comfort to both his daughter and Litzy, his ex-wife. The narrator states outright that Litzy's relationship with her father Georg was different than her mother's other romances, musing that, "meine Mutter und Onkel Wito gingen als Feinde auseinander, während mein Vater meiner Mutter bis zu seinem Lebensende, über mehrere Ehen hinweg, ein Freund blieb."³⁶⁹ "Onkel Wito" was the last of her mother's romantic partners, and the unusual quality of Litzy's relationship with the author's father is especially evident when Wito leaves Litzy, moving his things out of the apartment while she is at work. The narrator describes waking up during the night, after Wito has moved out, hearing her mother crying and being comforted by her father. When the young daughter herself begins crying, an unconventional family scene develops: her parents "kamen sie vom anderen Ende der Wohnung als Komitee in mein Zimmer anmarschiert und, [...] wir weinten nun gemeinsam, meine Mutter und ich, und mein Vater redete uns gut zu."³⁷⁰ Here, Honigmann constructs a kind of family *tableau vivant* in which the parent – here, her father – comforts the two sufferers. In this image, the author-narrator and her mother are in the same position vis-à-vis the father, reinforcing the implication that Honigmann's father was the constant, supporting parent, while her mother was secretive, emotionally reserved, and difficult to relate to.

In both *Pawels Briefe* and *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, then, the author-narrators construct genealogical narratives that re-envision the family with the (remembered or imagined) support of a male ancestor: Maron positions herself as her grandfather's rightful heir, the only one of his descendents to properly honor his memory, while Honigmann counterbalances the

³⁶⁹ Honigmann 21.

³⁷⁰ Honigmann 15-16.

disconnections of her mother's biography with the reliably constant presence of her father. In neither case, however, does this alignment with a male relative constitute a nostalgia for traditional masculinity. On the contrary, both Maron's grandfather and Honigmann's father in fact represent the maternal in the texts in a way that the actual mothers seem unable to do. Pawel and Georg are portrayed as family-oriented caretakers – the one offering milk, the other a shoulder to cry on –, in contrast to mothers whose strongest allegiance is to their political positions, and to men who are not their daughters' fathers.

III. Family Politics: Conflict and Confrontation

As is characteristic of the *Generationenromane*, both Maron and Honigmann construct a new genealogical family narrative in response to a break in family and collective history, which is in these texts represented by the rise and fall of the Communist East German state. In *Pawels Briefe* and in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, it is the authors' mothers whose choices allow the Communist experience to influence the private sphere, and thus it is the figure of the mother who presents the biggest challenge for the authors' multigenerational family portrait. The narrative of the Communist period in these texts is one of family division and conflict: the mothers' politics are depicted as leading to a break with their own parents – in the form of neglected memory or legacy – as well as causing a rift with their daughters. As the authors consider these aspects of their family histories, each seeks to distance herself from her mother's political convictions, but Maron and Honigmann both also present a revised narrative of the mother's biography in which Communist beliefs are not as central as the mother herself views them. In this way, the authors rhetorically separate the mother from her Communist associations, undermining the mother's own self-definition in order to rehabilitate the image of the mother for the sake of a narrative of family continuity.

In Maron's and Honigmann's texts, politics and family relationships intersect and conflict in a variety of ways; over and over, the mother's commitment to Communism and her support of the GDR disrupts her relationship with her daughter. We see this in both texts, for example, in the way that the biographical fact of the mother deciding to live in the GDR is portrayed as having disruptive consequences for family cohesion. For Maron, the mother's decision to move to East Berlin and remain in the GDR represents a break with her brother, who remained in the FRG, and a departure from the values and personal attachments with which she was raised. In Honigmann's text, the mother's choice to come to East Berlin after the war, a place she had never lived in and a society into which she resisted integrating, results in a lasting cultural divide between mother and daughter. Despite these disconnections in their family history, the author-narrators seek ways of engaging with their mothers' biographies that afford them a place, albeit one marked by ambivalence and tension, in the family narrative.

Reconnecting Generations: Pawels Briefe

In *Pawels Briefe* Maron examines how ideological worldviews shape personal decisions in her family history, beginning with her mother Hella's choices and motivations during the first years of the GDR. For Hella, who had joined the Communist movement in Berlin in the 1930s, Communism represents freedom and self-determination, and the founding of the GDR was a realization of her long-held desires. Hella, thirty years old in 1945, had spent a major portion of her life in National Socialist Germany, and the end of the war "setzte alle Festlegungen und Grenzen außer Kraft, die seit ihrer Geburt für sie gegolten hatten."³⁷¹ While the Nazi regime was in power, Hella and her siblings managed to survive unharmed in Berlin, with the help of some

³⁷¹ Maron 156.

friends and employers willing to conceal their Jewish roots.³⁷² In contrast to the fear and restrictions that governed her life as the daughter of a converted Jewish father during the Nazi period, the new East German state afforded Hella extensive opportunities to pursue her interest in Communist ideology at several “Parteischulen,” and she went on to become a journalist. For Hella, then, Communism was not only a deeply-held conviction – “wie ein lebenswichtiges Organ,” as she describes it; it also represented a political system that allowed her a degree of self-determination, freedom and social advancement that would have been impossible in her life before 1945.

Hella’s political beliefs were also harmonized with her personal life in the new East Germany: a significant factor in Hella’s decision to remain in East Berlin was her relationship with Karl Maron, with whom she shared her strong Communist convictions. When Hella and Karl Maron met in 1945, the war had just ended and Karl had returned from Moscow with the “Gruppe Ulbricht,” German Communists who had spent the duration of the war in exile. When he and Hella met, Karl Maron was Deputy Mayor of (East) Berlin, and over the next thirty years he would rise to the position of Interior Minister in the GDR. For Hella, the end of the war thus brought a new life, a “Wiedergeburt,” in her words, after the hellish conditions of the Nazi period were over and everything seemed possible. In the new GDR, she found “der richtige

³⁷² From Maron’s text, it is not exactly clear how Hella Iglarz and her siblings were able to remain undetected during the Nazi period. Their father, as a Polish citizen of Jewish origin, was expelled from Germany in 1940, which indicates that the authorities were aware of the family. Her mother Hella was able to work throughout the war, protected by an employer who was aware of her father’s Jewish heritage and helped shield her from denunciation. Not all of those who were defined as Jewish by the Nürnberg Laws were deported from Nazi Germany before the end of the war, however, and it is possible that Pawel’s children were simply lucky. As members of the Baptist congregation, they may also have had more support from their Christian neighbors than was afforded most Jews of the period. Because the author provides very limited information, however, we can only speculate.

Beruf, der richtige Staat, die richtige Liebe.“³⁷³ Karl Maron becomes an especially problematic addition to the family, however, as we will see below.

While for Hella the beginnings of her new life in Communist East Germany represented a positive development, her daughter’s narrator alter ego views it differently. On the one hand, the author-narrator notes that it is something of an Iglarz family tradition for each generation to break with the (political or religious) ideology in which they were raised: “Pawel ist nicht Jude geblieben, Josefa nicht Katholikin, Hella, Marta und Paul haben sich nicht von den Baptisten taufen lassen, und ich habe mit der Zeit aufgehört, an den Kommunismus zu glauben.“³⁷⁴ On the other hand, although the conversion experience represents an element of similarity linking the generations of her family, the author-narrator underscores the pain and loss that these breaks cause. When her grandfather, in one of his letters, exhorts his children to stay together at all costs, the author-narrator reads this as “das einzige Zeugnis für das Leid, das der Bruch mit seiner jüdischen Familie in Pawel hinterlassen haben muß.“³⁷⁵ In the case of Hella’s “rebirth” in 1945, the author-narrator insists that what for her mother was the start of an exciting future, also necessarily meant a break with the past, and in particular a turn away from the memory of the family she had lost during the Nazi period. Maron’s narrator looks past the positive changes the end of the war brought for her mother to characterize the “rebirth” in her mother’s life as “eine Wiedergeburt ohne Eltern, ein Neuanfang ohne die Vergangenheit” – while Hella focused on what she gained after 1945, the author-narrator stresses what Hella had lost.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ Maron 155.

³⁷⁴ Maron 192.

³⁷⁵ Maron 149.

³⁷⁶ Maron 113.

In *Pawels Briefe*, Maron presents her own evolving relationship to Communism as a contrast to her mother's narrative of adulthood as the realization of her political ideology in various aspects of her life. While Hella found fulfillment in Communist East Germany, her daughter's path to adulthood leads her away from both the political convictions with which she was raised and the GDR itself. When she was young, her political ideas were shaped by her family: Maron's narrator refers to her youth as a time when she and her mother were politically in agreement, when "Hellas Klassenfeind war [...] auch mein Klassenfeind."³⁷⁷ As she grew older, however, the author-narrator realized that her understanding of those concepts was naïve. When she was young, she muses, Communism signified for her merely "mama, Marta, Trockenkartoffeln, keine Fliegerangriffe, ... Kommunistisch sein war gut; und gut sein war kommunistisch."³⁷⁸ As she grew older, however, her idea of Communism was shaped by her experiences with the specific form it took in the East German state.

Whereas for her mother Communism represented freedom and social justice, Maron's experience was one of disappointment and disillusion. As a young adult she recalls developing a feeling of betrayal towards the GDR, which she discovered to be "nicht gerecht, nicht ehrlich, nicht frei, nicht klug, nicht schön, nicht gut, eben nicht kommunistisch."³⁷⁹ In this passage, we see the idea of Communism being divested of its earlier meaning – it is no longer synonymous with goodness and virtue. On the contrary, the young Maron discovers the Communist state to be the opposite. For her, passage into adulthood is ultimately marked by the decision to leave behind her struggle against a political system that had come to view her as an enemy, namely,

³⁷⁷ Maron 161.

³⁷⁸ Maron 61.

³⁷⁹ Maron 62.

upon her move to Hamburg in 1988. As we see, then, Maron's narrative of Communism in her own biography constitutes an implicit critique of her mother's path: for Maron, belief in the just nature of Communism and the East German state is naïve, an idealistic attitude that one outgrows. By implication, then, Hella's adherence to her Communist convictions and ongoing support of the GDR seems a kind of childish folly.

Although Maron breaks with the ideological tradition in which she was raised and which her mother continues to support, she portrays this fact as a step towards a new model of family cohesion, positioning her choices as part of a progression away from the cycle of intergenerational disconnection that has plagued her family. Her grandparents Pawel and Josefa left their Jewish and Catholic families to become Baptists, she recalls, and her mother gave up her Christian faith in favor of Communism. Maron's own life marks a departure from a family tradition of conversion, she suggests, because, in moving away from the ideology with which she was raised, she does not move towards a new religious or political understanding. In her text, capitalist Western society is portrayed as neutral – her move to the West is presented as a rejection of Communism, not an assumption of a new ideological perspective. We see this in the narrator's summary of generational shifts in her family: “meine Großeltern haben ertragen müssen, daß keines ihrer Kinder sich taufen ließ; Hella hat gelernt zu ertragen, daß ich Antikommunistin wurde.”³⁸⁰ In this passage, Maron marks herself only as an opponent of Communism, which she discards outright, and not in favor of a different ideological identity. Further, Maron's lack of adherence to a religious or political system as an adult has a positive consequence for her own son, Jonas: she is proud to have raised him outside the strictures of a definite ideology, and her narrator muses that Jonas is “unser erster Nicht-Konvertit seit vier

³⁸⁰ Maron 205.

Generationen, der gar nicht konvertieren kann, weil er auf keinen Glauben eingeschworen wurde.”³⁸¹ With Maron’s son, then, the family’s cycle of generational ideological disavowal is broken, so that future family connections are no longer troubled by political differences.

A Cultural Family Divide: Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben

In Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, the author-narrator also struggles with the ongoing effects of her mother’s politically motivated decisions. Whereas different attitudes towards the politics and policies of the GDR marked the contrast between Monika Maron and her mother, however, in Honigmann’s family, politics lead to an even more fundamental divide between mother and daughter. Before Honigmann is even old enough to have an understanding of her mother’s political positions, she is aware that her mother sees in her a representative of a culture that is not the cultural context with which Litzy identifies, and towards which Litzy is negatively disposed. As Honigmann traces her mother’s path across Europe over the course of her life, she attributes distinct identities or personalities to her mother, specific to each location and language – from her early childhood in Hungary to her Viennese youth and her marriage with Kim Philby in London and Paris, and eventually to her marriage with Georg Honigmann and her emigration to the GDR. The author’s mother even has different names in each locale – she is Litzy in Vienna, Alice in England, and Lisa in Berlin. Her relationship to this last city, however, remains uneasy, despite the fact that she spends thirty-seven years in Berlin and raises her daughter there. Honigmann depicts her mother as perpetually disdainful of East Berlin and its residents, always wistful for the elegance of Vienna or the propriety of the English gentlemen. For Honigmann herself, however, Berlin is home, and this results in a sense of cultural alienation

³⁸¹ Maron 205.

between the two of them. Recalling trips to Hungary as a child, for instance, Honigmann narrates from the perspective of one “der aus der DDR kam,” marking the difference between her own experience and her mother’s.³⁸²

There is more at stake in these cultural differences between mother and daughter than in usual generational shifts, however. When confronted with indications that her daughter’s life has been shaped by her East German context, Litzy reacts with uncharacteristically strong emotion. For example, when her daughter misspells “Österreich” (omitting one of the “r”s) on the envelope of a thank-you note to one of her mother’s Vienna friends, Litzy responds with outrage – she lost “die Nerven und jede Kontrolle.”³⁸³ Recalling this episode, Honigmann underscores the bewildering vehemence of her mother’s reaction, noting that, “die Schuldverstrickung der Rosenbergs, die Enttarnung Philbys und sogar Onkel Witos Auszug hat sie mit größerer Fassung ertragen als diesen Skandal.”³⁸⁴ This list of major events in their lives, including both political and personal “scandals,” points beyond the daughter’s confusion about the magnitude of her mother’s reaction to what this spelling error represents for Litzy: it seems to mark an even more fundamental disruption in Litzy’s world. Although Honigmann’s narrator remarks that she is uncertain, to the present day, “welche Art von Verrat” she committed with this spelling mistake, we can read the incident as evidence of the friction resulting from disconnections between phases of her mother’s life. Litzy’s explosive emotional reaction is a rare loss of composure that suggests she is not fully at ease with the consequences of her own disparate geography: she herself may remain an Austrian in Berlin, but her daughter is growing up an East German.

³⁸² Honigmann 32.

³⁸³ Honigmann 52.

³⁸⁴ Honigmann 52.

What the GDR signifies for Honigmann's mother, and thus its significance in the cultural conflict between Vienna-born Litzzy and her East Berlin-born daughter, becomes clearer in another episode of irritation between them. This passage is a long aside that interrupts the narration of a scene in which Litzzy is finally giving her daughter her own account of her life with Kim Philby. The dialogue between the two women (Litzzy now 80 years old, visiting her daughter in Strasbourg) is briefly suspended as the narrator, having just addressed her mother as "Mutti," reflects that Litzzy disliked being called by this name, although her daughter had always done so. Litzzy considers this nickname "preußisch und spießig," but for the narrator it was simply the way in which all of her contemporaries addressed their mothers.³⁸⁵ Honigmann places her mother's irritation within the context of other symptoms of the fact that her mother, despite having lived nearly forty years in Berlin, "hatte sich mit der Stadt [...] nie anfreunden können."³⁸⁶ The narrator recalls having found her mother's attitude unfair, but it also signifies for her a personal rejection. The daughter's Berlin dialect remained "ein schlimmes Handikap" on visits to Austria, and she recalls feeling defensive, because "es gab wirklich keinen Grund, mich irgendeiner 'Kollaboration' zu beschuldigen."³⁸⁷ In this last line, Honigmann points to the political aspect of her mother's aversion to Berlin, as Litzzy holds herself, with her connection to the KGB rather than the Stasi, to be above the East German Communists. The elitism inherent in this position will be discussed below, but here the passage points to the political undertones of family conflicts in Honigmann's text. Litzzy's political convictions drew her to East Berlin, but

³⁸⁵ Honigmann 114.

³⁸⁶ Honigmann 114.

³⁸⁷ Honigmann 115.

she remained aloof and distanced from her new context, socializing primarily with her fellow émigrés.

Litzy's lack of integration into what became her daughter's home culture results in a lasting divide between the two of them, Honigmann asserts, reflected in Litzy's apparent difficulty in separating her daughter personally from the social-cultural context she represents in her mother's eyes. Here, the mother's political interests have led to a fundamental cultural and social divide between mother and daughter: Litzy resents her daughter's lack of attachment to the mother's Austrian home, and responds to markers of her daughter's East German upbringing as if the latter had become a representative of an undesirable social-political faction. The divide between mother and daughter, rooted in Litzy's political decisions and her habitual secrecy, remains a defining element of their personal relationship.

The Political Family Quarrel in Pawels Briefe

In both *Pawels Briefe* and *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, the mother's ongoing support for GDR Communism becomes the subject of a family conflict; in the authors' representations of these quarrels, the mother's politics is cast as an ongoing challenge to their personal relationship. In *Pawels Briefe*, mother and daughter had long disagreed over politics and the repressive measures taken by the GDR against its citizens. The author-narrator recalls that, when poet and musician Wolf Biermann was expatriated in 1976, Hella and her friends sat downstairs in the family house and "erregten sich über Biermanns unverschämtes Kölner Konzert, während meine Freunde und ich oben saßen, schockiert, erbittert und ratlos."³⁸⁸ Their different attitudes towards the GDR government culminate in a falling out when Maron publishes her first novel,

³⁸⁸ Maron 201.

Flugasche, which traces the story of a young journalist's attempt to expose the environmental problems in the East German industrial town of Bitterfeld. Because the novel is openly critical of GDR industrial policies and institutions, Maron was only able to publish it with a West German press. The novel's appearance in 1981 was followed soon by a discussion on a West German literary television program; for the show's host, the most interesting aspect of the book was the fact that it was both critical of the GDR and written by the stepdaughter of a prominent SED figure, the late Interior Minister Karl Maron. In *Pawels Briefe*, the author argues that this television presenter, by painting her as a dissident voice from within the East German elite, ascribed to her an identity that she "noch nicht wollte."³⁸⁹

The publication of *Flugasche* marks Maron's entrance in the public sphere as a GDR critic, and the consequences that this has for the private relationship between the author and her mother become the subject of *Pawels Briefe*. As Maron's narrator recalls in the latter text: "nach der Sendung meldete ich mich nicht bei Hella, und Hella meldete sich nicht bei mir."³⁹⁰ A year or so later, however, the conflict ended as abruptly as it began, with a chance meeting followed by the intervention of a close family friend. After the reconciliation, mother and daughter promised, "die Politik fürderhin nicht über unseren Umgang miteinander entscheiden zu lassen."³⁹¹ In some passages, Maron seems to suggest that she and her mother were able to achieve this separation of politics from their private relationships. She asserts that she and her mother reconciled "weil wir eben Mutter und Tochter waren und weil wir uns liebten," and even suggests that her mother ceased to see her as a public figure, insisting "ich war ihre Tochter,

³⁸⁹ Maron 202.

³⁹⁰ Maron 202.

³⁹¹ Maron 203.

sonst nichts.”³⁹² Most importantly, Hella is willing to support her daughter in defiance of GDR laws, smuggling honorarium money into the GDR for her daughter, an action which makes her a “Fahndungsobjekt” for the Stasi.³⁹³ Maron presents her reconciliation with her mother as founded on an agreement to separate politics and personal relationships, and for her mother, this separation even seems possible.

Maron’s text complicates the idea of the separation of the public or political sphere and personal relationships, however. The recurring theme of Maron’s presentation of her family history is the inseparable nature of personal and political meanings: Hella’s political decision to remain in the GDR is inextricable from her relationship with Karl Maron, and the author-narrator’s first novel, a literary intervention into the public-political sphere, also has personal consequences. Indeed, the final line of *Pawels Briefe* points to the continuing influence of political differences on the author’s relationship with her mother: the new Communist party has just won seats in the reunified German Bundestag, and the narrator muses “Morgen werde ich [Hella] anrufen, oder übermorgen, wenn ihre Siegesfreude sich ein bißchen gelegt hat, heute jedenfalls noch nicht.”³⁹⁴ Although at an earlier point in the text Maron quotes her mother’s statement that she does not want to talk about politics, because “die Familiengeschichte sei etwas anderes,” the two never exist independently in *Pawels Briefe*. Politics remain a source of tension between mother and daughter, and when Maron closes her book with an indication of this persistent tension, it is a reminder that their struggle is ongoing.³⁹⁵ Against the background of

³⁹² Maron 202, 204.

³⁹³ Maron 202.

³⁹⁴ Maron 205.

³⁹⁵ Maron 158.

the multiple intersections of personal and political factors that we have seen in Maron's text, then, adherence to a resolution to separate personal relationships from political convictions appears idealistic and always incomplete. Politics remain a point of conflict and a source of tension in the mother-daughter relationship.

For Maron, this ongoing tension appears particularly in the form of a nagging question, not only about how Hella was able to support the GDR, but also what it would have taken to change her mind about the Communist state before the Berlin Wall fell. Maron's narrator returns to these problems at various points in the text. We see this when she asks what Pawel's daughters were doing amongst the GDR leaders, in the passage quoted briefly in the previous section:

Nichts in ihrem Leben vor diesem Mai 1945 – weder ihre Herkunft noch ihre Erziehung, weder ihr Sinn für Gerechtigkeit noch ihre Freiheitsliebe – kann mir erklären, warum sie für die nächsten Jahrzehnte zu denen gehörten, die ihre politischen Gegner in Gefängnisse sperrten, Christen drangsalierten, Bücher verboten, die ein ganzes Volk einmauerten und durch einen kolossalen Geheimdienst bespitzeln ließen. Was hatten Pawels Töchter Hella und Marta unter solchen Leuten zu suchen?³⁹⁶

Of course, in May of 1945 it was far from clear what the future of the Soviet-occupied German territories would be, and how the Communist leadership would treat its citizens. But this passage makes clear the contradictions with which the author-narrator is struggling: the

³⁹⁶ Maron 154.

daughters of her idealized grandfather, who enjoyed such a happy, harmonious youth, could not be more different than the corrupt and criminal government described here.

It is not only that Maron cannot reconcile these two incongruous pieces of her family history, however, but also that her mother seems to have been willfully deaf to the reports of persecutions committed by the GDR that did reach her. As Maron's narrator muses with frustration, her mother seems to have placed her loyalty to the Communist cause above all else:

Hella sieht in ihrer Treue eine Tugend; ich empfinde sie als Unbelehrbarkeit und, angesichts der Willkür und des Unglücks, das Kommunisten über einen halben Kontinent gebracht haben, als Herzlosigkeit. [...] Was immer zu ihr gedrungen war über die Untaten der Kommunisten, sie hat ihren Genossen mehr getraut als deren Opfern.³⁹⁷

In the end, this is the problem that drives Maron's exploration of her mother's life: regardless of what the East German Communist government became, capitalism was always the enemy for Hella, always the greater evil. The author-narrator laments that, "ich weiß nicht, was sie hätte erfahren müssen, um ihrer Partei die Treue aufzukündigen und zu sagen: Wer das tut, soll nicht in meinem Namen handeln dürfen."³⁹⁸ As we will see below, the best answer that Maron can seem to find to explain her mother's unequivocal support of the GDR is that Hella

³⁹⁷ Maron 179-80.

³⁹⁸ Maron 180.

was, in addition to being intelligent and “lebensklug,” a victim of her own idealism and naiveté, which was buoyed by a strong dose of biographical chance.³⁹⁹

The Political Family Quarrel in Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben

Like Maron, Honigmann also tells of a quarrel with her parents about the repressive methods of Communist governments. While Maron’s conflict centers on Maron’s public role as a GDR author, however, Honigmann’s *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* follows a more typical pattern of generational conflict, with a young adult confronting her parents about new and disturbing information she had received. In *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, the scene of confrontation follows the author-narrator’s visit to Moscow as a university student. While there, she spent her time with her mother’s old friends, contacts from Litzy’s days working for the KGB. This trip echoes Honigmann’s earlier school vacation spent in England as a young teenager, where she was passed around among her mother’s British and émigré Communist friends. Because she is older during her trip to Moscow, however, she engages in political discussions there with Litzy’s friends, who by this time have become a circle of dissidents rather than KGB favorites. When she returns from her trip to Moscow (where she has had her own run-in with Soviet bureaucracy, having been denied access to the literary archive where she sought to research), the young student confronts her parents with these dissidents’ stories of injustice and persecution by the Soviet regime.

Rather than presenting a dramatic scene between herself and her parents, however, Honigmann summarizes what took place from her adult narrative perspective, speaking decades later. When she returned to Berlin, Honigmann recalls, “trat ich meinen Eltern mit großer

³⁹⁹ Maron 201.

Aufgebrachtheit entgegen und wiederholte alles, was ich bei den Moskauer Dissidenten gehört hatte.”⁴⁰⁰ Here Honigmann places herself in the role that is familiar from *Väterliteratur*, that of the adult child confronting her parents with evidence of the brutal and violent elements of the political systems they supported or tolerated. She recalls having passionately called her parents to account: she “ersparte ihnen auch nicht” the story of a young woman sent to a psychiatric hospital for distributing illegal pamphlets.⁴⁰¹ The narrator also reflects upon her own motivations and intentions, including her awareness that her parents “solche Berichte nicht gerne hörten,” and her feeling that “das mußte [sie] ihnen zumuten.”⁴⁰² In these passages, Honigmann focuses on the personal dynamics of this family conflict: she allows her frustration at her parents’ “Verharmlosung” of the actions taken by the Soviets against their dissident citizens to register – they respond to her suggestion that the Communist system is a “Verbrechersystem” with a mere “Na, na, na” – but she stops short of condemning them as callous or complicit.⁴⁰³

Honigmann continues this reflection on the interpersonal aspects of her quarrel with her parents by hypothesizing about their position at the time. During the quarrel, she sought her parents’ acknowledgement that crimes had been committed by the Communist states and continued to be committed, and was irritated at their recourse to ironic distance rather than the active resistance undertaken by their Moscow friends. Narrating from her present-day perspective, however, Honigmann theorizes that perhaps her parents had never dared “so weit zu denken” as their friend Alexander Nekritsch, who had come to view the ruling Communists in

⁴⁰⁰ Honigmann 73.

⁴⁰¹ Honigmann 73.

⁴⁰² Honigmann 73.

⁴⁰³ Honigmann 73.

the Soviet Union as a “Kult der Gewalttätigkeit.”⁴⁰⁴ Further, the narrator reflects that her parents could very well themselves have felt uneasy in their own comfortable position, experiencing “etwas wie Unzufriedenheit und sogar Eifersucht auf meine Moskauer Freunde, die mich mit solchen Gedanken vertraut gemacht hatten.”⁴⁰⁵ Without entering into an apologetic discussion of her parents’ unwillingness to express outright opposition to the Communist regime in East Germany, Honigmann acknowledges here the possibility that their position was something other than the stubborn denial she perceived at the time. The passage ends with an indication that this political conflict made the parent-child relationships difficult, but without privileging one position over the other: “Wenn ich von meinen Moskaureisen zurückkam, war es besser, wenn wir uns eine Weile nicht sahen, meine Eltern und ich.”⁴⁰⁶ Similar to what we find in Maron’s text, here Honigmann’s family seems to have grown accustomed to this point of tension. The conflict between parents and daughter is not resolved, but instead becomes part of the family relationship: when Honigmann’s narrator refers to the argument over her Moscow friends later in the text, it is in a neutral tone suggestive of an oft-repeated anecdote.⁴⁰⁷

Narrating these tensions in retrospect, Honigmann focuses on the personal factors in her political clashes with her parents. But she also suggests a continuing critical perspective on her

⁴⁰⁴ Honigmann 74.

⁴⁰⁵ Honigmann 74.

⁴⁰⁶ Honigmann 74. This is Honigmann’s only reference to multiple trips to Moscow alone, and one wonders at her reference to the dissidents as “meine Moskaufreunde” (74) when they were, at least initially, her parents’ contacts. The fact that no indication of other Moscow visits or Honigmann’s relationship to these friends appears elsewhere in the text underscores the book’s overall focus on Litzy’s biography rather than Honigmann’s own, while also demonstrating that this passage has particular emotional significance for the narrator – as a chapter in *her* life, and not merely her mother’s.

⁴⁰⁷ Honigmann 119-120.

parents' apparent unwillingness to respond to her concerns about the realities of Communism. Such criticism is implicit in Honigmann's depiction of the Moscow dissidents, who represent a stronger political engagement than the author-narrator ever witnessed in her own parents. The narrative space that Honigmann devotes to the biographies of these friends suggests their importance to her own thinking. Rather than recounting her own conversations with the Moscow circle, Honigmann presents a series of biographical miniatures, telling the stories of Mischka, who lost twenty years of his life to the gulags, Schura Buturlin, forced to retire early from his post as "ein hoher Offizier der Roten Armee" because of his repeated objections to the Soviet march into Czechoslovakia, and Alexander Nekritsch, also forced into early retirement from the Academy of Sciences after publishing a book critical of Stalin.⁴⁰⁸ The last member of the Moscow circle Honigmann describes is Don Maclean, who, together with Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, and Anthony Blunt was part of a KGB spy ring in Cambridge from the 1930s through the 1950s. Once Maclean had been exposed as a spy in 1951, he was forced to seek refuge in the Soviet Union, despite having attempted to break off his KGB contacts.

Whereas Monika Maron presented her own changing opinion of Communism as a model for contrast with her mother's ongoing faith in the GDR, Honigmann uses these anecdotes about her Moscow friends to cast a critical shadow over her parents' lack of political activity later in their lives. By dwelling at length on each of these stories of lost faith in the "real existing" Communism of the Soviet Union, Honigmann suggests her own sympathy with their experiences. The ironic understatement of her narrator's comment that "Mischkas kommunistische Überzeugungen hatten sich nach zwanzig Jahren Gulag ziemlich abgekühlt" suggests her support for a critical attitude towards the Communist state, as does the admiring

⁴⁰⁸ Honigmann 68.

tone in which she describes Mischka's young friend just released from the psychiatric hospital, who "ganz ruhig ihren Tee trank und weiter illegale Schriften verbreitete."⁴⁰⁹ Honigmann's retelling of these stories of Communist supporters-turned-detractors provide a basis of comparison for her mother's comfortable lifestyle in the GDR, with an implicit critique. While Litzy ceased her political activity when she moved to East Berlin, her former associates, who had ended up in Moscow and had maintained their political engagement, were now turning their revolutionary activities against the Soviet state they had previously supported.

While Honigmann is, like Maron, disturbed by her mother's reluctance to acknowledge the repressive nature of the Communist states she supported, the question that is most persistent and troubling in her text surrounds her mother's secrecy about her work for the KGB. Throughout *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, Honigmann points to inconsistencies and improbabilities in what her mother told her, but is also fundamentally concerned with her own position vis-à-vis her mother's past. For example, Litzy insists she knew nothing about atomic weapons, although journalists report that Kim Philby first heard about atomic energy from her. Distrustful of news reports, the author-narrator maintains that it is "verwunderlich" to imagine that her mother would know anything about atomic energy, as Litzy understood little of classical mechanics and never even learned to drive.⁴¹⁰ Still, Litzy seems to have inside knowledge about the Rosenberg case, which was centered on the passage of information relating to atomic research. Recalling Litzy's declaration that the Rosenbergs were not innocent, Honigmann's narrator wonders, "wer weiß, welchen Anteil sie daran hatte."⁴¹¹ As we see here, it is not only

⁴⁰⁹ Honigmann 67, 73.

⁴¹⁰ Honigmann 26.

⁴¹¹ Honigmann 26.

the possibility that her mother may have also been connected to this spy ring that troubles the author-narrator, but also that she cannot be sure whether her mother had been honest with her.

At several points in the text, Honigmann's narrator underscores the fact that she knew as little about her mother's KGB connections as anyone, and that her mother wanted it that way, because it best protected Litzy's secrets. When English journalists begin asking questions after Philby was exposed as a Russian spy in 1963, Litzy urged her young daughter to say nothing, to which the narrator muses, "was hätte ich auch sagen sollen, ich kannte ja weder die Wahrheit noch die Lüge [...] Wir waren ungefähr auf demselben Wissenstand, die englischen Journalisten und ich..."⁴¹² Honigmann's narrator stresses that her mother had no desire "dieses Kapitel in irgendeiner Weise mit mir zu teilen," but only wanted to keep her "up to date," so that she "so nah wie möglich an der Wahrheit lügen könnte: ich weiß davon nichts."⁴¹³ Once again, we see Litzy only revealing enough information so that her daughter can see that more is hidden, that she is being intentionally and steadfastly excluded from this part of her mother's past.

As a key example of her mother's inclination to dissemble, Honigmann points repeatedly to her mother's ostensible termination of her KGB work in 1939. Litzy insists that she quit spying in that year, as the Second World War began and she and Philby returned to England from Paris. Her daughter has trouble believing this story, however, as she wonders how, "während Philby noch zwanzig Jahre als sowjetischer Spion unentdeckt blieb," the KGB would have allowed her mother, who knew that her ex-husband was a spy, to simply carry on with her

⁴¹² Honigmann 24.

⁴¹³ Honigmann 24-25.

life.⁴¹⁴ The author-narrator implies that her mother must have continued to have a relationship or some sort of arrangement with the Soviet intelligence service, because it was simply unthinkable that the KGB would have trusted Litzy to not expose Kim Philby. Returning to the topic after her initial reference to the problem, Honigmann explains her thinking more fully:

Nach Ausbruch des Krieges war sie 1939 nach London zurückgekehrt. In unserem Gespräch sagte sie, daß damit ihre Beziehung zum sowjetischen Geheimdienst beendet gewesen sei, was sehr unwahrscheinlich klingt, denn gerade diese Jahre waren die Zeit des größten politischen Mißtrauens in der Sowjetunion, die Zeit der schlimmsten Verdächtigungen und erbarmungslosesten Prozesse, in denen noch der harmloseste Bürger zum Feind und gegnerischen Spion erklärt wurde. Und selbst wenn man ihn nicht sofort erschöß oder ins Lager deportierte, ließ man ihn doch nicht einfach laufen. Meine Mutter hat mir keine Erklärungen für diese Unwahrscheinlichkeit gegeben, wie sie sich mit all ihrem Wissen unverdächtig und ungeschoren aus der sowjetischen Geheimdienstwelt hatte verabschieden können. Ihr Schweigen darüber muß wohl mehr ein Ausdruck der Lüge als der Wahrheit gewesen sein.⁴¹⁵

It is easy to understand Honigmann's reasoning in this passage: Litzy claims to have walked away from her spy work and have been trusted to keep sensitive secrets during both World War Two and the first decades of the Cold War, even while Stalin, notorious for his

⁴¹⁴ Honigmann 63.

⁴¹⁵ Honigmann 78-9.

murderous paranoia, was leading the Soviet Union. On the one hand, it certainly seems unlikely that Litzy did not at least have an agreement with the KGB, but, on the other hand, it is also possible that the Soviets feared that attention would be drawn to Philby if anything were to happen to his ex-wife, or that Philby himself stipulated that Litzy be protected. While Honigmann points out the danger that her mother could have been in, she does not, at least in her text, entertain the idea that her mother could have had strategic use for the KGB without continuing to work for them. Above all, however, Honigmann's autobiographical alter ego is concerned with her mother's behavior towards her – in the last line of this passage, Honigmann insists that her mother must have been less than honest with her. There are many possible scenarios that could have occurred, but Litzy's version – that the KGB simply let her go – is the least plausible. More believable, for the author-narrator, is that her mother concealed the truth from her.

Honigmann reiterates this point – that her mother unabashedly refrained from sharing her experiences as a KGB operative with her – nearly every time she revisits this aspect of Litzy's past. This repetition creates an emotional picture: although Litzy makes verbal gestures towards opening up and invokes a conspiratorial tone (she travels to Strasbourg to finally tell her daughter “ihre Version [...] im Ton der Geheimhaltung und mit der strikten Anweisung, es nicht weiterzuerzählen, mit niemandem darüber zu sprechen,” and reminds her daughter “diese Mitteilung ist nur für Dich”), she never truly takes her daughter into confidence.⁴¹⁶ Litzy's revelations are restricted to setting a couple of points straight – she and Philby joined the KGB together in London; she did not lure him into the life of a spy in Vienna – but these are issues

⁴¹⁶ Honigmann 60, 78.

related to the public record. Privately, Lizzy shares little with her daughter that is not already public knowledge.

The impersonal nature of Lizzy's discussions of her past with her daughter is especially evident in the terms with which she explains to her daughter why she has finally decided to tell "her version" of the Philby episode. In this passage, Honigmann's narrator recalls that Lizzy did not come to have a conversation with her daughter per se, but rather "forderte mich [...] plötzlich auf, 'diese Geschichte' aufzuschreiben, 'dieses Kapitel aus meinem Leben' festzuhalten."⁴¹⁷ Now, twenty-five years after the author-narrator first learned of Kim Philby, when English journalists began to be interested in Lizzy's story and the daughter felt she knew as little as the reporters did, her mother seeks to literally put her in the position of a journalist. Lizzy even suggests that her daughter write an article about her and attempt to publish it in a prominent newspaper, perhaps in *The Times* or *The New York Times*. She points out that her daughter could even request payment for the story – "ein sehr hohes Honorar sogar."⁴¹⁸ By placing her daughter in the position of an interviewing journalist or a biographer, the mother seeks to use her daughter as a conduit through which she can access the public sphere while remaining in control of her story – she relies upon her daughter's familial allegiance to represent her as she wants to be seen.

With respect to Lizzy's KGB work during her time with Philby, Honigmann honors her mother's request. Indeed, as her narrator notes, she can do little else: because Lizzy was handled by the KGB, she had no Stasi file, and the KGB archives that would shed light on her mother's activities have not been made public. But *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* shows much more than the portrait of a former spy: that aspect of Lizzy's life provides the framework for the author's

⁴¹⁷ Honigmann 78.

⁴¹⁸ Honigmann 78.

engagement with her mother's life, but the full picture presented in the text is formed by the daughter's impressions of her mother. On the one hand, Honigmann honors her mother's desire for discretion and confidentiality by not engaging in research and interviews that would help her better understand Litzzy's place in history, her role in the rise of Communism in Europe. On the other hand, however, Honigmann freely integrates her own personal experiences with and ideas about her mother, which could very well amount to more public exposure than Litzzy's herself would have wished. Here Honigmann exerts her own prerogative as author, narrator, and daughter. As she acknowledges with some bitterness, she was excluded from much of her mother's life by design: in a 1988 letter, Litzzy warns her daughter that journalists have been seeking her out once more, and may also discover her daughter in Strasbourg, and entreats her, "nur zu sagen, daß Du zwar weißt, daß ich mit Kim einmal verheiratet war, aber sonst nichts darüber weißt, absolut nichts. Entspricht ja auch der Wahrheit."⁴¹⁹ At the beginning of her final chapter, Honigmann reiterates this idea: "Entspricht ja auch der Wahrheit. Daß ich nichts weiß, absolut nichts."⁴²⁰ When she narrates her mother's life, however, the author draws upon what she does know, which is how her mother was in her private life, among family and friends, in her letters and photographs. When Honigmann portrays her mother as more interested in beauty and comfort than in Communist society and class equality, then, she counters Litzzy's public image with her own daughterly perspective on her mother. The fact that the two versions of Litzzy – the Vienna revolutionary and the East Berlin "Gräfin" – seem to have little in common does not present a problem for Honigmann's portrait: Litzzy's life is characterized by break and

⁴¹⁹ Honigmann 137.

⁴²⁰ Honigmannm 138.

fragmentation, and Honigmann's text insists that this portrait of inconsistency is the most accurate representation of her mother that she can create.⁴²¹

Interpreting Maternal Complicity in Pawels Briefe and Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben

As we have seen, then, politics and politically-influenced decisions result in persistent tensions between generations in the Maron and Honigmann families, negatively affecting the personal mother-daughter relationship in a variety of ways. There is another tendency in Maron's and Honigmann's texts which runs counter to these narratives of conflict, however, whereby the author-narrators re-interpret the mother's political positions in a more favorable light. Although the mothers in both texts supported an oppressive Communist regime, both authors present a counternarrative to the mothers' own self-definition as Communists. In these new narratives, Maron and Honigmann challenge their mothers' political identities, seeking to undermine the steadfastness of their mothers' political convictions. In *Pawels Briefe*, the narrator ruminates on the element of chance at work at the major turning points of anyone's life, making pointed suggestions that her mother's life could easily have followed a different path. This existential assertion enables Maron to call her mother's agency and self-determination into question, suggesting that Hella's allegiance to Communism and the GDR resulted from naïveté, and was fundamentally in contradiction to her character and upbringing. Honigmann employs a similar strategy in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*: she casts doubt on her mother's politics by showing Litzy to demonstrate qualities and behaviors contrary to fundamental tenets of her professed Communism. She is characterized by her interest in aesthetics and appearance, her snobbery and her ability to garner privilege, rather than her class consciousness. In both cases, this

⁴²¹ Honigmann 126. "Frau Gräfin" was Litzy's nickname among her colleagues at the film dubbing studio in Berlin.

destabilization suggests that Hella's and Litzzy's allegiance to Communism represents a transgression against their families: their politically-motivated choices lead them away from the genealogical line with which their daughters seek to identify. At the same time, rhetorically undermining their mothers' political agency allows Maron and Honigmann to both reject the political ideology of their mothers *and* re-affirm a meaningful family identity.

In *Pawel's Briefe*, Maron uses two primary strategies to cast doubt on her mother Hella's political convictions. First, she examines Hella's path to becoming part of East Germany's ruling elite, questioning her mother's motivation and underlining the element of chance at work at several decisive junctures. To do so, she borrows sociologist Niklas Luhmann's notion of "Wendepunkte" that comprise each person's biography, points "an denen etwas geschehen ist, das nicht hätte geschehen müssen."⁴²² Maron's narrator marks several such turning points in her mother's political trajectory, always emphasizing that events could have turned out otherwise. For example, when Hella joins a Communist youth group, it is not out of conviction, but rather because she had been expelled from a Social Democrat youth group, who objected to Hella's membership in an orchestra that was also a Communist agit-prop group.⁴²³ In Maron's portrayal of this episode, her mother seems blissfully unaware of or uninterested in the political differences between the Communists and the Social Democrats, or, for that matter, of the political base for her orchestra group. For the narrator, this is a fateful turning point: had the Social Democrats been "großherziger," she imagines, "dann hätte sich Hella vielleicht irgendwann in einen von der SAJ verliebt ... Vielleicht hätte sie ihn sogar geheiratet."⁴²⁴ Had

⁴²² Maron 66.

⁴²³ Maron 72.

⁴²⁴ Maron 73.

this happened, the narrator muses, “alles, alles wäre anders gewesen.”⁴²⁵ In this passage, Maron suggests that it was not her mother’s political beliefs but rather a relatively incidental personal factor that determined the course of Hella’s life.

Another crucial turning point the author considers is her mother’s first encounter with her future husband Karl Maron in 1945. Once again, chance events seem to have dramatic consequences: Hella and her friend Lucie notice a small flyer announcing the founding of the new Berlin Magistrate in the Soviet-occupied zone; Lucie recognizes the signatories on the notice as acquaintances of hers from Moscow; the girls visit the office, which is in dire need of secretaries; Hella becomes Karl Maron’s secretary, and the two fall in love.⁴²⁶ The narrator views this as a string of coincidences that come to constitute “der folgenreichste Wendepunkt in Hella’s Leben.”⁴²⁷ Portraying Hella’s life as hinging upon a series of chance occurrences, Maron suggests that her mother’s path to Communism was driven by contingency and quirks of fate, rather than according to the progressive evolution of Hella’s political beliefs. Where Hella sees herself making choices at each point, Maron inserts a question mark, emphasizing coincidental or interpersonal factors rather than political ones.

The suggestion that the development of Hella’s Communism was not a result of her own intentionality is reinforced by Maron’s other strategy for undermining her mother’s conviction, which is to assert that Hella’s political beliefs result from naiveté and lack of self-knowledge. Over and over, her narrator insists that supporting the GDR fundamentally contradicts Hella’s upbringing and character. As in one passage discussed in the previous section, the narrator sees

⁴²⁵ Maron 73.

⁴²⁶ Maron 152-3.

⁴²⁷ Maron 154.

her mother's abiding loyalty not as a virtue, but rather as stubbornness and heartlessness. In a similar passage, she bemoans "Hella, die ich für ihre Lebensklugheit liebte und deren politische Ignoranz mich um so mehr empörte."⁴²⁸ The implication of these lines – namely, that Hella acts out of character when she chooses to associate herself with Communism - bolsters the narrator's assertion that her mother became a Communist by coincidence, not conviction.

Perhaps most illuminating is another passage quoted above, in which the narrator lists persecutions committed by the East German regime and wonders "Was hatten Pawels Töchter Hella and Marta unter solchen Leuten zu suchen?"⁴²⁹ Here, Hella's (and her sister Marta's) political associations, presented in their worst light as cruel and tyrannical, clash with both her upbringing and her own personal sensibilities. Hella's support for the GDR government and her willful ignorance of its methods are incongruous with how her daughter wants to see her – i.e., as Pawel's daughter, as the link connecting Maron herself to the ancestor with whom she has chosen to identify. Hella's political loyalty thus represents a betrayal of both herself and her family.

Like Maron, Honigmann portrays her mother Litzy's essential character as at odds with her Communism, as well as also suggesting that Litzy's supposedly politically motivated decisions in fact had more significant interpersonal qualities. As we saw earlier, in the introductory scene of *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* Litzy is characterized by her unruly, ever-changing hair. It is not only the nature of her hairstyle that is indicative of Litzy's nature, however, but her concern with appearances in general. During the East German "chapter" of Litzy's life, that is, during the period that Honigmann herself personally recalls, we see Litzy's

⁴²⁸ Maron 201.

⁴²⁹ Maron 154.

interests to be focused more on aesthetics than on politics – Honigmann depicts her mother’s Communism as a transitory interest, preceded by a Zionist phase and followed by an increasing concern with beauty and tastefulness. During her daughter’s lifetime, Communism seems to signify for Litzy only a system in which she enjoys privilege, as a consequence of her early connections with the KGB and her marriage to Kim Philby.

Although Honigmann’s narrator does not reflect directly upon the role of chance and contingency in determining the course of individual lives, as Maron does, there are many moments in Honigmann’s text in which social connections appear to drive Litzy’s political affiliations, similar to Maron’s suggestion that her mother was frequently motivated by personal interests. In a passage of *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* devoted to Litzy’s first introduction to Communism, we find several instances of both this stressing of the interpersonal over the political and Litzy’s characteristic vanity. For example, when the reader learns that Litzy’s first husband was a Zionist, Honigmann evokes the social-recreational context they would have shared: “Sie hatten sich sicher im Jugendverband von Blau-Weiß getroffen, mit dem die Chawerim zu Wanderungen und den Kanufahrten in den Wildbächen aufbrachen. Von ihnen hat sie mehr erzählt als von ihrem ersten Mann.”⁴³⁰ Directly following this, the narrator notes that it was a friend who first drew Litzy into Communist circles: in Vienna in the early 1930s, revolution and Zionism were in the air, as Honigmann’s narrator describes it, and “Mitzi wird [Litzy] wohl klargemacht haben, daß Palästina weit, die Kämpfe der Wiener Arbeiter and der Sieg von Gerechtigkeit, Wahrheit und Brüderlichkeit aber nahe seien.”⁴³¹ Politics comprised her social life at this time: the narrator recalls her mother musing that ““dieses halblegale Leben ist

⁴³⁰ Honigmann 56.

⁴³¹ Honigmann 56-7.

damals unsere ganz normale Lebensart gewesen [...] wir saßen einfach öfter in politischen Versammlungen als in Konzerten und gingen häufiger auf die Straße als ins Museum.”

After many meetings of Communists took place in Litzy’s apartment, she was arrested in 1933 and spent a few weeks in prison. As her daughter recalls the story, the most disconcerting aspect of this prison term wasn’t the loss of freedom, however, but the fact that there was no mirror in Litzy’s cell: “der Anblick des eigenen Gesichts habe ihr so sehr gefehlt, daß sie ihr Gesicht dann, wie Narziß in der Quelle, in der Kaffeetasse gesucht und, wenn auch undeutlich, gefunden habe.”⁴³² This concern with appearances is not restricted to Litzy’s own physical appearance, but also how she views others. She shows particular disdain for her East German Communist compatriots, lamenting with her friend their “Stillosigkeit und Geschmacklosigkeit,” their “Häßlichkeit, Plumpheit und Peinlichkeit.”⁴³³ Later, Litzy’s aesthetic priorities come to dominate over her politics altogether. The narrator recalls sessions in which Litzy designed and sewed clothing for her daughter as one of the few early moments in which Litzy stopped talking about politics and “war ganz und gar ihren ästhetischen Aufbrüchen hingegeben.”⁴³⁴ Honigmann’s narrator insists upon this competitive relationship between aesthetics and politics to the extent of almost belaboring the point. At the end of an anecdote detailing Litzy’s patronage of the East German artist Roger Loewig, imprisoned in the GDR for his regime-critical painting, the narrator concludes that, “schon zu dieser Zeit begannen also ihre ästhetischen Prinzipien die politischen zu überwiegen.”⁴³⁵ Thus at a variety of points, both in the

⁴³² Honigmann 57.

⁴³³ Honigmann 36.

⁴³⁴ Honigmann 39.

⁴³⁵ Honigmann 42.

context of central episodes in Litzy's development as a Communist and in regard to her private life, Honigmann weaves in this red thread of Litzy's artistic sense, implying that it, rather than her political sympathies, is the more enduring.

As is already evident, Litzy's aesthetic concerns have a distinct upper-class, snobbish tone. Beyond her love of beauty and style, which Honigmann casts as stronger than her mother's political convictions, Litzy's retention of a feeling of entitlement contradicts the Communist focus on equality and the working class. Litzy's sense of entitlement and superiority are rooted in both her cultured Viennese upbringing and her connections to higher-ups in the KGB, who represented a kind of Marxist upper class for her, in contrast to the petty bourgeois East Germans. The narrator often notes that, though they lived in East European Communist states, her parents' friends had all been members of the upper class, and the irony of their de facto re-establishment of this grouping does not escape her: "Alle die ehemaligen Partisanen, Flüchtlinge und KZ-Überlebenden, aus denen der Freundeskreis meiner Mutter ausschließlich bestand, stammten aus gutbürgerlichen Familien, einem Milieu, in dem sie sich vor vielen Jahren, in ihrer Jugend, oft in dramatischen Gesten davon losgesagt hatten."⁴³⁶ Rather than focusing on the sacrifice and struggle which surely also bound these individuals together, Honigmann emphasizes the persistence of the bourgeois milieu within the Communist society. Furthermore, Honigmann also frequently depicts her mother utilizing the privileged position afforded by her earlier work for the KGB. The visas and travel permits for her regular trips with her daughter to Vienna were secured through Litzy's connections, with the help of an official letter of invitation from the chairman of the Communist Party of Austria, who had been in Soviet exile together

⁴³⁶ Honigmann 35.

with his German counterparts during the Nazi era.⁴³⁷ Travelling from Paris to Berlin after the war, Litzy recalls being swept through customs by the Russians, and that she “mußte auch nicht in die Quarantäne wie die Sudetendeutschen.”⁴³⁸ Even her official recognition as a *Verfolgte des Naziregimes* was in doubt (having never lived in Nazi Germany nor in a Nazi-occupied country, her eligibility was in question); she only acquired it after making her special status clear to the organization’s administrators. In her daughter’s experience and assessment, then, Litzy was interested in the privilege her political connections afforded her, rather than in continuing her political work or adhering to the tenets of her professed Communist ideology.

Similar to the dynamic we see in the *Väterliteratur* texts, the sympathies between the mother and the Communist regime that Maron and Honigmann explore raise the question of complicity, of the individual thus bearing some part of the responsibility for crimes committed by that regime. In contrast to the earlier model of treating fathers (and/or their parents’ generation collectively) as representatives of the Nazi regime and thus condemning them, Maron and Honigmann do not hold their mothers categorically or symbolically responsible for crimes committed by the GDR. Instead, they dispute their mothers’ ostensibly steadfast political convictions, challenging their claims to self-determination. When we look closely at this pattern in each text, we see an irreconcilable tension between family and politics emerge, and we see each author’s insistent efforts to rhetorically detach her mother from her chosen political allegiance and claim her instead, albeit ambivalently, for the author-narrator’s own conception of her genealogy.

⁴³⁷ Honigmann 54.

⁴³⁸ Honigmann 118.

In re-conceiving the mother's biography, both authors are to a certain degree presenting interpretations in light of the mother's decreased support for the GDR government later in her life. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Maron's mother admits that, despite her continued belief in Communism, the GDR had been a disappointment: "du weißt ja, sagt Hella, daß ich die DDR, wie sie am Ende war, wirklich nicht mehr gewollt habe."⁴³⁹ Similarly, during the 1980s Barbara Honigmann's mother shifted from being a "Genossin der Betriebs-Parteileitung" in the film studio where she worked to being an "einfache Genossin," and, as more discontent GDR citizens came to work at the studio, Litzzy "sympathisierte ... mehr und mehr mit diesen vorsichtigen Verweigerern..."⁴⁴⁰ And of course, Litzzy Honigmann emigrated from the GDR to Vienna several years before the Communist state fell, relinquishing her East German citizenship in order to have her Austrian citizenship restored, disavowing the GDR in deed if not in word. Yet, although both Maron and Honigmann construct a new narrative about the mother that fits with her attitude towards the GDR at the end of her life, these portrayals are best understood as responding to other lingering questions about the mother's life. Maron's and Honigmann's family memory projects are both animated to a significant degree by the irreconcilability of their personal – and generally, if ambivalently, positive – impressions of their mothers and the knowledge of their mothers' support for the repressive Communist governments of Cold War Europe.

IV. Family History as Public Intervention: Forgetting and Omission

As I have shown in the previous sections, while Maron's grandfather and Honigmann's father are represented as caring and devoted to their families, the authors' mothers are the

⁴³⁹ Maron 204.

⁴⁴⁰ Honigmann 127.

primary problematic figures in these texts. This is not only due to the break in communicative family memory for which they are made responsible, but also as a result of their political convictions. Whereas in *Väterliteratur* the father was represented the political system within the family, in these texts it is the authors' mothers who represent the political system and accordingly the authors' rebellion against Communism is to a degree directed against the mother. In both cases, however, there is another male figure in the family who is even more strongly associated with the Communist state. Both Hella Maron and Litzzy Honigmann were members of elite GDR society, and for both this status is connected to their marriages. The public sphere is especially significant for these texts, as both families include public figures. It is unusual for the *Generationenromane* genre, and is a complicating factor that the two authors respond to in different ways, making very different interventions into public discourse through their texts.

Victims and Accomplices: Pawels Briefe

The significance of political and personal aspects of Maron's text has been a point of disagreement among literary scholars. This discussion has primarily been focused on the author's representation of her mother as the agent of rupture in their family history, as critics debate the degree to which Hella Maron is a metonymic signifier for the East German state; some take this view, while others point to elements of Maron's text which complicate the metonymic picture. A brief consideration of these arguments illustrates the difficulty of summarizing the multiple meanings of the intersection of personal and political aspects of Maron's family narrative. First, critic J.J. Long characterizes Maron's critical stance toward her mother's apparent disconnection from her pre-1945 life as primarily motivated by Maron's desire to position herself vis-à-vis the

East German state, which is, in Long's words, "metonymically represented by Hella."⁴⁴¹ When Maron's narrator questions her mother's choices, in this view, it is in order to distance the author-narrator from the political system in which she was raised. Making a similar assertion, Stuart Taberner also sees Hella as a metonymical figure, but here the relationship is inverted: for Taberner, the author-narrator's self-representation as aggrieved daughter is primary, and *Pawels Briefe* is the result of Maron's realization that her anger at the GDR "provided a convenient means of prosecuting her antagonism towards her mother."⁴⁴² In this argument, then, the critical perspective towards the GDR itself that Maron's narrator adopts is actually a screen for her personal feelings, and not the political objection it might seem.

Both Long and Taberner see evidence for Hella's representative status particularly in Maron's treatment of Hella's response to the end of World War Two and the advent of the GDR. As I have already noted, Hella refers to 1945 as her "Wiedergeburt," which the author-narrator transforms into a "Wiedergeburt ohne Eltern," wondering, "mußten nicht nur die Täter, sondern auch die Opfer ihre Trauer verdrängen, um weiterzuleben?"⁴⁴³ Hella's daughter, for whom the "New Germany" would become an adversary, views the former's re-birth through a lens of loss, as Hella's focus on her new life led her to forget many details of her family's experiences of suffering the Nazi era, and also to not impart fundamental aspects of Pawel's and Josefa's lives

⁴⁴¹ J.J. Long, "Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*: Photography, Narrative, and the Claims of Postmemory," *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, Georg Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006) 160.

⁴⁴² Stuart Taberner, "'Ob es sich bei diesem Experiment um eine gescheiterte Utopie oder um ein Verbrechen gehandelt hat': Enlightenment, Utopia, the GDR and National Socialism in Monika Maron's Work from *Flugasche* to *Pawels Briefe*," *Textual Responses to German Unification: Processing Historical and Social Change in Literature and Film*, ed. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, Kristie A. Foell (Berlin - New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001) 56.

⁴⁴³ Maron 113.

to her daughter. In Hella's forgetting we can recognize an individual instance of the GDR's institutionalized forgetting of the Nazi era and the specificity of Jewish suffering (subsumed here under the category of victims of fascism), and Long's and Taberner's arguments point to such a reading.⁴⁴⁴

What is at stake for Maron in her attack on the GDR and her mother's allegiance to the Communist state, Long and Taberner rightly point out, is Maron's own public image: *Pawels Briefe* is at least in part a response to media attempts to portray Maron herself as a Stasi collaborator. In 1995, a series of articles in *Der Spiegel* revealed that Maron had filed reports as an *informelle Mitarbeiterin* before leaving the GDR in 1988. In *Pawels Briefe*, Maron discusses her interactions with the Stasi as well as the subsequent media attention to the discovery of her Stasi file. She recalls her meetings with a Stasi official as misguided and essentially opportunistic – she was primarily interested in special travel privileges. Furthermore, the author-narrator portrays the two reports she wrote for the Stasi as indicative of her own naiveté: she was honest in her writing, giving her mother cause for alarm, fearing her daughter was too free with her criticism of the GDR in the reports, while Maron herself “hielt es für unmöglich, daß man mich für die Wahrheit verhaften könnte, wenn man sie ausdrücklich von mir verlangt hatte.”⁴⁴⁵

More problematic for the author-narrator is the allegation that, as part of her Stasi reports, she had denounced a close friend. She has no recollection of such a report and insists she cannot

⁴⁴⁴ Many historians have examined the Jewish experience and the memory of the Shoah in East Germany. See, for example: Dan Diner, “On the Ideology of Antifascism,” *New German Critique* 67 (1996): 123-132; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); and Thomas C. Fox, *Stated Memory: East Germany and the Holocaust* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999).

⁴⁴⁵ Maron 197-8. In her essay collection *quer über die Gleise*, published one year after *Pawels Briefe*, Maron included the two reports she wrote for the Stasi in 1976; both indeed contain largely trivial material that tends towards criticism of the GDR.

imagine having written it, and turns to her mother (who purportedly has “ein ungewöhnlich gutes Gedächtnis” for events which fall outside of the Nazi era) for confirmation that her own memory is correct.⁴⁴⁶ Hella assures her daughter that she wrote no such report, and the issue is dropped. By addressing these topics, *Pawels Briefe* itself thus intervenes in the public discourse about Maron’s actions in the GDR, and Long and Taberner read this as an attempt to exculpate herself from the accusation of having acted as informant. Further, her identification with her Jewish grandfather is seen as an attempt to legitimize this undertaking.⁴⁴⁷ Long describes *Pawels Briefe* as “obsessed with such self-legitimation,” and argues that “both the photographic and narrative discourses of *Pawels Briefe* are organized in such a way as to consolidate Maron’s ideological position while devaluing that of her mother.”⁴⁴⁸ Taberner argues that Maron “simply invents a new myth of victimhood, with herself at the center.”⁴⁴⁹

Other critics read *Pawels Briefe* differently, however, focusing on the status of memory in the text as a counterweight to the metonymical potential of Maron’s depiction of her mother. Friederike Eigler and Caroline Schaumann, for example, both argue that *Pawels Briefe* presents a nuanced perspective on memory and forgetting, each rejecting the claim that Hella is primarily a stand-in for the GDR. For Eigler, memory and forgetting are not opposites in *Pawels Briefe*; on the contrary, forgetting, in its various dimensions, constitutes “die andere Seite des Erinnerns.”⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore, she argues that Maron distinguishes “zwischen Hella’s Vergessen und dem

⁴⁴⁶ Maron 17.

⁴⁴⁷ See Long. “Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe*,” 159-161; Taberner, “Ob es sich ...” 48-49.

⁴⁴⁸ Long 160, 159.

⁴⁴⁹ Taberner 56.

⁴⁵⁰ Eigler, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, 169.

gesellschaftlichen Rahmen, der dieses Vergessen förderte,” and that the GDR is in fact represented by Karl Maron, who is almost entirely written out of the author’s family history.⁴⁵¹ Similarly, Schaumann sees in *Pawels Briefe* the necessity of both memory and forgetting, asserting that the narrator is far more ambivalent, self-reflexive, and self-doubting than other critics maintain.⁴⁵² Schaumann points out that Maron distinguishes between the GDR’s suppression of memories of Jewish suffering, Pawel’s own reticence to discuss his traditional Jewish past, Hella’s forgetting and also the author-narrator’s own shaky memory. Although Schaumann disagrees with Long’s assertion that *Pawels Briefe* as a whole can be understood as a response to Maron’s “Stasi affair,” she does allow that Hella’s forgetting is “neither coincidental nor merely personal but exemplifies and manifests East German approaches to the Nazi past.”⁴⁵³ However, Schaumann goes on to note that it was Pawel himself who began the tradition of silencing the family’s past, so that when Hella fails to preserve his memory she is in fact following Pawel’s lead.⁴⁵⁴ For Eigler and Schaumann, then, the complexity of Maron’s portrayal of forgetting precludes viewing Hella as simply a representative of the East German state, viewing her forgetting as damning evidence of her moral corruption, or reducing Maron’s attack on her mother to a defensive move.

On the one hand, I agree with Eigler’s and Schaumann’s argument that Maron’s nuanced depiction of memory and forgetting challenges metonymic readings of the relationship between the political and the private in *Pawels Briefe*. On the other hand, however, it is also important to

⁴⁵¹ Eigler 174, 172.

⁴⁵² Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, 268, 264-5.

⁴⁵³ Schaumann 267.

⁴⁵⁴ Schaumann 268-9.

acknowledge the self-legitimizing aspect of *Pawels Briefe* which Long and Taberner address, as well as the fact that the publishing of the book itself intervenes in public discussions. Maron does acknowledge the necessity of forgetting in some situations (for example, in order to imagine the everyday life of her grandparents, she must forget “wie sie gestorben sind”), and her entire project attests to the constructed nature of memory.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, Maron underscores the personal, familial and the political aspects of Hella’s forgetting without reducing this to a simple metonymic relationship. Instead, she acknowledges that individual occurrences have multiple layers of significance. This is evident in her reflections on the immediate post-war period, during which Hella claims to have experienced her “Wiedergeburt”:

“Jeder hatte seine Toten, Söhne, Väter, Männer, Freunde. Regierten die einfachen Sätze: Das Leben muß weitergehen; das macht die Toten nicht wieder lebendig? Und später, als das Leben längst weitergegangen war, als die Zeitungen ‘Neues Leben,’ ‘Neuer Weg,’ ‘Neue Zeit’ und ‘Neues Deutschland’ hießen, [...] wurde da auch die eigene Vergangenheit unwichtig?”⁴⁵⁶

In this passage, Hella’s forgetting is portrayed in the first place as a personal matter, a survival strategy shared by many and supported through comforting sayings repeated by fellow sufferers; only “later” does this forgetting take on a political significance. Furthermore, the implication here is that the GDR’s focus on the collective encourages the forgetting of personal experience, not that this forgetting represents the repression of the Holocaust. As we have seen in the previous section, it is precisely Hella’s ostensible willingness to allow her personal perspective to be subsumed under the larger Communist project that is problematic for her daughter, which is something different than portraying the private sphere as a microcosm of the

⁴⁵⁵ Maron 23.

⁴⁵⁶ Maron 114.

political sphere. Although Maron is clearly concerned with answering critics who accuse her of participating in the surveillance mechanisms of the Stasi, *Pawels Briefe* cannot be reduced to Maron's "desire to reaffirm her victim status and her political identity."⁴⁵⁷

At the same time, the fact that Maron's text is more than an artifact of a desire to publicly claim a victim status through her grandfather's legacy of suffering under the Nazi regime (i.e., the fact that the text, like most interesting literary works, is complex and multi-faceted) should not blind us to the significance and consequences of this victim narrative in *Pawels Briefe*. For example, one glaring omission that results from the author-narrator's effort to position herself within a narrative of victimhood is the role of her stepfather Karl Maron in her family history. If we take our cue from the author-narrator's own suggestion that personal and political factors are inextricably connected, a close look at her description of the conflict with her mother raises important questions about Maron's own self-representation.

Although the author-narrator characterizes her quarrel with her mother as reflective of their politics, her actual description of the original event suggests something different – the problem is not, or not only, that Maron has entered the public sphere as a dissenting voice from the GDR, but rather that she is portrayed as "Karl Marons Stieftochter." Indeed, the near-complete absence of the author's stepfather from the text is perplexing and calls for closer consideration. Although he was a significant public figure in the GDR and a major personal presence in the author's life, by virtue of his thirty-year relationship with her mother, from 1945 to his death in 1975, Karl Maron makes almost no appearance in *Pawels Briefe*. A handful of statements indicate that Karl was a negative figure in the author's life, especially in her

⁴⁵⁷ Long 160.

discussion of his death, which she “wirklich als Befreiung erlebte.”⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, at no point in the text does the author include a description of her stepfather, nor does she include any memory in which he is present.

Indeed, it is only in his death that Karl Maron seems to make a positive contribution to the biographical narrative presented in *Pawels Briefe*: with money she inherited from Karl, the author was able to spend a year writing her first novel free of financial concerns. While doing so, she “schlief in dem Zimmer, in dem Karl gestorben war, und jeden Abend vor dem Einschlafen gab ich mich dem niedrigen Triumph der Überlebenden hin. Ich schämte mich und triumphierte trotzdem.”⁴⁵⁹ In the absence of any other representations of the relationship between the author and her stepfather, her triumphant and liberated feeling at his death (which she is willing to acknowledge despite some feeling of shame at its macabre nature), points to a strong dislike while also implying that he was an important figure in her life, if in a negative way – certainly more important than his near-omission in her text reflects. Effectively banishing Karl Maron from *Pawels Briefe* helps conceal what may be a quite uncomfortable fact for the author – that her stepfather’s money allowed her to begin her career as a writer.

The problematic nature of Karl Maron for the author’s autobiographical project becomes clearer when we consider who he was in the GDR: Interior Minister under Walter Ulbricht, and hence one of the top officials responsible for the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. A lifelong Communist and powerful GDR politician, Karl Maron would have been politically at odds with his stepdaughter, who, as we have seen, distanced herself from Communism from an early age. At the same time, she would have enjoyed a level of privilege and comfort available to

⁴⁵⁸ Maron 193.

⁴⁵⁹ Maron 194.

very few in East Germany; certainly her family connection to Karl Maron protected her from reprisals after *Flugasche* was published in West Germany. Although the author includes in her text her feelings of rage and despair when a West German television show host portrays her as “was ich mein Leben lang am wenigsten sein wollte: Karl Marons Stieftochter,” the troubling matter of the author’s surname remains. It would not have been difficult for her to publish her novel under a pseudonym; she could have adopted her mother’s maiden name (which was her own surname before her mother married Maron) or her biological father’s name. The choice to publish her novel under the Maron family name instead can be interpreted in a number of ways: as an unacknowledged desire for the notoriety it would bring; as a desire to link her novel publicly to her earlier journalistic work in the GDR (particularly her reportage for the “Wochenpost” on environmental problems in Bitterfeld, the subject of *Flugasche*); or perhaps even as an effort to take advantage of the protection from retaliation in the GDR that she expected the name to afford her. Because she does not reflect upon this decision in *Pawels Briefe*, however, questions of opportunism and entitlement linger in the air in the author’s representation of her stepfather. It is clear from the author’s self-representation that she and her stepfather disagreed politically, but the personal privilege the connection afforded her complicates the picture, implying that the author excluded her stepfather from her text because the privileged position his government role afforded her does not fit with the victim identity with which she seeks to associate herself via her grandfather’s life story.

Another consequence of Maron’s self-positioning within a legacy of victimhood concerns her depiction of her mother’s forgetting. A significant aspect of Hella’s forgetting in *Pawels Briefe* that has received less attention than it calls for is the fact that, as much as her break with the past may be consistent with GDR public memory culture, it is also consistent with traumatic

experience. When Maron, in the above-cited passage, draws a parallel between her mother's professed "Wiedergeburt" and the GDR propensity to invoke historical rupture in its self-representation, she encourages us to view Hella within the context of the GDR faithful, not as the half-Jewish Communist struggling to remain safe that Hella had been during the Nazi era. The extent of Hella's own forgetting points to something more than her breezy claim that "wir haben immer so nach vorn gelebt": not only has she forgotten her own shockingly unsympathetic letter to her father after her mother's death, but she has also forgotten any experience of hardship or suffering, as well as the fact that her then-boyfriend Walter, the father of her daughter Monika, had received the Iron Cross during the war.⁴⁶⁰ Letters Hella wrote during the period and the recollections of friends, who recall Hella and her siblings being barred from entering their building's bomb shelter – "wie es die Rassengesetze vorschrieben" – attest to what must have been a terrifying and disorienting time in the young woman's life.⁴⁶¹

Neither Maron's narrator nor many literary scholars who examine *Pawels Briefe* acknowledge the traumatic element in Hella's forgetting, despite the fact that the forgetting of details and experiences is a defining aspect of psychological trauma. Hella's surprising claim to have remained lighthearted and cheerful during the Nazi era is also consistent with Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is marked by "an inherent latency within the experience itself" and "that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all."⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ Maron 114.

⁴⁶¹ Maron 119. Luckily, an Iglarz family friend later became *Luftschutzwart* for their apartment building, and saw to it that they were allowed in the shelter.

⁴⁶² Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," *Trauma. Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 7-8.

According to this theory, Hella could have simultaneously experienced and forgotten her anxiety, fear, and sadness during the Nazi era.

One of the few to view Hella's forgetting as an indicator of trauma is Friederike Eigler, who marks Hella's style of forgetting, which blocks off periods in which her life was threatened, as consistent with the pattern of traumatic memory.⁴⁶³ While readers can identify Hella's experiences during the Nazi period as traumatic, however, Maron opts not to take this view in her representation of her mother. Instead, the author-narrator depicts her mother's life and choices after 1945 as resulting from a certain naiveté and a strong element of chance, rather than as a process of recovery after a devastating traumatic experience. As we have seen in her genealogical self-positioning, a victim identity is attributed to Maron herself and to her grandfather, and the two of them are defined in contrast to Hella; it appears that a narrative of trauma in Hella's life does not fit with the family portrait Maron seeks to construct. In the first pages of the text, the author-narrator asserts that her grandparents "vererbten mir mit ihrem Tod die Geborgenheit der Unschuld."⁴⁶⁴ No mention is made here of Hella, the author's genealogical connection to Pawel and Josefa; innocence, like victimhood, appears in this family to skip a generation.

Summing up the intervention into public discourse that Maron seeks to make with *Pawels Briefe* is thus not a simple matter. On the one hand, her effort to restore the specificity of her grandfather's experience and his self-understanding to her family's communicative memory is commendable and represents a positive contribution to our understanding of the personal legacy of twentieth-century German history. On the other hand, however, this narrative clashes uneasily

⁴⁶³ Eigler, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, 171.

⁴⁶⁴ Maron 8.

with Maron's attempt to navigate the murky moral terrain of her own, however brief, cooperation with the Stasi and her privileged position within the GDR as the stepdaughter of a high-ranking member of government. There is no reason why an individual cannot have family connections to both Jewish victims of Nazism and the repressive East German elite, and it is also conceivable that such an individual would experiment with the opportunities that the latter connection offered, as politically abhorrent as the GDR was to her. But Maron's own portrayal of these aspects of her life sets up a disturbing calculus in which she implies that the victim identity she "inherits" from her grandparents cancels out the possibility of an "informant" identity. In this context, her tendency to identify with her grandfather's persecution appears as a misguided attempt to construct for herself a public identity that is incompatible with the "informant" identity that was thrust upon her in the media. And this urge leads to narrative decisions that have negative effects on the cohesion of the text: readers are left to wonder about her stepfather's role in her and her mother's lives, as well as the trauma her mother seems to have suffered during the Nazi era. Because Maron's text implies a dichotomy in which one can either be a victim or a complicit abettor, the author compels herself to inscribe blind spots into her own family memory.

The Spy Left on the Shelf: Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben

Barbara Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* has not aroused the kind of critical disagreement that Maron's text has, and this reflects the different kind of intervention in public discourse represented by Honigmann's text, as well as a difference in the role of forgetting in her family narrative. It is not only Litzy's life decisions, the choices she made as she followed her Communist beliefs, that create a rupture in family history, but also Litzy's propensity to forget

details about her life, especially dates, as well as her reticence to speak about certain topics. Although Litzy's biography is particularly interesting because of her connection to one of the most famous spies of the twentieth century, Honigmann's text contributes little to the existing knowledge about Kim Philby or the historical period in which he was married to her mother. The text is not designed to make a significant intervention in public discourse about the history of European Communism; the author-narrator does not engage in research outside of familial sources to learn more about her mother than the latter was willing to reveal. Instead, the text reflects its subjects' own private interests and experiences: it preserves Litzy's secrets, but also represents Honigmann's own experience as a daughter – she knew little more than the journalists and other friends and family knew about her mother's past, and found her mother just as befuddling as everyone else did. By weaving her own lack of knowledge into the fabric of her text, Honigmann makes a rhetorical gesture of respecting her mother's desire for discretion. But the author's decision to publish her own memories of her mother comprises a different gesture: just as she yields to her mother's right to control knowledge of her life story, the author-narrator invokes her own right to do as she pleases with her experiences.

There are passages in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* in which Litzy claims to simply have forgotten details about her past, and there are others in which she appears to be withholding information. It is frequently the case that the significance of Litzy's forgetting and secrecy is unclear, and whether her claims to forgetting are genuine – a person divorced three times may be forgiven for no longer knowing in what years she was divorced, but can a person really forget their own birth date, as Litzy claims to have done? The opening scene of Honigmann's text is a vivid illustration of this conundrum:

Es war grausam, Ethel und Julius Rosenberg hinzurichten, aber unschuldig waren sie nicht,” sagte meine Mutter, während sie vor dem Spiegel ihre wilde Frisur in irgendeine Ordnung zu bringen versuchte; und obwohl das, was sie da sagte, im Gegensatz zu allem stand, was ich um mich herum hörte, was sie in der Schule lehrten und wie es sonst überliefert wurde, ließ meine Mutter gar keinen Zweifel daran, daß sie es besser wusste, und deswegen fragte ich auch nicht nach. Statt dessen fragte ich sie nach ihrer ursprünglichen Haarfarbe, weil sie sich, soweit ich überhaupt zurückdenken kann, die Haare färbte, natürlich nur in dunklen Tönen, denn sie war ja ein ‘dunkler Typ’, in diesen Tönen allerdings schöpfte sie das ganze Spektrum von Dunkelblond bis Tiefschwarz über Rostbraun und Feuerrot voll aus. Sie antwortete mir, das weiß ich nicht mehr, ich hab’s wirklich vergessen.⁴⁶⁵

With this passage, Honigmann opens her text with questions of family and politics – this intimate domestic scene between mother and daughter, in which Litzzy says something inscrutable connecting her (equally intimately, it seems) to a world of espionage and high treason. The narrator, from her young perspective, simply does not know what to do with the implications of Litzzy’s off-hand comment or its contradiction of all the other information available to her. Moving the conversation in another direction, the daughter runs into a similar dead end – her mother inspires all sorts of questions, but provides no answers. Like her unruly, ever-changing hair, her essential nature is ultimately unascertainable. This juxtaposition of Litzzy’s forgetting of something trivial (the color of her hair) and her sophisticated way of

⁴⁶⁵ Honigmann 5.

simultaneously revealing and concealing something that seems very significant captures the overall character portrait Honigmann paints of her mother in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*. While creating an impression of openness and candor, Litzy achieves in fact the opposite, only revealing that she has something to conceal.

Throughout the text, the author-narrator presents herself as possessing no more knowledge or insight into her mother's past and her character than others have. When journalists seek information about Litzy's life with Kim Philby, the narrator asserts that "wir waren ungefähr auf demselben Wissensstand, die englischen Journalisten und ich, meine Quellen und ihre waren die Nachrichten, die nun aus Moskau und Großbritannien und von da in die restliche Welt gedrungen waren."⁴⁶⁶ Similarly, the author-narrator recalls that her mother's romantic partners often looked to her, the daughter, for a better understanding of Litzy's "chaotische Lebensart," but the daughter felt herself just as excluded from Litzy's inner world as those around her.⁴⁶⁷

Although Honigmann describes feeling "vor die Tür gesetzt" by her mother's evasive conversational skills ("sie stellte immer viele Fragen, aber Antworten gab sie nie"), as an author and narrator she preserves this distance in her writing about her mother.⁴⁶⁸ Honigmann points rhetorically to questions about her mother's past, as in the opening scene, and also, on occasion, states her questions directly. But she does not seek answers beyond what she recalls from her own experience; she acknowledges that she could have undertaken research to find out what all her mother had done as a KGB agent, but decides that this would amount to "Nachspionieren,"

⁴⁶⁶ Honigmann 24.

⁴⁶⁷ Honigmann 91.

⁴⁶⁸ Honigmann 13.

and an appropriation of her mother's past.⁴⁶⁹ Although such work would conceivably have enabled Honigmann to piece back together "die Bruchstücke ihres Lebens," she states simply: "ich hätte es tun können, aber ich habe es nicht getan."⁴⁷⁰ Rather than supplement her narrative with interviews, archival information, and research trips, Honigmann presents her mother as she knew her, with no more knowledge about her mother's past than Litzy was willing to communicate herself. As the literary critic Hajo Steinert argues, "einzig in den Erinnerungen der Tochter an die Mutter liegt die Chance der Authentizität des Porträts."⁴⁷¹

Caroline Schaumann, one of the few literary scholars to have studied Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, reads the author-narrator's representation of Litzy's secrecy as evidence of a mix of emotions and needs vis-à-vis the mother. In light of Litzy's contradictions and concealments, Schaumann argues, Honigmann's text portrays a "profound loss of knowledge that cannot be recuperated."⁴⁷² Schaumann also suggests that, in response to this feeling of loss, "Honigmann feels the need to be as honest and objective as possible, foregoing additional fictionalization" in her text.⁴⁷³ The author-narrator's frank tone is, for Schaumann, also an indication that she has "surrendered" to her mother's uncertainties, giving in to Litzy's desire to leave some parts of her life in shadow.⁴⁷⁴ In Schaumann's view, then, Honigmann's text is

⁴⁶⁹ Honigmann 141.

⁴⁷⁰ Honigmann 141.

⁴⁷¹ Hajo Steinert, "'So nah wie möglich an der Wahrheit zu lügen': Barbara Honigmanns autobiographisches Schreiben," *Ethik der Literatur*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler and Jennifer Kapczinski (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011) 235.

⁴⁷² Schaumann, *Memory Matters*, 190.

⁴⁷³ Schaumann 190.

⁴⁷⁴ Schaumann 190.

shaped by unresolved tensions between mother and daughter, and the text allows the author-narrator to counteract some of her mother's secrecy with her own forthright narrative style.

While Schaumann rightly contrasts Honigmann's frank tone with her mother's secrecy and recognizes the sense of loss with which the author-narrator depicts her mother's break with family history, I disagree with the amount of tension that she attributes to the mother-daughter relationship in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*. In my reading, Honigmann's narrative voice, which remains almost uniformly with her adult perspective, lacks the emotional immediacy that would suggest ongoing conflict or an attitude of surrender. A useful example here is the chapter of the text which begins with Litzzy's visit to her daughter's studio in Strasbourg, where she has finally come to talk about the "chapter" of her life when she was married to Philby. In the beginning of the chapter, the author-narrator relates the first part of her conversation with her mother, including the direct citation of a piece of dialogue in which the daughter is both shocked and exasperated at her mother's claim to have forgotten the dates of her divorces:

“Ich bin von Kim, glaube ich, 1942 geschieden worden oder 1944 oder 45, aber vielleicht war es auch 1946. Ich weiß auch nicht mehr, in welchem Jahr wir uns zuletzt gesehen haben.”

“Aber Mutti, du mußt dich doch erinnern können, wann deine Scheidung mit Kim war!”

“Ich kann mich auch nicht mehr erinnern, wann die Scheidung von deinem Vater war.”

“Mutti, bitte, du mußt dich an irgend etwas erinnern können!”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁵ Honigmann 113-4.

Although this chapter begins with Litzzy's announcement that she has come to tell her story, it actually flows associatively through a variety of subjects, beginning with a discussion of Litzzy's problem with the nickname "Mutti," and, continuing with a discussion of Honigmann's parents' Communist connections in the GDR. We learn that her father joined the Communist Party while a journalist in England, and, with his journalistic training, was instrumental in organizing press and propaganda offices in the new East German state. From here, Honigmann goes on to tell of her mother's early work with her husband in the propaganda service, and subsequently for culture programs at the DEFA. The chapter, which opened with the daughter's frustration with her mother's forgetful and inexact storytelling, closes with an image of distance between mother and daughter. Now a college student, the daughter expresses a desire to live independently, and before she knows it, the two of them are living on opposite sides of their Berlin-Friedrichshain neighborhood. In this chapter, we see Honigmann's strategy of portraying her emotional reactions to her mother's complicated nature from a distanced point of view – here quoted from a conversation that had taken place several years earlier. Further, the author-narrator seems to adopt some of her mother's conversational style, weaving through different topics and time periods associatively, moving away from the issue of her mother's KGB past over the course of the chapter. The final lines of the chapter return in a new way to the theme of the opening passage: the distance, be it personal or geographical, between mother and daughter.⁴⁷⁶

In this chapter, Litzzy's eccentricities become part of the formal structure of the text, and the distance that the mother's bewildering, forgetful character creates between herself and others is rendered symbolically in the Friedrichshain park they must traverse in order to connect. We

⁴⁷⁶ On the significance of geographical locations for mother and daughter, see Petra S. Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken: Eine Analyse von Barbara Honigmanns Prosawerk*, (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2008) 175-178.

can thus locate in the text a kind of rhetorical tribute to the lack of cohesion in Litzy's life – far from surrendering to the her mother's contradictions and inconsistencies, the author-narrator embraces them, not in sense of celebrating rupture, but in that she preserves her mother's secrets and diversions in her text as a gesture of respect for Litzy's desire for discretion. As she states in the above-quoted passage, the author-narrator chose to not investigate beyond what little her mother and others told her. Accordingly, the reader never learns whether Litzy's birth date is really the first or second of May, nor the dates of her divorces, although this information must have been accessible to the author, at the very least in the documents she inherited after her mother's death. Instead, the portrait Honigmann paints of Litzy maintains a nebulous quality that approximates the author-narrator's own experience of her mother, as if a fractured and shadowy picture is the most accurate representation of Litzy's life.

In contrast to Maron, then, Honigmann ultimately adheres primarily to private exigencies in her narrative portrait of her family. She does not have need to confront her public image as Maron does, and, in the absence of this challenge, she engages with the public figure in her family history in a different way. As I have shown, Litzy's past with Kim Philby and as a KGB operative functions in *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* to showcase the divide between mother and daughter resulting from Litzy's "Diskretion und Zurückhaltung."⁴⁷⁷ This is indicative of Honigmann's inclusion of the Philby story into her text in general: the man himself is of little interest to the author-narrator, but her mother's behavior surrounding the public interest in her connection to Philby is central to Honigmann's portrayal of her mother. In the episodes concerning Philby we see Litzy's characteristic secrecy, her tendency to hold her daughter at arms length, her preference to keep different periods of her life separate from one another, and

⁴⁷⁷ Honigmann 76.

even her bewildering contradictions: she kept Philby's secret and concealed this part of her past even though she was "eigentlich ein Plappermaul und hörte gar nicht mehr auf zu reden, wenn sie einmal angefangen hatte."⁴⁷⁸ The author-narrator's narrow interest in Kim Philby, including only what light his story can shed on her own experiences with her mother, is illustrated by her treatment of a handful of books about Philby that she inherited from her mother: "Sechs Bücher stehen in meinem Regal, zwei habe ich gelesen, zwei habe ich durchgeblättert, die anderen beiden kurz angesehen und dann ins Regal gestellt, so ähnlich, wie es meine Mutter auch getan hat. Meine Neugier war schnell befriedigt, denn was ich an diesem Kapitel aus ihrem Leben nicht verstand, wurde in den Büchern auch nicht erklärt."⁴⁷⁹ In her own text, then, Honigmann keeps Philby at the periphery, in the same position he held in her life and her relationship with her mother.

V. Conclusion: Constructing Genealogies in *Generationenromane*

As we have seen, both Maron and Honigmann use autobiographical writing to reflect upon the mothers with whom they do not want to identify: political differences have disrupted personal relationships. And yet, each author-narrator seeks to inscribe herself into a multi-generational family narrative that includes these problematic mothers. On the one hand, these autobiographical texts clearly show daughters seeking to distance their own identities from the figure of the mother. Both Maron and Honigmann reject their mothers' political affiliations and ascribe to them undesirable personal qualities – Hella is naïve, Litzy unreliable, inscrutable. Maron also finds a preferred parental figure in her grandfather Pawel, characterizing herself as similar to him and imagining herself in her mother's place among Pawel's children. While

⁴⁷⁸ Honigmann 76.

⁴⁷⁹ Honigmann 27.

Honigmann does not identify so directly with an ancestor, her alignment of her own perspective with that of her father serves a similar function, as a positive identification to counter her marking herself off from her mother. The separating move that these texts undertake is both distancing and inclusive: Maron and Honigmann do not identify with their mothers, but neither do they reject or condemn them out of hand. Even while Maron attacks her mother's political ignorance and Honigmann recreates her mother's extreme reserve, neither seeks to break with their mothers altogether.

Furthermore, both Maron and Honigmann exhibit a re-affirming stance towards their family identity overall. The fact that each chooses to ally herself with another perspective from within their own family reflects this, as do their efforts to rhetorically detach their mothers from the latter's professed Communism. In this way, both works evidence the main traits of the *Generationenroman* trend: they investigate the intersections of family history and collective or political history, they raise the question of complicity with a repressive totalitarian regime, but that potential complicity does not carry with it an imperative to break with the family. Further, these texts share the attitude towards history typical for the *Generationenromane*, and summed up on Maron's remark "die Geschichte wird nicht umgeschrieben."⁴⁸⁰ Theirs are not revisions of family history that replace earlier conceptions of it. Rather, they proceed from the assumption that family history is marked by inconsistent preservation of memories, of selection and forgetting, and that perspectives on intersections of family and politics change. This history is not re-written, but in being written it transforms: writers of *Generationenromane* develop their own personal perspective through writing, simultaneously claiming and re-negotiating their family history.

⁴⁸⁰ Maron 79.

Maron's and Honigmann's texts add a new twist on considerations of personal involvement in recent German history, by presenting stories of mothers and daughters, and of Jewish and victim identities in the GDR. As such, they reflect what Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove view as the dialogic, dynamic nature of post-reunification German memory culture. Fuchs and Cosgrove consider post-1989 Germany as the site of "memory contests," characterized by "retrospective imaginings that simultaneously articulate, question, and investigate the normative self-image of groups of people."⁴⁸¹ Indeed, Maron's and Honigmann's autobiographical narrators are engaged in precisely these activities: articulating, questioning, and investigating their family histories and how they intersect with collective experiences. Fuchs expounds further on the anti-normative quality of memory contests, of which we also see traces in these narratives, arguing that memory contests "tend to delegitimize the prescriptive dimension of cultural memory, its affinity with the sacred and ceremonial function [and] often result in the fragmentation and localization of competing traditions," and that they are manifestly tied to the needs of the present.⁴⁸²

In the *Generationenromane*, the focus on the family sphere represents an intervention into the prescriptive, generalizing mode of collective memory, and in *Pawels Briefe* and *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* we find competing understandings of or engagements with family history – in competition for the very reason that they reflect differing needs in the present. In this way, this trend bears the marks of its specific moment in German memory culture, a climate which recognizes a moral imperative to remember the legacy of totalitarianism and persecution

⁴⁸¹ Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, "Introduction," *German Life and Letters* 59 2: Special Issue on German Memory Contests (2006): 164.

⁴⁸² Anne Fuchs, "From 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' to Generational Memory Contests in Günter Grass, Monika Maron, and Uwe Timm." *German Life and Letters* 59 2: Special Issue on German Memory Contests (2006): 186.

in German history, but which also allows for nuanced, self-aware engagements with the personal experience of that collective past that produce provisional interpretations responding to individual needs. Far from contradicting or seeking to replace public projects of memorialization and negotiation of collective memory, these texts create a space in the public sphere for specific, individual experiences, as a complement to national and communal processes of commemoration.

Conclusion

In her 1997 study of autobiography and photography, Linda Haverty Rugg argues that, “autobiography is itself an exertion of control over self-image, for in writing an account of one’s own life, one *authorizes* the life, claiming a kind of privilege for one’s own account.”⁴⁸³ Rugg’s statement is easily adapted to describe *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*: these texts represent an exertion of control over the image of one’s family history, and the writers authorize their own account, asserting privilege for their version through constructing their own narratives. Tracing the trajectory from *Väterliteratur* to the *Generationenromane*, from the memory politics of 1980 to those of 2000, illuminates shifting ideas about how narratives of the German past in family history can and should be constructed. Further, looking closely at individual works sheds light on what is at stake for each period in the process of engaging with the family past.

Bernward Vesper’s *Die Reise* showcases both family and political conflicts, and the resulting contradictions in the author-narrator’s self-conception are reflected in conflicting attitudes expressed throughout the text. In his recollections of childhood, Vesper casts his father as a feared authoritarian, while narration from the author’s adult perspective asserts he “konnte nicht verstehen, wie die lost generation ihre väter hassen könnte.”⁴⁸⁴ Consistent with his presentation of contradictory subjective positions, Vesper’s narrative strategy introduces frank acknowledgment and castigation of the father’s support for Nazism, as well as a consideration of how the father’s position influences the next generation. This is a concern that hovers in the background of works of *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane*, but rarely becomes overt.

⁴⁸³ Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) 4.

⁴⁸⁴ Vesper 666.

Both Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild* and Ruth Rehmman's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel* present a narrative performance of criticism of the father, as the narrators demonstrate a willingness to look unsentimentally at his role during the Nazi era. This takes different shapes in the two texts, however, reflecting the author-narrators' different subjective connections to their fathers. Meckel distances himself from his father, in an adamant gesture that suggests that this is what he thinks he should do – i.e., disavow his Nazi-supporting father. Rehmman, in the conversations framing her biographical narrative, also presents herself as willing to consider that her father may have shared complicity in the Nazism of their small town. Unlike Meckel, however, Rehmman proves ultimately unwilling to revise her idealized image of her father, creating instead an apologetic narrative of the father as exceptional and exempt.

Looking at these two texts together makes visible how both respond to an implied imperative that recognizing the father's tacit support of Nazism – recognizing that he played a role in the success of that system – means the father must be disavowed. Of course, the authors respond to this imperative in different ways: while Meckel tries to paint a dark picture of his father, Rehmman continues to view her father through rose-colored lenses despite what she learns about him. That is, while Meckel remains within a black-and-white dichotomy, Rehmman insists on a more complex system, in which the father's virtuous character in other respects “excuses” his moral compromises during the Nazi period. Focusing on specific cases, these texts shed light on the individual's role in larger historical phenomena, but the author-narrators show a persistent discomfort with nuanced conceptions of complicity and responsibility. Even as their texts paint a different picture, the narrators themselves struggle to think together multiple conflicting narratives: that the father had both admirable and lamentable qualities, and he existed in a historical context in which the latter qualities connected him to a horrific, genocidal system.

The *Generationenromane* mark a shift away from this more rigid thinking towards a tolerance for nuance and uncertainty, and the texts I examine in this project illustrate both the advantages and the pitfalls of this more permissive stance. The different reconciliatory gestures made in Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land*, achieved through negotiations of masculine identity and the use of postmodern narrators and uncanny motifs, set these texts apart from the ambivalent struggles of the *Väterliteratur* era. Using these techniques in different ways, Timm constructs a meditative text that dwells on questions without answers while Wackwitz replaces his uncertainty about his own position in his family history with assertions of a grand traditional lineage, with himself as heir. A similar divergence is visible in the authors' use of the uncanny: while Timm uses uncanny passages in his text to represent anxiety about his own family connection to Nazism (his older brother was a member of the SS, and died on the Eastern Front), Wackwitz uses the language of ghosts and haunting to suggest (but not define) a significant family connection to dark moments in Germany's past. These two texts illustrate several key qualities of the *Generationenromane*, including the theme of intergenerational reconciliation, the nuanced engagement with the past and an openness towards different possibilities of representing the individual's relationship to the past.

A similar picture emerges in Chapter 3, although Maron's *Pawels Briefe* and Honigmann's *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* are quite different from Timm's and Wackwitz's narratives. In these texts, the work of constructing a genealogical context for the author-narrator's own self-conception is particularly tangible. Both authors inscribe themselves into a genealogy rooted in their families' Jewish past, and this is a conscious and contradictory act in each case: for both it means a break from the Communist ideology with which their mothers raised them, but also a reconnection with an older family identity. This theme of rupturing ties in

order to reconnect them in a different configuration recurs in both works: Maron and Honigmann each do something similar in their representations of their mothers' Communist political convictions, undermining their mothers' own self-conceptions as convinced Communists in order to confirm what the daughters consider the mothers' true position within the family. Finally, Maron's and Honigmann's texts are also particularly interesting cases for a consideration of how public and private spheres intersect, as each has a well-known Communist figure in the family – Maron's stepfather Karl Maron, GDR Interior Minister from 1955-1963 and Honigmann's mother's second husband Kim Philby, the British Intelligence official famously revealed as a KGB spy in 1963. For these authors, the typical *Generationenroman* intervention into public discourses of memory gains another layer of significance, as their texts also intervene in existing discourses on Maron and Philby.

It is not only their attitudes towards family connections to Nazism that separate *Väterliteratur* from the *Generationenromane*, however, but also their assumptions about the ability to know and represent the past in language. Both Meckel and Rehmann seek to create the appearance of objectivity or authenticity in their texts, and demonstrate relatively uncritical attitudes towards the possibility of discovering and representing “how things truly were” in Ranke's sense of the historian's task. The authors of *Generationenromane* have moved away from this more naïve, more expository, narrative goal, writing with a sense of privilege for their own subjective understandings of their families' past and its significance for them. Rather than adopting a discursive pose of the objective reporter, as many *Väterliteratur* authors do, Timm and Wackwitz explore postmodern narrative techniques, embracing the idea of the unknowable past. Maron and Honigmann, on the other hand, directly engage with the account of another individual (the mother), thematizing the interrupted transmission of information, and

disagreements over what and how information should become part of the family's communicative memory.

Examining these two trends together thus illuminates how memory practices have shaped German identity in the post-war period. As they explore their family experiences, *Väterliteratur* and the *Generationenromane* show shifts in public discourse on the German past: from the most interesting themes of an era, to current modes of writing about the past and the tensions that are most compelling. The texts showcase individual approaches to these issues, modeling behavior as they simultaneously navigate personal stories and trends in public discourse. The *Väterliteratur* texts give an indication of struggles to come: these texts show tensions between different modes of knowing about the past (what comes through in documents, in memories, and the prevailing categories in public discourse) and the crucial role that subjectivity and subjective experience of the family play in the individual's review of the familial position in German history. These issues reappear transformed in the *Generationenromane*: the individual's access to the past is increasingly mediated as time passes, and subjectivity plays an even greater role in the engagement with media and with different attitudes towards memory work. These trends are thus both seismographs and bellwethers: undercurrents in society and public discourse become visible in these two literary trends, but the texts also anticipate attitudes or conflicts that will mark future stages in German memory culture.

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